Lessons in morality in a changing world
Allegories of virtue and vice in the Baillieu Library Print Collection
Amelia Saward

As evident in texts ranging from the Bible to the writings of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, humans have tried for millennia to understand and explain the concept of morality and, more precisely, the human virtues and vices. Consequently, it is no surprise that representations of morality populate Western art throughout history. Such representations usually take the form of allegory. In the Renaissance's age of humanism, where Church principles and pagan traditions were paradoxically mixed, these representations demonstrated the emergence and establishment of the three holy virtues (faith, hope and charity) and four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice) as a fluid set.[1]

Allegorical depictions of the seven virtues, sometimes contrasted with the vices (pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust), occur throughout European Renaissance and baroque art, and in a variety of mediums, such as painting and drawing. Unsurprisingly, however, many are in the form of print, a medium that flourished at that time, allowing easier access and broader reach among the population. Allegorical portrayals of the virtues and vices during the period appear to stem from the unprecedented exploration of the antique and concurrent rediscoveries of ancient philosophical teachings. Giotto's figures of the virtues and vices (situated below the cycle of frescoes on the life of the Virgin and Christ) in the Scrovegni Chapel (Arena Chapel) at Padua, dating from 1303–05, are one of the earliest Renaissance examples.[2] Along with an advanced understanding of time and temporality that began in the medieval period, this re-emergence of ancient theories heralded an era characterised by an unsurpassed desire to understand the human condition.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection at the University of Melbourne includes at least 25 examples of prints depicting the seven virtues, at least 20 of which date from the Renaissance and early baroque periods, represented allegorically and personified in the female form, along with two representations of vices from the approximate period. They include six of the seven images from the series *The seven virtues* by Italian engraver Marcantonio Raimondi (1480–1527/34) after drawings by Raphael;[3] ten examples from Germany by Little Masters Hans Sebald Beham (1500–1550)[4] and Heinrich Aldegrever (1502–1555/61),[5] and four Netherlandish prints by Hieronymus Wierix (c. 1553–1619).[6] The two representations of vice—*Pride* and *Lust*—are part of Aldegrever's series.

The Raimondi prints, as well as the majority of those by Beham and Aldegrever, are from the significant gift made by Dr J. Orde Poynton (1906–2001) in 1959, while the remaining prints mentioned were purchased by the university, bar one donated in recent years by Marion and David Adams.[7]

Although morality has been a subject of human inquiry since ancient times, much of the Greek and Roman philosophical work on the subject was only rediscovered in the 12th and 13th centuries, spurring a renewed interest.[8] In medieval times the *four* cardinal virtues were frequently represented in a variety of media and contexts, such as in the four corners of illuminated manuscripts. In contrast, during the Renaissance the *seven* virtues first appeared in art, after Thomas Aquinas' seminal text *Summa theologica*.[9] Renaissance scholars, priests and humanists all sought to better understand the subject and convey their conclusions to their fellow men. Moreover, churches used prints to appropriate such subject matter and disseminate their teachings, attempting to

Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael, *Fortitude*, plate 4 from series *The seven virtues*, c. 1515–25, engraving, 21.5 × 10.5 cm. Reg. no. 1959.3685, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

secure their hold on a particular village or city. The result was an injection of morality into teaching at all levels, including through the print, one of the most accessible forms of education for the less learned members of the population. Allegorical and symbolic depictions of virtue and vice emulated the new teachings of the intellectuals and the churches and brought them to wider audiences.

An eminent printmaker of the Italian Renaissance, Marcantonio Raimondi (1487–1539), was at the forefront of the movement to establish printmaking as a mass commercial enterprise and develop the print as a commodity. Renowned for his engravings made after the paintings, frescoes, woodcuts and designs of some of the most notable artists of the Renaissance, such as Albrecht Dürer and Raphael, Raimondi had a close working relationship with Raphael's assistant Baviera.[10] He also trained many students, such as Marco Dente, further helping to establish and cement the print trade. Raimondi's series *The seven virtues* is after drawings by Raphael, so it is also to Raphael that we look to understand the iconography and basic stylistic traits of Raimondi's engravings.

Both Raimondi and Raphael worked in the *stile classico* and were highly influenced by antiquity, favouring mythological subjects and mixing in humanist circles. In Raimondi's personifications of virtue this classical influence is strongly evident. The female figures stand in recessed archways evocative of classical—and subsequently Renaissance—architecture. In *Fortitude* (see left) the influence of classicism is also seen in the figure's left arm and the drapery from her dress, thoughtfully placed over a column. Raphael's composition and included elements refer symbolically to the antique philosophical origins of virtue and vice.[11]

In the 1520s, Raimondi was arrested by Pope Clement VII for engraving erotic works based on Giulio Romano's images.[12] His series on virtues is perhaps therefore ironic and appears to be merely a copy of subject matter rather than a heartfelt expression of his own moral beliefs, particularly given the popularity of the virtues as subject matter. Raimondi's experience helps illuminate the roles of state and Church in deciding and policing so-called virtuous and unvirtuous behaviours. Moreover, it shows that although Renaissance scholars discussed 'natural' virtue based on ancient texts, in reality, power and

consequently money also played a part in establishing the morality of the period, at least on the surface.[13]

Heinrich Aldegrever was born in the German town of Paderborn in 1502, but moved to nearby Soest in around 1527, where he stayed for the remainder of his life.[14] Soest joined the Reformation in 1532 and presumably this appealed to Aldegrever, who—as is apparent from his prints—was Lutheran.[15] This provides an interesting context when examining his complex and highly symbolic representations of the virtues and vices. Aldegrever was well acquainted with Dürer's work and, even when adopting a more Italianate style in his latter years, such early influences can still be seen. His work from the 1550s (compatible with the dates of the Baillieu Library's virtues and vices) also demonstrates familiarity with Raimondi's work and the influence of Italianism.[16] It is worth noting that whereas Raimondi's series includes only the seven virtues, Aldegrever also depicts the contrasting vices, potentially in an effort to question the Church and its morality. His print of *Pride* (the first plate in his series of the seven vices—see right) is represented by a female figure riding an animal, consistent with the other plates from the series. In the case of *Pride*, the figure is riding a rearing horse, with

a lion walking alongside. She carries a flag depicting an imperial eagle; in the top-left corner of the print is a coat of arms featuring a lion rampant surmounted by a peacock as the crest—all are symbolic of pride and earthly glory. Moreover, she is wearing the papal triple-crown, reflecting the anti-Catholic sentiment prominent in German art of the Reformation period. The text below the image (Vicious pride, first mother of wicked things and welling spring of all kinds of evil)[17] reinforces the overall theme of the work, but, through the papal crown reference, Aldegrever makes a specific link between pride and Catholicism. Stylistically, the print typifies the European artistic climate during the period, incorporating both Italianate and traditionally northern traits.

Hans Sebald Beham's series of virtues contrasts interestingly with Aldegrever's. Although both demonstrate an emerging Italian influence on German printmaking, Beham's works are far more primitive in style. They were probably intended for a less learned audience, as they are simpler in composition and clearly state the name of the virtue within the image itself (compared to Aldegrever's, which are highly complex in composition and have a longer text below the image). Printed

during the Reformation in Germany, when earning a good income was difficult for artists, and religious artworks were also statements of allegiance, the works of both Aldegrever and Beham are clearly products of their context. Given the common reference to Beham and his brother Barthel as the 'godless painters', it is likely his works were not religiously commissioned or inspired, but created for educational purposes, as a satirical comment on the Catholic Church, or simply to make money.[18]

Of the six Beham virtue prints held in the Baillieu Library, one image, *Pacientia* (Patience, illustrated opposite), appears to be from a different series; this is also the only image from the Marion and David Adams gift;[19] four of the others (including another copy of *Patience*) are from Dr J. Orde Poynton,[20] and one was acquired in 1988.[21] The prints *Faith*, *Hope*, *Justice* and *Prudence* all date from 1539, whereas *Patience* is dated 1540, does not include a series number within the image, is much larger in format, and different in style and composition. While the other figures are standing, she is seated, and more complex background figures are included, although like the others she is winged. Patience

sits on a column base holding a lamb, symbolic of Christ's sacrifice—the ultimate exemplar of patience—and thus represents self-control during a challenge or hardship. She also faces the devil's onslaughts on the right of the image and is crowned by cherubs with a laurel wreath. Beham's works demonstrate the significant influence of both German and Italian masters—namely Dürer and Raimondi—and therefore the dissemination of stylistic traits throughout Europe.

The series of prints depicting virtues, by Hieronymus (Jerome) Wierix (1553–1619), is stylistically different from the other examples in the university's collection discussed here. They are bust-length, rather than full-length, and are bordered with detailed symbolic imagery surrounding the central figure. Wierix led a tumultuous life and was arrested for drunkenness, among other offences, and imprisoned on more than one occasion.[22] Principally engaged in engraving allegorical and political themes during the years 1577–80, Wierix portrays sympathy for the rebels against the Spanish.[23] Although in 1585 he was recorded as Lutheran, it appears that Wierix and his brothers later returned to Catholicism and, through their prints, played a significant role in

the Catholic recapturing of the southern Netherlands.[24] The prints in the Baillieu are from a series titled *Virtutum theologicarum et cardinalium*, which also includes a title page.[25] Given Wierix's religious allegiances and the use of a text from the New Testament (For in Christ Jesus neither is circumcision worth anything nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by love),[26] *Faith* (see p. 44) and the series of virtues were probably created for didactic purposes. The woman personifying faith is looking down towards a small cross, held in her left hand. Her head is modestly covered with a cloth and her right hand is placed over her chest. She has a halo, and cherubs occupy the four outer corners of the print, emphasising the traditional nature of this representation, designed by Johannes Stradanus (Jan van der Straet the younger, 1523–1605), (though Wierix did design some of his prints himself).[27] In later years Wierix's activities and personal life were less dramatic and included executing images for Geronimo Nadal's counter-reformatory books.[28] Although there are gaps in our knowledge of the Wierix prints in the Baillieu Library collection, this artist's personifications of the virtues reflect his wider oeuvre, rich with visual references to religious teachings.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection's engravings depicting personifications of virtue and vice represent the religious, political, intellectual and artistic context of the late Renaissance to early baroque period in which they were produced. Each shares a common theme and stylistic traits with other works from the period, beyond their subject matter, emphasising the dynamic flow of information and art—particularly in the print medium—throughout the 16th and early 17th centuries. They also, however, demonstrate the existence of different regional styles, which, despite the cosmopolitan flow of information and ideas and the rapidly growing medium of print, continued to characterise the art of different parts of Europe.

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Works from the **Baillieu Library Print Collection** may be requested for examination in the Cultural Collections Reading Room, Level 3, Baillieu Library, or search the catalogue online: www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/prints/.

FIDES.

Io. Strad. inv.
Hier. Wirix sculp.
Phls Gall. exc.

In Christo Iesu neq; circoncisio aliquid valet neq; præpu-
tium, sed fides quæ per charitatem operatur. Gal. 5.

1 David A. Lines and Sabrina Ebbersmeyer (eds), *Rethinking virtue, reforming society: New directions in Renaissance ethics, c. 1350 – c. 1650*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013.

2 Douglas P. Lackey, 'Giotto in Padua: A new geography of the human soul', *The Journal of Ethics*, vol. 9, nos 3–4, 2005, pp. 551–72.

3 Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael, seven engravings (six images) from series *The seven virtues*, c. 1515–25, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne: plate 1 *Charity*, reg. no. 1959.3691; plate 2 *Temperance* (two copies: reg. nos 1959.3686 and 1959.3687); plate 3 *Justice*, reg. no. 1959.3689; plate 4 *Fortitude*, reg. no. 1959.3685, plate 6 *Hope*, reg. no. 1959.3688; plate 7 *Prudence*, reg. no. 1959.3690.

4 See notes 19, 20 and 21 below.

5 Heinrich Aldegrever, three engravings from series *Virtues and vices*, 1552, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne: *Pride*, reg. no. 1959.2170; *Lust*, reg. no. 1959.2171; *Compassion (Charity)*, reg. no. 1959.2169. Heinrich Aldegrever, *Faith*, 1528, engraving, reg. no. 1989.2039, purchased 1989, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

6 Heironymus Wierix, four engravings, before 1612, purchased 1987, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne: *Fides* (Faith), reg. no. 1987.2024; *Fortitvdo* (Fortitude), reg. no. 1987.2022; *Temperantia* (Temperance), reg. no. 1987.2023; *Iusticia* (Justice), reg. no. 1987.2025.

7 The late Dr Marion Adams was a professor at the University of Melbourne, and dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1988 to 1993. Her husband, Mr David Adams, is an alumnus of the university and in 2011 donated his and Marion's collection of prints and drawings to the Baillieu Library. The collection reflects Marion Adams' love for, and scholarly interest in, German culture.

8 Lines and Ebbersmeyer, *Rethinking virtue, reforming society*.

9 Lackey, 'Giotto in Padua'.

10 Babette Bohn, 'Raimondi, Marcantonio', *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordartonline.com, accessed 12 July 2015.

11 Ancient philosophical texts referring to virtue and vice include Aristotle's *Necomachean ethics*, Plato's *Protagoras* and *Meno*, and Cicero's *De officiis*.

12 Bohn, 'Raimondi, Marcantonio'.

13 Luke Syson and Dora Thornton, 'Defining social virtues', in *Objects of virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, London: British Museum Press, 2001.

14 F.W.H. Hollstein, *German etchings, engravings and woodcuts 1400–1700*, vol. 1, Amsterdam: M. Herzberger, 1954, p. 6.

15 Anna Somers Cocks, review of 'Aldegrever and the decorative arts', *Print Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1987, pp. 177–9.

16 Rosemarie Bergmann, 'Aldegrever [Trippenmeker], Heinrich', *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordartonline.com, accessed 20 August 2015.

17 Translation from Latin courtesy of Professor Andrew McGowan and Dr Felicity Harley-McGowan.

18 Carl C. Christensen, 'The Reformation and the decline of German art', *Central European History*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1973, p. 226.

19 The collection has two copies of this 1540 engraving of *Pacientia* (Patience) by Hans Sebald Beham: reg. no. 2011.0032, gift of Marion and David Adams 2011; and reg. no. 1959.2253, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959.

20 Hans Sebald Beham, three engravings from series *Seven virtues*, 1539, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne: plate 4 *Justicia* (Justice), 3.9 × 2.4 cm, reg. no. 1959.2264; plate 5 *Fides* (Faith), 3.9 × 2.4 cm, reg. no. 1959.2265; plate 6 *Spes* (Hope), 3.9 × 2.4 cm, reg. no. 1959.2266.

21 Hans Sebald Beham, engraving from series *The seven virtues*, 1539: plate 2 *Prudencia* (Prudence), 3.9 × 2.4 cm, reg. no. 1988.2015, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.

22 Carl Van de Velde, 'Jerome [Hieronymous] Wierix', *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordartonline.com, accessed 27 June 2015.

23 Van de Velde, 'Jerome [Hieronymous] Wierix'.

24 Carl Van de Velde, 'Wierix', *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordartonline.com, accessed 13 July 2015.

25 See British Museum reg. nos 1863,0509.811 and 1863,0509.812 (search from www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx).

26 Galatians 5:6. Translation from Latin courtesy Professor Andrew McGowan and Dr Felicity Harley-McGowan.

27 *Fides* was designed by Johannes Stradanus, engraved by Hieronymus Wierix and published by Philipes Galle; these details are inscribed in the small circular cartouche below the figure [*Io. Strad. inv. / Hier. Wirix Sculp. / Phls Gall. exc.*], (Jan Van der Stock and Marjolein Leesberg (eds), *The new Hollstein: Dutch and Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts 1450–1700*, Rotterdam: Sound and Vision Publishers, 2003, xxviii).

28 Van de Velde, 'Jerome [Hieronymous] Wierix'.