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A philosophical approach to the riddle of Michelangelo's Florentine *Pietà*

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Abstract: Michelangelo was quite ambivalent about his Florentine *Pietà*. On the one hand, the face of Nicodemus depicts the features of Michelangelo who had intended the sculpture to be put above his own prospective grave at Rome. On the other hand, he became enraged by this magnificent work and attempted to destroy it. I try to explain this enigmatic ambivalence on philosophical grounds. While Platonic grounds explain his dissatisfaction with and rage at the work, leading to a sort of iconoclasm, these grounds fail to explain his attachment and identification with this *Pietà*. Nor do other philosophical grounds, such as Aristotelian, Leibnizean, or idealistic, explain it adequately. On special possibilist grounds—panenmentalist ones—we may have an adequate explanation for this ambivalence as well as the question of the identity of the restored work of art.

1. The riddle

For many years one has tried to solve the riddle of why the aging Michelangelo mutilated and attempted to smash one of the most impressive and important of his sculptures—the "Florentine *Pietà*" (or the "Florence *Pietà*")—even though he had worked on it for several years and even though no one before him had created such a statue. It was the first postclassical, isolated, monumental, monolithic statue with *four* figures (Lavin, 2003; cf. Fehl, 2002, p. 10). Only the efforts of his servant,

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Michelangelo was quite ambivalent about his Florentine *Pietà*. On the one hand, the face of Nicodemus depicts the features of Michelangelo who had intended the sculpture to be put above his own prospective grave at Rome. On the other hand, he became enraged by this magnificent work and attempted to destroy it. I try to explain this enigmatic ambivalence on philosophical grounds. While Platonic grounds explain his dissatisfaction with and rage at the work, leading to a sort of iconoclasm, these grounds fail to explain his attachment and identification with this *Pietà*. Nor do other philosophical grounds explain it adequately. On special philosophical grounds, based on my original metaphysics—panenmentalism—we may have an adequate explanation for this ambivalence as well as the question of the identity of the restored work of art.

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Antonio, saved the statue from complete demolition. To make the riddle more complicated, Michelangelo eventually allowed one of his friends, a mediocre Florentine sculptor, Tiberio Calcagni, to restore the statue, and it was finally donated to Francesco Bandini. Yet the left leg of Christ is still missing. It should be mentioned, first, that Nicodemus, the uppermost figure in the statue holding Christ, bears the face of Michelangelo (thus this figure is, in fact, a self-portrait) and, second, that from the outset Michelangelo destined this magnificent statue to be set above his own prospective tomb at Rome. Various interpretations attempting to solve the riddle have been suggested (for instance, Arkin, 1997; Fehl, 2002; Kristof, 1989; Liebert, 1977; Shrimplin-Evangelidis, 1989; Steinberg, 1989; Wasserman, 2003), some of which are most interesting and insightful. To the best of my knowledge, however, there has been no philosophical attempt to approach this riddle and I would like to suggest such an approach in this paper.

Georgio Vasari suggested several possible reasons for Michelangelo's treatment of this masterpiece, but I prefer to direct the reader's attention to the following one:

> it may have been that the judgment of the man was so great that he was never content with anything that he did. A proof that this is true is that there are few finished statues to be seen out of all that he executed in the prime of his manhood, and that those completely finished were executed by him in his youth, ... the whole number of these statues not amounting in all to eleven, the others, I say, were all left unfinished, and, moreover, they are many. Michelangelo having been wont to say that if he had had to satisfy himself in what he did, he would have sent out few, nay, not one. For he had gone so far with his art and judgment, that, when he had laid bare a figure and had perceived in it the slightest degree of error, he would set it aside and run to lay his hand on another block of marble, trusting that the same would not happen to the new block; and he often said that this was the reason that he gave for having executed so few statues and pictures. (Vasari, 1912–1914, Vol. 9, p. 83)

It is in this reason that the *philosophical* motive for Michelangelo's violent dissatisfaction with the Florentine *Pietà* lies. Nevertheless, the riddle refers to his ambivalent attitude to this statue: On the one hand, he attempted to destroy it; on the other, he depicted the face of Nicodemus in his own likeness and intended to set the work over his grave and, furthermore, despite his violent rage at the statue he let his servant to keep it albeit mutilated, and allowed his friend, the sculptor Calcagni, to restore it. To solve the riddle we have to consider both sides of this ambivalence consisting of an intimate attraction and a violent repulsion, of a great attachment and a strong detachment.

2. A platonic approach to the riddle

Thinking about the philosophical meaning(s) of Michelangelo's dissatisfaction with this masterpiece, a Platonic approach comes first to mind. After all, one cannot imagine the Renaissance—an era which challenged the Catholic orthodox divination of Aristotle's philosophy—without the strong Platonic and neo-Platonic influence, just as there is no established way to sever Michelangelo from the influence of Ficino's Platonic school at Florence. The Renaissance as a whole, not only in its modern scientific birth but also in art, especially that of Michelangelo, cannot be even imagined without Platonism and a Platonic influence. Vasari, I suggest, ascribed, in fact, a Platonic insight to Michelangelo's dissatisfaction with his works, namely, that there must be an unbridgeable *chōrismos* (gap or separation) between the complete and the incomplete, the perfect and the imperfect, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the mundane, the noetic and the phenomenal which is materialized or sensual, and, in sum, between the Ideas and their copies, representations, images, imitations, or shadows. This unbridgeable separation, which Aristotle, rightly, found so problematic (*Metaphysics* I, 9; Aristotle, 1968), lies at the heart of Plato's works until the later ones (Gilead, 1994, pp. 5–22). Plato's *Parmenides* demonstrates that such a problem must remain insolvable— aporetic—in Plato's philosophy. Indeed, Plato could not find any reasonable solution to it. This leaves the Platonic work as a whole aporetic or incomplete, which is compatible with the open, non-final nature of all the Platonic dialogs as such (contrary to completed or "sealed" books). Yet it is in the nature of Platonic philosophy that the separation of the Ideas, of the *noumena,* from the *phainomena* must be there.

Platonic separation plays a crucial role in Plato's theory of love, especially in the *Symposium*, and because of this separation no lover can be completely satisfied with his love; no love would reach the absolute end of his or her erotic aspiration and longing, that is, to be united with the Idea of the Good, which is also the Idea of the Beauty. Such a unity is the Gods' share, not of any mortal being. We thus attempt to imitate the ideal of love in our mundane reality, we thus unsuccessfully attempt at perpetuating ourselves in our children (who are similar to us), in our friendships, political and social achievements, in science and, over all, in philosophy. In these ways we hope to imprint our names on eternity, even though nothing mundane or sensual can be eternal. Eternity pertains only to the Gods, to the Ideas, or to our souls after the death of our bodies. Thus, Diotima-Socrates's exchange in the *Symposium* demonstrates that no love can be satisfied, including the highest of all forms of love—the love of wisdom, namely, philosophy.

What in Plato's work holds true for love also holds true for art. Plato's *Timaeus* (28a ff.; Plato, 1971) teaches us about the unbridgeable gap or separation between the eternal paradigm, according to which the Demiurge shaped the world out of mundane matter, and its material, temporal imitation. I cannot imagine a philosophical text so similar to the practical theory that guided Michelangelo: Like the Platonic Demiurge, a divine sculptor, the human sculptor imitates or copies the paradigm, which can be perceived only in his mind, and thus releases the sculpture that is hidden in the mundane matter—but, alas, the noetic eternity is far away from, far above the mundane reality in which the sculpture is made. The endless efforts that Michelangelo made to create a bridge in his art between the noumenal eternity and the mundane, temporary reality of the marble were, hence, doomed to failure. No satisfaction with his artistic achievements, however great or deemed as divine by his generation and much later, could be attained by Michelangelo as a human artist.

A separation similar to the Platonic *chōrismos* tangibly appears in Michelangelo's works. His masterpiece on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel demonstrates that wonderfully in the gap, appearing to be almost closed, between the finger of God and that of man. Even in the highest, the closest, the most intimate relationship between God and his human creatures there must be an unbridgeable separation, similar to the Platonic *chōrismos*, between Him and us. The divine perfection is over and above any human achievement. Moreover, Michelangelo's *David* depicts something of that *chōrismos* in the way in which the sculpture is, in fact, a symbol, whose tangible nature relates to something quite different, entirely spiritual or noetic, namely, the spirit of liberty of Florence as a highest value for a free society and state, overcoming tyranny, like *David* overcoming Goliath. What the marble sculpture which, like any mundane creation, is not eternal, depicts, in fact, indicates the eternal, spiritual, or noetic meaning of it, which clearly transcends it as a material sculpture. This means that the sculpture, however blameless, could not absolutely satisfy the sculptor, his creator or, better, midwife (for the sculpture is actually hidden in or is a captive of the marble, from which the artist liberates it) and thus the artist is doomed to remain unsatisfied, like the Platonic Eros. As for the sculptor as a midwife, it is also a Platonic notion. As is well known, the Platonic Socrates mentioned that he was a sort of a midwife (*Theaetetus* 150b-d), and, as such, he did not generate or put new ideas into the mind of his interlocutors but only gave birth to these ideas. As is also well known, Michelangelo did not ascribe to himself the ability to create his masterpieces but only to give them birth, to reveal and liberate them out of the material prison in which they had been captivated. In removing the superfluous from the marble, the sculpture, hidden there, has been revealed.

It is not by accident that Leibniz, mentioning his idea of innate knowledge and relating it to the Platonic recollection (a fine example of which is Socrates's teaching the illiterate slave a geometric theorem in the *Meno* 82b), compared it to the exposure of the sculpture hidden in the block of marble.[1] And the famous incomplete sculptures of the slaves in the Academy Gallery in Florence depict such exposure and liberation very vividly, although, being unfinished, this liberation has not been completed. On the aforementioned Platonic grounds, it could not be completed in any event.

Even if Michelangelo had completed these sculptures, they would have remained enslaved to the mundane stone, no less than the completed *David*. They symbolize something spiritual or noetic but

actually fail in achieving the spiritual or noetic as such. As one of the greatest artists of all times, even Michelangelo was doomed to remain unsatisfied, and even when he came very close to the artistic ideals that his mind perceived, he could not achieve them in his works to his full satisfaction. Despite their spiritual nature (even divine nature, if anything human can be divine), they were doomed to remain mortal, defective, missing, separated for ever from eternity (note that even sempiternity is quite different from eternity, which has nothing to do with any temporality or temporariness).

All these sound quite Platonic, at least so far. But the Platonic influence on Vasari and Michelangelo runs more deeply. In the first volume of his *Lives*, Vasari overemphasized the importance of the design (*disegno*) in the artistic works. Any artistic work has to begin with the design that the artist's mind perceives as a concept. In Vasari's own words:

> I will surely say that of both one and the other of these arts the design, which is their foundation, nay rather, the very soul that conceives and nourishes within itself all the parts of man's intellect, was already most perfect before the creation of all other things, when the Almighty God … shaping man, discovered, together with the lovely creation of all things, the first form of sculpture; from which man afterwards, step by step (and this may not be denied), as from a true pattern, there were taken statues, sculptures, and the science of pose and of outline. … Thus, then, the first model whence there issued the first image of man was a lump of clay, and not without reason, seeing that the Divine Architect of time and of nature, being Himself most perfect, wished to show in the imperfection of the material the way to add and to take away; in the same manner wherein the good sculptors and painters are wont to work, who, adding and taking away in their models, bring their imperfect sketches to that final perfection which they desire. (Vasari, 1912–1914, Vol. 1, p. xxxvii)

Nevertheless, Michelangelo, remarkably different from many other artists, was well aware of the tragic truth that no such perfection lies in the artist's hand. No such perfection can be achieved by mortals; no human sculptor is like the divine sculptor, God or the Demiurge. What certainly strikes us in this text are the Platonic or Platonic-like terms, especially in those taken from the *Timaeus*—the (noetic) design or concept, the model (or the perfect paradigm), the human imitation of the divine or God Himself, the Divine Architect of time and of nature, or the imperfection of the material. It was Michelangelo who drew the far-reaching, even tragic, conclusions of this theory.

Given that all these aforementioned terms sound strongly Platonic, why should we not attempt to solve the enigma of the Florentine *Pietà* in a Platonic light only? Such a Platonic approach appears to fit Michelangelo's dissatisfaction with this statue like a glove to a hand but, in fact, it may explain partly only one side of Michelangelo's ambivalence towards this statue—his wish to destroy it due to its failure to meet the ideal design. The imperfection of the block of marble and especially of the artistic shaping of it which, though it had come closer to the perfect design or model, some of which Michelangelo's mind had perceived, still denied it a satisfactory completion. Nothing in this sublime statue could entirely satisfy him or to meet the ideal to which he had aspired. As Vasari noticed so clearly, nothing could be more dead than the Christ in this *Pietà* (Vasari, 1912–1914, Vol. 9, p. 62). Neither Maria, as there are two of them, can hold the dead body of Christ, nothing indicates that any resurrection would finally come, and the aged artist, wearing the mantle of Nicodemus and bearing the face of Michelangelo, cannot give life to the body of the dead Christ. Can anything be more distressful, more frustrating for the aged Michelangelo entirely sober and free of illusions? If he fantasized that in his old age he could give life to that singular human being, taking part in the Godhead, thus creating or, rather, revealing in the marble what only a Demiurge could do, still the achievement of the material statue, still far from the artist's design, put an end to his time-honored aspiration. Michelangelo, forgetting his sober knowledge, became simply outraged because of the separation, of the *chōrismos*, between his perfect design and the actual, physical statue. He thus preferred to destroy it, imperfect and frustrating as he found it then. All this appears to be perfectly Platonic. To be satisfied with the incomplete, with the imperfect, must be clearly un-Platonic. Yet Platonic dissatisfaction may easily drive the artist to destroy or, at least, to abandon the works as

unfinished. As many examples associated with romantic love demonstrate, as soon as the lovers discover that their relationship falls short of their ideal of love, they may prefer to demolish their love altogether. Artists and other creators must also restrain their destructive drive to demolish their works because they are not perfect or not perfect enough. Geniuses may consider their master-pieces as defective, not worthy of publication or exhibition (think, for example, of Kafka, who ordered Max Brod to destroy all his unpublished works). Against the philosophical Platonic background, we may understand why the iconoclastic rage drove Michelangelo to attempt to destroy this masterpiece.

Mentioning iconoclasm, we should not forget Michelangelo's *Moses*. After all, Moses turned his rage from the vulgar idolatry of the children of Israel to the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. This might remind Michelangelo of something quite important, again in the Platonic sense, concerning his *Pietà*. Moses is not only an archetypal iconoclastic, he may serve as an archetype for innumerable dreamers, visionary people, and idealists, as he was doomed to see the Promised Land from afar but never to reach it. The sculptor of *Moses* could not forget or ignore this fate. Against the Platonic background concerning the separation of any mun-dane achievement from its ideal paradigm, Michelangelo might identify himself with Moses but in-stead of destroying the two stone tablets he attempted to destroy his own *Pietà*. From the point of view of Moses, such a sculpture should be considered as an idol—which is a rather strange idea to any Catholic and many Christians. I wonder whether Michelangelo's rage at his statue has some-thing to do with this kind of iconoclasm on Platonic grounds. After all, these grounds imposed on Michelangelo the imperative not to blur the distinction and not to ignore the separation between any *eidos* and its *eidolon* or what is only similar (*eikos*) to the *eidos*.

Moreover, the strong connection between the artist's ideas, concepts, or designs, all of which are mental and ideal, and the ideal paradigm shows much of Plato's influence. After all, nothing is closer to the divine Ideas as the souls separated from the bodies. The soul, according to the *Phaedo*, for instance, is akin to the noumenal Ideas. Similarly, Michelangelo's (and Vasari's) concepts (*concetti*) are akin to the ideal paradigms. On what grounds? At this stage, a religious, not necessarily philo-sophical, idea may enter the scene: God, who created the human mind and all other things accord-ing to His ideals or paradigms, took care of the correspondence between these ideals and the true concepts that the human mind may have. From a purely philosophical view, however, such a guar-antee is less than enough, for it is a kind of *Deus ex machina*. The basis for the correspondence should be immanent, namely, within the reach of the human mind without relying upon the trans-cendent God, which is beyond and above the human domain. As for Plato, the *chōrismos* inescapably frustrates any adequate explanation for such a correspondence, despite the so-called affinity of the human soul with the transcendent Ideas. This reflects on the psychophysical problem as, according to the *Phaedo* (64c5–8 and 67a1) and other Platonic dialogs, mind and body are separate one from the other for they pertain to a duality of two entirely different ontological categories.

3. Separation, heresy, and rage

It is an accepted view that Florentine Platonism (more precisely, the neo-Platonism of Ficino's school) attempted to reconcile this philosophical view with Christianity, especially with an Augustinian theology. It seems to me that Michelangelo's rage at the Florentine *Pietà* is strongly related to his shocked realization that such a reconciliation must fail. Despite some similarities be-tween the Christian dualism and the Platonic one, there is a major difference between them. This very difference is strongly linked with Michelangelo's vivid awareness of the unbridgeable gap be-tween divine, immortal, and eternal being and any mortality or temporality, in a word—between the divine and the human, between the perfect and the imperfect, even defective. Plato's *Symposium* excluded the possibility of a divine human being. Even though there is some affinity, even a great one, between Socrates and Christ (especially because of what distinguishes and separates them from the rest of humanity), there is still a great difference between them. No Platonic thinker is en-titled to ignore the difference between Socrates, however daimonic his character, and any God or god-like being. No human being, according to Diotima and Socrates, can be wise; only the gods are

wise. No human being can be perfect; only the gods are perfect. Christianity has challenged this view, for Christ, as a son of both God and the Holy Spirit, is divine and perfect; he takes part in the divinity. His mortality was transformed into immortality.

If my conjecture has solid grounds, in his old age, Michelangelo's Platonism drove him to smash the statue, whose unity is composed of four figures, at least one of which is supposed to be divine, as a part of the Godhead. From the point of view of an aged Platonic artist there must be an unbridgeable gap between the divine and the human and no unity can hold them together. The dead Christ is the reflection of a horrible heresy, for rendering any part of the Godhead human or mortal means murdering God (or at least a part of Him) as an eternal, immortal, divine being. At this moment of new awareness, Michelangelo could see that the worship of Christ was, in fact, a sort of idolatry. As if he, as a devoted Christian artist, unfortunately, even tragically, followed the ancient Greek idolatry.

This must be a horrible crisis, and I would like to compare it with the crisis that Plato experienced while Socrates, the best of the Athenians, was sentenced to death. From Plato's point of view, Athens should have accepted Socrates as the best of all statesmen but, alas, the case was quite the reverse and Socrates was separated from the reality in which he should be a mentor. As I explained elsewhere (Gilead, 1994, pp. 21–22), such a break was not only theoretical, as an aspect of the separation problem; it was also existential and practical. It was a real crisis in the whole life of Plato himself. On the day of Socrates' last conversation and death, informs Phaedo, "Plato was sick" (*Phaedo* 59b10), which explains his absence from this tragic scene. The nature of this sickness was the crisis of Plato's entire life both as a philosopher and a human being. It was both the spur for a personal unbearable suffering and for the crucial *aporia* of his philosophy, namely, the unbearable separation between the ideal and the mundane. Plato attempted to overcome this crisis in his philosophical and artistic search but to no avail.

Likewise, I think, Michelangelo experienced a similar crisis. When very old, he realized quite vividly that the gap between the divine and the mundane, between the immortal and the mortal, is unbridgeable, and for him, as an old man, this was a real, deep crisis, acknowledging that his approaching death was the final stage of his life, beyond which no resurrection was waiting for him. The realization that Christ as a statue is entirely dead without even the slightest sign of life, of rising from the dead but, instead, of clearly sinking towards the earth, might signify for Michelangelo that there was no hope, no afterlife, no resurrection. It appears that the three figures attempting to hold Christ could not support him. Michelangelo's self portrait attempted to hold together the whole statue but in vain. For him, it appears, there was no real unity there, and the unity of the statue, of the four figures, was simply a deception that should be smashed to pieces. The son of God appeared to be entirely dead, dragging with the weight of his dead body the other three figures to his grave.

Of course, my speculation goes, Michelangelo made his best to conceal this heresy from the rest of the world, including those who were especially close to him. Still, the deep reason for his rage was the realization that an unbridgeable gap separated his work from its pure, ideal design.

Michelangelo's last, third *Pietà*—the unfinished *Rondanini Pietà*—suggests a way out of both of these problems—that of the separation and that of his secret heresy. As an unfinished work (Michelangelo died before finishing it), it is compatible with the unfulfilled Platonic quest and endless journey to perfection. As imperfect, it cannot be worshiped as an idol and, furthermore, as the two figures in it are Christ and the Madonna, nothing of the human figures, nothing of the apostles or the disciples was left. Thus, this sculpture separates the divine from the human as well as the imperfect from the perfect. As such, the last *Pietà* did not arouse Michelangelo's rage and thus he did not attempt to demolish it.

4. Some other philosophical approaches substituting platonism

Still, if the Platonic approach fits so well Michelangelo's rage at his Florentine *Pietà*, why should we not be satisfied with such an approach?

The major trouble is that the Platonic Ideas, the paradigms, are necessarily general. They are clearly and simply universals, whereas the model or design according to which Michelangelo created (or, rather, discovered) the Florentine *Pietà* was undeniably individual or particular, by no means universal. Each of Michelangelo's works must have had a paradigm of its own, not a universal one but clearly an individual one. Unlike a Platonic Idea, say that of the table which is instantiated in all existing tables, genuine, original artists do not create different copies of the same paradigm, but one work of each design or paradigm. This holds true equally for original sculpture, painting, and architecture. If the Florentine Duomo could replace the Solomon Temple (as Ghiberti wished to demonstrate in one of the panels on the door of the baptistery in front of the Duomo), it would not be a copy of that temple; it would be, instead, a higher replacement for it. Moreover, the idea that the sculpture is simply a copy of the design or the model is clearly incompatible with Michelangelo's theory of art and praxis as well. There is one and only one sculpture which is identified as Michelangelo's *Moses* or Michelangelo's *David*. Any other similar sculpture would be considered a forgery or a copy lacking any genuine artistic value.[2] Furthermore, it is only Michelangelo who could discover or reveal these sculptures (to begin with their concepts) and give them birth or liberate them from the blocks of marble. In other words, the singularity of the artist, as a psychical subject, reflects on the uniqueness of each of his works (analogously to the handwriting or fingerprints of a person, which are unique, namely, different from any other handwriting or fingerprints).

This artistic fact is clearly incompatible with the idea of universal archetypes such as the Platonic Ideas. The individualistic approach of both Michelangelo and Vasari is also incompatible with the Platonic idea that any individual human being is simply a mortal *smikron*, a trifle, a tiny or insignificant thing both in comparison to the Ideas and independent of them (*Symposium* 210b8, 210c5). Vasari, in contrast, appears to believe that the names and the fame of the individual eminent artists about which he devotedly reported are very significant, even eternal.

Furthermore, the Platonic separation, as Aristotle recognized, is a problem, never a solution. We must seek another philosophical approach according to which, despite the categorical difference between mind and body, or generally between noumena and phenomena, there is a strong connection between them. Analogously, there is such a connection between the paradigm, model, or design of the work, the matter from which this work was made, and the concepts or ideas in the artist's mind, though there are clear differences between these different kinds of being. The case appears to be that there is no satisfactory Platonic solution to this problem.

Moreover, neither is an Aristotelian approach satisfactory, for the forms he adopted, though not separate from matter, are still general or universal. Thus, Aristotelian forms are also incompatible with the individual designs or models to which Michelangelo related.

A Leibnizian approach is also inadequate for dealing with our problem. For Michelangelo, the matter, the block of marble, for instance, is never reducible to the ideal paradigm, model, or design. Had Michelangelo lived in the seventeenth century, an idealistic solution—whether empiricist or rationalist, reducing any matter to a mental substance—could not serve him adequately. For him, the marble and the matter in general are quite real and, at the least, are entirely irreducible to mental beings whatsoever. If there is cognitive innateness according to Michelangelo, it could not be Leibnizian.

To sum up, neither Platonic/Judeo-Christian dualism nor any idealistic or materialistic reductionism can help us in treating adequately the riddle of the Florentine *Pietà*.

We thus need quite a different philosophical approach to this riddle. Such an approach should keep the particular matter (or body) and the individual design, model, or paradigm inseparable or

united yet quite different. Such inseparability or unity made it possible for the artist to accept the limitations, restrictions, and imperfection of the actual work and yet to cherish it and to stop a destructive drive in him from demolishing or damaging it. Michelangelo did not know such a way and the dualistic impasse led him to follow his destructive impulse in the case of the Florentine *Pietà*. Only the devotion and love of his servants and friends as well as his love for them finally saved this masterpiece, perhaps the most sublime and heart-moving statue I have ever seen. It is especially moving, for the figure of Christ is born or arises as if from the bosom of the figure of the aged Michelangelo-Nicodemus himself. The most intimate meaning and significance of this sublime statue should move the heart of any spectator. Moreover, the experience, at least my experience, in looking at it is of a private deep dialog between Michelangelo and the spectator. Such a statue tells a lot about the spectator himself or herself, which is an experience of self-knowledge, particularly in the Platonic sense.

5. The panenmentalist approach

Since 1999, I have published four books and various papers devoted to introducing and elaborating on my metaphysics, called "panenmentalism (see Gilead, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2016a, 2016b)." This metaphysics deals with individual pure possibilities and their actualities and it is a special possibilist metaphysics which relies upon no notion of possible worlds. It initiates a treatment of the mind–body problem using a novel approach. According to this approach, the mind is an individual pure possibility whose actuality is the body. Thus, mind and body are categorically different yet inseparable, as any individual actuality, anybody, actualizes only its individual pure possibility with which it is united. There is no separation, epistemic or ontic, between any actuality and its pure possibility. Individual pure possibilities are real existents, existing independently or regardless of any actual-physical reality, possible worlds, or mind. Thus, they are mind-independent and are subject to discovery as much as actualities are. Regardless or independent of any spatiotemporal and causal conditions and of the actual reality as a whole, any individual possibility is pure, whereas any actuality is inescapably subject to spatiotemporal and causal conditions or restrictions. No two pure possibilities can be identical for, being independent of spatiotemporality, no pure possibilities, unlike actualities, can be located in the same time at different places or in different times at the same place. In philosophical terms, this means that the law of the identity of the indiscernibles must be valid for individual pure possibilities and hence, derivatively or secondary, for their actualities. This means that on the last account, no two actualities, either, can be identical even regardless of their place and time.

There is a special kind of individual pure possibilities, which are not identical and, moreover, are not even similar. Such are the psychical pure possibilities—each of which is singular. Thus, any psychical subject, which is categorically distinct from any object, is singular; such a subject is entirely different from any other psychical subject, let alone from any object. This singularity reflects on the uniqueness of the actuality, namely the body, of each psychical subject, i.e. person. Thus, as psychical being, I am entirely different from any other human subject, while my brain, immune system, fingerprints, or my body as a whole is unique. This uniqueness is compatible with the similarity of these members or tissues to those of other human beings. "Identical" twins share common genes but otherwise they are not at all identical; each of whom is unique. Mind and body are different though inseparable and the psychical singularity reflects on the biological uniqueness of the body. Psychical singularity means that our mind, more precisely our psyche, is anomalous, namely it is not subject to any natural laws or to rules, whereas our body is inescapably subject to such laws.

Instead of the metaphorical, problematic Platonic *metexis* (taking part), imitating (*mimesis*), copying, and the like, panenmentalism rests the relationship between individual pure possibilities and their actualities on *actualization* which is, I think, an unproblematic term, free of any metaphorical residue. The actualization in discussion keeps the unity between the pure possibility and its actuality intact without any gap to separate them one from the other.

The above-mentioned existence of individual pure possibilities is crucial for the panenmentalist ontology and epistemology as well. Ontology, the theory of being and existence, must assume first that its objects are possible, for impossible objects do not exist. Many of our propositions on possibilities are true and, according to the correspondence theory of truth, such propositions must correspond to their objects. The objects of such propositions are individual pure possibilities. From the epistemological viewpoint, from the viewpoint of a theory of knowledge, we cannot know or identify actualities unless we assume, tacitly or explicitly, the existence of their individual pure possibilities. For instance, the existence of actual quasicrystals was denied for many years, because the purely mathematical-physical possibilities of such crystals had been excluded on both an empirical and a theoretical basis (see Gilead, 2014a, 2016b). There are various examples of striking scientific discoveries that would have been avoided if their individual pure possibilities had been excluded from existence (Gilead, 2014b).

On the background of this very concise and somewhat dogmatic summary of some of the panenmentalist principles, let us return to Michelangelo and his Florentine *Pietà*. Let us replace Michelangelo's "design, model, or paradigm" with "individual pure possibility" which adequately corresponds to his concept or idea. In other words, his concepts relate adequately to some individual pure possibilities which only he could discover. These possibilities, though existing independently of his mind and hence discovered by it, could be actualized only in his artistic works. Thus the individual pure possibility of the Florentine *Pietà*, which only Michelangelo, as a singular sculptor or artist, could discover is the *design* according to which he attempted to give birth to this statue out of one block of marble. His ingenious imagination served him to discover the dormant state in which the statue existed in this block. His actual skill made it possible for him to give birth to this statue, which exists completely, perfectly only as an individual pure possibility. The actual statue and its pure possibility are inseparable yet clearly distinct, for the former is imperfect and subject to spatiotemporal and causal circumstances, whereas the latter is perfect, entirely exempt from any of these. Moreover, the individual pure possibility comprises within itself all the possibilities that are open to this individual statue while keeping its identity intact. Only some of these possible components were actualized, and the sculpture as a whole can be only partly and circumstantially actualized. This makes a great difference between the actual statue and its pure possibility as a whole.

The imperfection of the actual statue must be there because of the spatiotemporal and causal circumstances in which it was actualized. Thus, the actual statue cannot exhaust all the possibilities that are open to it a priori, independently of its actual existence and spatiotemporal circumstances. Bearing such imperfection or restriction in mind, Michelangelo *could* accept the actual statue without being driven to demolish it. Such could be the case, because the imperfection under consideration does not lead to separation, and thus the actual statue is not separated from its "ideal," perfect design, namely, its individual pure possibility. Because of this unity, the artist, were he aware of such a metaphysical approach, instead of his Platonic or Judeo-Christian dualism, could be tolerant to his great achievement and accept it as it was. The entirely dead Christ would still keep its living spiritual significance. His death could have been considered as most meaningful, as was the old age of the great artist. When we look at the sculpture not through panenmentalist spectacles, it appears as though the three other figures of the Florentine *Pietà* cannot hold the figure of Christ and that sooner or later they would sink or collapse under his weight. In contrast, through panenmentalist spectacles, the Christ of the Florentine *Pietà* can be held and supported by the three other figures; and it is an integral part of a statue which is fully alive, heart-moving, elevating. Looking at it from a panenmentalist viewpoint, it is really resuscitated, being entirely newly reborn, as much as Michelangelo wished him to be. Moreover, the singularity of the sculptor fully reflects on the uniqueness of the sculpture as a whole.[3] The intimate attachment of the sculptor to his work is thus preserved.

6. A panenmentalist comment on the identity of a restored work of art

An especially intricate problem is the identity of the restored or completed work of art (for instance, Brook, 2008; Danto, 1981; Lord, 1977; Sagoff, 1978). Regarding Tiberio Calcagni's restoration of the Florentine *Pietà* as well as that by Professor Redig the Campos of the Rome *Pietà*, one may ask

whether they are Michelangelo's works of art. An intricate philosophical problem indeed, which has much to do with the identity problem as a whole including the identity of the indiscernibles. In this comment I attempt to show that panenmentalism suggests a reasonable solution for this problem.

Each individual pure possibility can be actualized solely as a one actuality. The pure possibility serves as the identity of this actuality (hence, panenmentalism defines it as the "pure possibility-identity"). Thus, there is one and only one individual pure possibility of each of Michelangelo's *Pietàs*, as there is only one actuality of each of these pure possibilities. In this way, we reach a Kripkean conclusion concerning such sculptures (compare Lord, 1977)—each one of them could be made of a unique block of marble, not of any other block of marble, let alone of any other kind of matter. Nevertheless, I reach this conclusion on grounds quite different from the Kripkean ones. Kripkean identities are a posteriori necessary (Kripke, 1980; cf. Lord, 1977), whereas panenmentalist identities are a priori necessary (Gilead, 2003, p. 18, 46, 56, 209 and 210, 2009, p. 6 and 7, 2011, p. 127).

On the panenmentalist grounds, the unique, original actuality of the Rome *Pietà* is the only actuality of the individual pure possibility of that *Pietà*. Equally, the unique, original actuality of the Florentine *Pietà* is of, and only of, the individual pure possibility of this *Pietà*. The only, singular sculptor of both *Pietàs* is Michelangelo. As for the restored or completed parts in both cases, they are only *imitations*—in the strict, non-metaphorical sense of the word—*of the relevant actualities* of some parts of those actual sculptures. Tiberio Calcagni, as well as Redig de Campos, imitated the relevant parts of the original, unique actualities. They had no access to the individual pure possibilities-identities of these sculptures. Redig de Campos used the photographs and drawings that remained of the original actuality of the Rome *Pietà* to restore the broken or mutilated parts of the actual statue. Calcagni could restore the broken or mutilated parts according to the sketches or models that Michelangelo kept or according to the advice and guidance of the master himself. Neither of these talented restorers had any access to the individual pure possibilities that Michelangelo's mind had perceived. Only he could perceive or, rather, discover, the individual pure possibilities of his sculptures.

Equally, there is no doubt that the original *David* is placed at the Galleria dell' Accademia and the copy—an imitation—at the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. The first is the original actuality and the second is the imitated or copied actuality of the original actual sculpture. *If* the case is that no discernibility of them is in fact perceived, yet, as any actuality is subject to spatiotemporal and causal conditions or restrictions, the spatiotemporality or, rather, the history, of each of the two statues is sufficient to discern between them. In fact, such indiscernibility is only apparent, for only one of these sculptures, the one situated at the Galleria dell' Accademia, is the actuality, the only possible actuality, of the individual pure possibility of Michelangelo's *David*.

As for the *Pietàs* in discussion, the actualities we can see nowadays at Florence and at Rome are combinations of the original actual statues and some parts that are simply imitations or restorations of the original actual parts. The imitations are of these original parts and they are not actualities of the parts of the relevant individual pure possibility. The sculptor of these *Pietàs* was a genius of an artist whereas the restorers—were only skillful or gifted technicians. The sculptor is singular, whereas the technicians, however skillful, might be replaced by other skillful technicians. Professor de Campos, with all due respect, played an analogous role to a fine dentist assisted by other technicians to restore a patient's teeth (and, as a matter of fact, the same polymers are used for these quite different purposes!). Undoubtedly, there is an obvious distinction between the artist and the technician, as there is a clear distinction between the original work of art and its imitation, copy, reproduction, or restoration. On panenmentalist grounds, all these differences are adequately clarified.

7. Conclusion

The first step that any genuine artist should take is the discovery of a novel individual possibility which only he or she would actualize. This possibility is valuable as long as it is entirely different from

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anything that was discovered before. The discovery does not separate the artist from the prospective actual work; on the contrary, it paves his or her way to it. The discovery of a new possibility brings the artist closer to the achievement of his or her novel work.

In this way, the separation crisis that overcame Michelangelo while attempting to smash the Florentine *Pietà* has an emendation or remedy: As much as mind and body, though quite distinct one from the other, are inseparable, namely, united, so the Florentine *Pietà* as an actuality is inseparable from its individual pure possibility. The difference between the eternity, immortality, and spirituality of this pure possibility and its mundane, spatiotemporal, mortal actuality is certainly maintained, but it is of a real redemption that they are not separated, that they are united. The unity of the human and the divine, the mortal and the immortal, lies at the heart of Michelangelo's genius creativity. It is the real consolation for what he, like any one of us, lost especially while approaching death. In the end, the four figures in the Florentine *Pietà* have remained united. Though this unity is not perfect, despite being somewhat mutilated and defective, it is really still there.

What Michelangelo personally, singularly, could discover were the individual pure possibilities of his unique works. Following these possibilities, he chose the most suitable blocks of marble to elicit from them the actualities, the physical realizations, of these guiding pure possibilities. Only Michelangelo could discover them and reveal their actualities hidden or captive in these blocks of marble.

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Notes
1. For the sculpture analogy see Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Preface; I, i, §11; I, i, §24; and I, i. §26 (Leibniz, 1996, p. 52, 80, 86, and 87, respectively).
2. Nevertheless, what about a case in which one cannot find any difference between the original *David* placed at the Galleria dell' Accademia and the copy placed at Piazza della Signoria in Florence? For an interesting view which raises this very question and criticizes the Platonic approach to this problem, consult Brook, 2008; who challenges Danto, 1981. I find Sagoff, 1978 about love and the individual art object, which is not replaceable by any replication, reproduction, or copy (let alone a forgery), much more convincing especially in criticizing Plato with regard to this point. Though Danto mentions Christ's missing leg in the Florentine Pieta (Danto, 1981, pp. 115–116), he does not treat the riddle concerning this loss which is "not often noticed" and which is supposed to have "a deep reason." My panenmentalist approach, as will be discussed below, suggests, *inter alia*, another treatment (different from those of both Brook and Danto) of the principle of the identity of the indiscernibles as applied to the artistic work and of the identity of the restored work of art as well (see Section 6).
3. Cf.: Michelangelo's "career is marked by a series of *unica*—unique objects that are never repeated and scarcely imitable (Wallace, 2013, pp. 158–159)."

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