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Giotto’s Visual Ingenuity in the Cycle of Virtues and Vices at the Arena Chapel

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Much has been written about Giotto’s fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel in Padua, completed in 1305. Often overlooked in this scholarship, however, is the pictorial and visual innovations Giotto employed there, and the techniques he utilized to achieve them. A few scholars, most notably Anne Derbes and Mark Sandona, have touched on these unique visual techniques in their discussion of the Chapel, but this topic merits a more in depth discussion, which is the goal of the present paper. In order to provoke greater contemplation by the viewer and enable the extraction of more profound meanings, Giotto used strategies such including visual “rhymes,” where a pose or posture is echoed in multiple figures throughout the Chapel. The relationships created by these rhymes inspire reflection on the nature of the relationship and its significance. The pose and posture of individual figures are also meaningful: Giotto used body language effectively to visually express the character of a figure, inviting the viewer to ponder the human nature of that figure. Arguably, it is these techniques that make the Chapel so awe-inspiring, and this justifies a more in depth discussion of Giotto’s visual ingenuity. Through the visible, the invisible is made apparent, and Giotto masterfully employs this idea in the Arena Chapel. A study of Giotto’s visual techniques in the entire Chapel would be a weighty task and beyond the scope of this paper; I will be focusing on specific area of the Chapel that is often overlooked: the cycle of virtues and vices in the dado. It is, in fact, these visual techniques that makes this program so compelling and, as Andrew Ladis says, “an integral part of Giotto’s
scheme.”¹ It is through Giotto’s visual ingenuity that the importance of the virtues and vices is illuminated.

Visual analysis is a legitimate way to derive meaning from the Chapel, considering the importance of visual culture in the fourteenth century. Church decoration was a major way the clergy conveyed complex religious messages to the largely illiterate public. Fresco cycles, altarpieces, and devotional paintings were all methods that clergy employed to educate the masses. Contemporary viewers would have been very aware of the various visual techniques employed in the Arena Chapel, as it was a language they were used to. Because of their importance to a contemporary audience, this merits a close examination of Giotto’s various visual techniques.

The virtues and vices are situated within a relatively traditional fresco program. The top register of the Chapel depicts the story of the Virgin’s parents, Anna and Joachim, and the early life of the Virgin; the middle register the life of Christ; and the final register the Passion of Christ. The cycle proceeds from left to right, starting in the upper left of the north wall and ending in the lower right of the south wall. The west wall contains a sizeable Last Judgment, and the east wall God Enthroned, the Pact of Judas, the Annunciation, and the Visitation. Occupying the dado below the Passion scenes on the north and south walls, the virtues and vices are manifest as classically-dressed grisaille figures painted niches, flanked by faux-marble panels. The figures are framed with labels and inscriptions, both in Latin, but the inscriptions have been badly damaged and most are illegible. Snippets reveal that the inscriptions most likely held a description of the nature of the respective vice or virtue.² Each virtue is paired with a facing vice

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as follows, starting from the west wall: Hope (Spes) and Despair (Desparatio); Charity (Caritas) and Envy (Invidia); Faith (Fides) and Infidelity (Infidelitas); Justice (Iustitia), and Injustice (Iniustitia); Temperance (Temperantia) and Anger (Ira); Fortitude (Fortitudo) and Inconstancy (Inconstantia); and Prudence (Prudentia) and Folly (Stultitia).

Giotto was pulling on a long artistic and textual tradition of portraying the metaphysical concepts of virtue and vice as tangible beings. Describing these immaterial ideas as recognizable human figures no doubt made them easier for people to grasp. Although there are two hundred and twenty seven virtues and vices that are discussed in the Christian context, a group of seven of the premier virtues, knows as the Seven Christian Virtues, and seven of the worst vices, known as the Seven Deadly Sins, were distinguished by theologians. The Seven Christian Virtues include Prudence (sometimes Wisdom), Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Faith, Hope and Charity. Giotto draws directly from tradition and uses this group in his Chapel. He does not, however, follow tradition so closely with his vice cycle. In 590, Pope Gregory I distinguished the Seven Deadly Sins of Pride, Anger, Envy, Greed, Sloth, Gluttony, and Lust. Interestingly, Giotto does not mirror his conventional group of virtues with the conventional group of vices: he keeps only Anger and Envy and adds Despair, Infidelity, Injustice, and Inconstancy. This new grouping of vices is unprecedented, and his sources are the subject of much scholarship, although no conclusion has been reached.

One of the first visual representations of the virtues and vices was the illustrations accompanying the Psychomachia written by the Christian Latin poet Prudentius in the late fourth century.

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6 See Pfeiffenberger, “The Iconology of Giotto’s Virtues and Vices,” Part V.
century. Meaning “soul battle,” it was an vivid allegory of the struggle between virtue and vice in a person’s soul. The struggle, while psychological in real life, here is represented as a physical battle between classical female figures who engage in duels, each virtue pitted against her opposing vice. Their actions are illustrative of the nature of their respective vice or virtue: for example, Wrath attacks Patience, but even after multiple attacks cannot defeat her, so Wrath destroys herself instead. Many features of the *Psychomachia* became medieval conventions: from the fifth century on, virtues and vices are most often described as classically dressed females engaged in duels. At Padua, Giotto draws heavily on the Psychomachian tradition, portraying the majority of his figures as classically dressed females, as well as pairing each virtue with a rival vice, facing one another across the wall.

Adolf Katzenellenbogen explains that in these early illustrations of the *Psychomachia*, the warring females appear side by side and of equal size, but later on, the virtues gain more prominence as their triumphant nature begins to be emphasized. The virtues start to appear treading upon the defeated vices, towering above them like giants, as in the twelfth century at St. Pierre at Aulnay. (Figure 1). The act of standing upon one’s opponent was a universal symbol of domination and triumph. As the virtues became more majestic, the humanity of the vices decreased: they became grotesque demons, naked with wild, flying hair, also visible at Aulnay. In the thirteenth century, the vices begin to gain back their human qualities and appear as females again, but are still subordinate under the feet of the virtues, such as at Strasbourg Cathedral (Figure 2). Interestingly, at Padua Giotto does not make his virtues triumphant over his vices, or his vices animalistic demons. They stand on opposite sides of the room, equal in stature, build and amount of clothing.

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The Chapel, its inception and history, is intrinsically connected to the concept of vice and virtue. This background of the Chapel manifests itself in the virtues and vices, and legitimizes close observation of them. The land on which the Arena Chapel would be built was bought by Enrico Scrovegni in 1300. Enrico planned to build a grand family palace and an adjoining burial chapel for himself, naming the chapel after the Roman arena that had once stood on his parcel of land. Work began on the chapel in 1302, and was probably finished by 1305 when the High Council of Venice voted to lend tapestries to Enrico for the dedication of his chapel. That Giotto was the artist for the interior frescoes is not mentioned in any of the surviving official documents; the earliest reference to him comes from Francesco de Barberino who writes about Giotto’s depiction of Envy in 1308-1312. Enrico dedicated his chapel to the Virgin of the Annunciation, honoring a chapel of the same dedication that had once stood on the site, as well as to the Virgin of Charity. The first mention of this dedication is in 1304 when Pope Benedict XI issued a papal bull granting indulgences to those who visited the “Santa Maria del Carita de Arena.” This dedication to the Virgin of Charity no doubt comes from the fact that Enrico proclaimed the Chapel a way to make up for the sins of his family: the Scrovegni family, Enrico included, were known usurers. Enrico’s father Reginaldo was described by Dante in his *Inferno* as sitting in the burning desert of the Seventh Circle of Hell, his moneybag strung around his neck. As in contemporary religious thought, charity was the contrasting virtue to the vice of avarice, of which usury was a faction. In connecting his Chapel with charity, Enrico would

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further remove himself and his family from the allegations of usury. The Virgin Mary was believed at the time to be an intercessor on behalf of even the worst sinner. In this case she was no doubt an important and hopeful figure for Enrico. The year 1300 seemed to mark a change in heart for Enrico: all signs of his usurious practices end in this year, and it is then that he buys the land for his Chapel. As a Jubilee Year, 1300 was a time of great penitence, and perhaps this prompted Enrico to change his ways. However, the fact that he built a grand palace with a lavish chapel, decorated by Florence’s most celebrated artist does not exactly indicate humility and the total renunciation of wealth.

Our attempt to illuminate the virtues and vices and their importance in the Chapel through Giotto’s visual ingenuity will begin with the visual rhymes present in Charity, as this virtue is specifically important in the background of the Chapel. Charity, a female figure, wears a long flowing tunic that is belted under the breasts and gathered at the hips, with neatly coiffed hair topped with a crown of roses (Figure 3). A bowl of fruit and flowers balances in her right hand, and with her left she offers her very anatomically-correct heart to God. Showing her contempt for usurious activities, she tramples money bags underfoot. This figure expresses both amor dei and amor proximi, love of God and love of neighbor, the accepted definition of charity at the time. As she gives her love to God, she also gives love in the form of gifts to her fellow humans. As Andrew Ladis suggests, her stance is reminiscent of Saint Bonaventure’s remark that “it is charity that makes us ascend to the highest thing and descend to the lowest.” In her cornucopia-like bowl, Charity offers roses, poppies, pomegranates, and wheat. Selma

14 Freyhan, “The Evolution of the Caritas Figure,” 69.
15 As quoted in Ladis, Giotto’s O, 43.
Pfeiffenberger recognizes all these objects as potent Christian symbols: roses are a symbol of the Virgin, and poppies Christ’s Passion because of their blood-red color and ancient connections with sleep and death; pomegranates are associated with the Resurrection and wheat with the Bread of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{17} In offering these gifts to her fellow man, Charity recalls Christ’s sacrifice and reminds the viewer that to perform charity is honoring his sacrifice.

Charity also sports a halo of flames in a cruciform pattern. Fire, flames, and light have been associated with charity since early Christian times,\textsuperscript{18} a common convention in Giotto’s time was to depict Charity holding a flame, particularly a flaming cornucopia.\textsuperscript{19} Saint Bonaventure explains the importance of light in his \textit{Sententiae} in 1250-1251. He describes God as the \textit{fons lucis}, the source of light, and consequently all human bodies are evaluated according to the degree of light within them. Richard Freyhan says, “[t]he dignity of the body grows with the amount of light it contains, and the more it contains, the nearer it is to God.”\textsuperscript{20} The flame attribute of charity must indicated that the act of charity imbues one with the light of God and brings one closer to heaven. It is clearly a powerful virtue. The flaming halo of Giotto’s Charity must similarly attest to her closeness with God. Additionally, the cruciform arrangement immediately recalls the halo of Christ – perhaps, as with her cornucopia, it again recalls Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, the ultimate act of charity.

The act of extending one’s arms, giving selflessly, as Charity does, is echoed throughout the Chapel. Ladis notes parallels in the \textit{Visitation}, where Elizabeth and the Virgin hold each

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\item\textsuperscript{17} Selma Pfeiffenberger, “The Iconology of Giotto’s Virtues and Vices at Padua” (PhD diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1966), V:52.
\item\textsuperscript{18} “Caritas lux est,” Augustine, PL XXXIII, col. 561 XXXV, 1598, as quoted in Freyhan, “The Evolution of the \textit{Caritas} Figure,” 73.
\item\textsuperscript{19} Freyhan, “The Evolution of the \textit{Caritas} Figure,” 75
\item\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 74.
\end{itemize}
other, full of love, their arms bent at the elbow as are Charity’s (Figure 4).\footnote{Ladis, \textit{Giotto’s O}, 43.} Both these women are giving themselves for something larger, for the salvation of mankind. The fruit of the Virgin’s sacrifice is visible in the \textit{Nativity}, when again she and the nurse mirror not only the embracing action of the \textit{Visitation} but also the gifting nature of Charity (Figure 5). As Charity holds out a bowl of fruit for her fellow man, the Virgin holds out the fruit of her womb, also for the salvation of mankind.

We also see echoes of Charity in Enrico’s donor portrait in the \textit{Last Judgment} (Figure 6). Arms extended, Enrico selflessly offers his Chapel to the figure often identified as the Virgin of Charity. This act is an expression of both \textit{amor die} and \textit{amor proximi}: as Charity presents her heart to God, so Enrico offers his Chapel to the holy figures; and as Charity gives wealth to her neighbor, Enrico also gives the Chapel to his fellow man to enjoy in the years to come, as the Chapel was open to visitors. There is no doubt that Enrico would have wanted to be linked to the figure of Charity, to be seen as a figure full of the light of God and the antithesis of a usurious man. He wanted salvation, not damnation. Heightening Enrico’s connection with Charity is his conflicting relationship with the figure of Judas. Ladis notes how Enrico and the hanging Judas are located directly above the two posts of the doorway below the \textit{Last Judgment} (Figure 7).\footnote{Ibid., 45.} While Judas hangs in Hell, Enrico is placed with the holy in Heaven. Judas is linked with many vices in the Chapel, notably Envy, the opposing vice of Charity. Here, by placing Enrico in direct opposition to Judas, who additionally embodies treason, despair, and usury, Enrico is painted as a man of charity, love, and goodness: a far cry from his previous usurious self.

Envy’s connection to Charity, Judas and Enrico make it a figure of obvious importance in the Chapel. Located across from Charity, Envy is depicted as a slightly ambiguous but likely
female figure with grotesque animal features (Figure 8). Out of her head grow two asymmetrical horns and distended ears resembling those of a bat or donkey. In her left hand she tightly clutches a tasseled money bag, and with her right she claws at more unseen riches. A snake, associated with the Devil and the word of Satan, issues from her mouth, twisting back to blind her. It also makes clear some of the consequences of envy: the hateful things said or done in envy will “come back to bite you.” Francesco da Barberino speaks of Giotto’s Envy in one of the only contemporary documents that ties Giotto to the Chapel: “Animosity: it suffers this, indeed, with endurance, as where Envy is consumed inside and out with enviousness – this Giotto painted excellently in the Arena at Padua.” Barberino notes that Giotto excellently depicts the all-consuming nature of envy – he must have been referring to the fact that Envy is being literally be consumed by the flames she stands in, which resemble the fires of Hell in the nearby Last Judgment. We see she is consumed inwardly by envy in the fact that she is so intent on obtaining the object of her greed that she does notice her fiery predicament.

Ladis notes the connection between Envy and Judas and the action of grasping. Envy claws for more money, characterizing the gesture as greedy and covetous. These qualities are projected onto Judas, as he is grasping in three out of the four scenes we see him in. In the Pact he clutches at a money bag, like Envy; in the Last Supper he reaches for food in a crock; and in the Betrayal he grasps at Christ, enveloping him in his yellow robes (Figure 9-11). Derbes and Sandona stress the connection between Envy and the action of taking, and Charity and the action

25 Ladis, Giotto’s O, 40.
of giving. They note that figures like Judas who snatch and grab are all sinful: the soldiers in the Massacre of the Innocents, and the profusion of snatching and grabbing demons in the Last Judgment. In contrast, figures that enact the opposite of grasping - giving - are all marked as holy figures. As Christ and Mary selflessly give themselves for the salvation of mankind, Anna gives the Virgin to the Temple in the Presentation of the Virgin, Elizabeth gives her support to the Virgin in the Visitation, and, of course, Enrico gifts his Chapel to the Virgin of Charity. Here, Giotto takes the prominent Christian theme of selfless sacrifice and elaborates upon it visually, using visual tactics to paint sinners as takers, and the holy, Enrico included, as givers.

Yet another sinful grasping figure is in Christ Carrying the Cross, where a man in brown in the front of the crowd behind Christ prods him in the back with a stick and also reaches toward him with a hand that bears a remarkable resemblance to the grasping hand of Envy (Figure 12). This hand is positioned in a place of significance: it is almost in the center of the composition, and the empty space that surrounds it immediately draws viewers’ eyes to the hand and attached arm. The man the hand belongs to possesses features reminiscent of Judas’: dark curly hair, heavy brow, small beard and a moustache. Equating this figure with both Envy and Judas makes him doubly sinful.

Anger, located third from the east wall, is a particularly expressive vice (Figure 13). She tears open her long, belted tunic in fury, baring her chest and throwing back her head as if about to emit the howl of rage that so often accompanies a gesture like this. Her sex is somewhat ambiguous: she has long hair and her feet are covered, yet she exposes a rather masculine chest that doesn’t indicate the existence of breasts. This sexual ambiguity is common among both Giotto’s virtues and vices and their earlier representations – they occupy a somewhat fantastical

26 Derbes, Anne and Mark Sandona, “‘Ave charitate plena’: Variations in the Theme of Charity in the Arena Chapel”, Speculum 76.3 (2001), 632.
realm, where normal signs of gender do not apply. This evokes the *Psychomachia*, where the virtues and vices are female in appearance but act and cavort like men, fighting in battle and teasing each other about their effeminacy.\(^{27}\) We see Anger’s form echoed on the facing wall in *The Trial of Christ before Caiaphas*. Here, Caiaphas tears his gold trimmed robe open at the chest, somewhat less expressively than Anger, frowning angrily across the room at Christ (Figure 14). Caiaphas is marked as a sinful figure for being consumed by anger and disbelief and letting his rage obscure the truth that Christ is the true son of God.

The vice Infidelity is located two niches down from Anger, opposing Fidelity (Figure 15). A weighty robed figure, seemingly female, stumbles toward a fire, being led by the small girl she holds in her hand, who has a rope around her neck. A man reads from a scroll in the upper right hand corner of the niche. Pfeiffenberger believes this to be a depiction of idolatry, being “unfaithful” to the church.\(^{28}\) She reads the small girl as a pagan idol, and the branch she holds a reference to pagan tree worship, or perhaps recalling the costumes of the revelers at the Feast of Fools, who often dressed in leaves and branches. Ladis also describes the girl as a “puny god,” pitiful compared to the majesty of the Christian god, nothing but a dressed-up fool.\(^{29}\) Freyhan believes it to be a depiction of secular love, and the rope around Infidelity’s neck a *vinculum amoris*, the metaphorical chain of love.\(^{30}\) He cites the thirteenth-century Limoges Casket which shows a woman guiding a stumbling man by a rope, the *vinculum amoris*, around his neck (Figure 16). Although Giotto’s Infidelity also shows a similar female scene, this repudiation of secular love and worldly pleasures doesn’t fit into the theme of the Chapel. The focus is more on


\(^{29}\) Ladis, *Giotto’s O*, 33.

\(^{30}\) Freyhan, “The Evolution of the *Caritas* Figure,” 80.
Enrico’s salvation through sacred love. In support of Pfeifferberger’s reading, the man reading from the scroll in the corner could be an Old Testament prophet, reading the word of God. His words, however, never reach Infidelity’s ears, for they are covered by the flaps of her helmet. Pfeifferberger believes this helmet to be Roman military in origin, but I believe they more resemble contemporary kettle hats. Kettle hats were worn by foot soldiers from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, their main purpose to shade their eyes and protect from attacks from above (Figure 17). Perhaps the hat here “protects” Infidelity from the words of the prophet above and therefore the knowledge of God, as the hat directly aligns with the Prophet’s would-be line of speech.

Ladis notes that a figure posed similarly to Infidelity stands in the Cleansing of the Temple, receiving the brunt of Christ’s anger (Figure 18). He shields himself with his right arm while he clutches a bird cage with his left. A similar diagonally cascading swath of fabric falls from both figures’ right shoulders to their left hands. Giotto here draws connections between the dishonorable things these two figures value above God: money for the Cleansing figure, and pagan gods for Infidelity. It also references their mutual inevitable outcome: the fires of hell. The act of valuing false things above God also symbolically refers to Judas and his penchant for money.

Justice or Iustitia resides in the center of the south wall, in a niche larger than those of the other virtues (Figure 20). She sits on a monumental throne reminiscent of Giotto’s later Ognissanti Madonna (Uffizi Gallery, Florence c. 1310), wearing a long robe and cape. Her hair is covered by a veil, topped by a crown, and in her hands she weighs the just and the unjust. The

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31 Pfeiffenberger. Iconology, V:42.
33 Ladis, Giotto’s O, 33.
decoration on the foot of her throne portrays the joyous effects of a just government: people sing and dance in peace. Why is Justice in the biggest niche? Thomas Aquinas regarded some virtues to be more important than others, for example, Fortitude was more important than Temperance, while Justice was the most important virtue of all. Justice might also have been an important contemporary concern in Italy, where one family often had control over a city, even in the republics. Corruption and nepotism were often rife within these governments, and no doubt the citizens of Italy highly valued a just authority, as injustice was so widespread.

Justice’s frontal, enthroned posture echoes throughout the Chapel, suggesting the importance of the concept of justice. God the Father appears on the east wall, dispatching Gabriel to the Annunciation. He sits frontally in a similar winged throne, holding up his hand in a blessing gesture. Connecting the two figures no doubt affirms God’s role as a fair and just being, as well as suggests God’s heavenly justice as a source for the human justice seen on earth. In the Last Judgment on the west wall Christ assumes a similar position (Figure 21). Seated and frontal, he judges the resurrected souls and decides their fate. He presides not from a grand throne like God and Justice, but instead from a rainbow, encircled by his mandorla. Christ is the ultimate judge: at the end of times, he decides the fate of all souls. Here, Giotto paints him as the just judge of the Day of Judgment, where he will, hopefully, reward the virtuous and punish the sinners.

Next to the private door where the Scrovegnes themselves would have entered from their adjacent palace is a portrayal of the vice Folly, to whom many figures in the Chapel bear resemblance (Figure 22). Similar to depictions of the vice at the time, Folly is a lumbering, potbellied, club-wielding fool in jester’s clothing. His costume has a bird-like character: his long

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train gives the appearance of tail feathers, and his spiked hat the impression of a crown of feathers. Pfeiffenberger suggests that this figure represents a mock king and his silly hat a mock-crown, inspired by costumes worn at the Feast of Fools, where people satirized their local bishops and deacons by recreating their uniform in leaves, feathers and bells.\(^{35}\)

Folly’s unusual costume is echoed in dress of many of the soldiers in the narrative scenes above. The soldiers wear short, pleated armor, strained by their uniformly large bellies. The fact that most soldiers resemble Folly cannot be a coincidence: Giotto most likely uses visual parallels to draw connections between Folly and those who foolishly carry out the word of a pagan, non god-fearing ruler, and in effect, painting these figures as fools. A striking example appears in the soldier that argues over Christ’s robes in *The Crucifixion* (Figure 23). Despite the richness and intricacy of his military attire, it bulges over his belly and pleats at the waist as does Folly’s costume. The soldiers flanking Christ in *The Trial before Caiaphas* show a similar bulging, pleated outfit. Giotto marks these figures as thoughtless and unwise, fitting as they do not recognize Christ to be the son of God. A demon in the Hell scene in the *Last Judgment* wears elements of the foolish Roman soldier costume (Figure 24). He wears the pleated skirt that swells at his belly, and stands in a stance reminiscent of Folly’s. This demon seems to be blowing a horn, initiating the end of times, welcoming the sinners into Hell. Ladis recognizes Folly’s gesture as a welcoming action,\(^{36}\) and in taking the Chapel as a whole we see he welcomes his fellow vices, and beyond them, Hell. Both the demon and Folly foolishly give sin a warm reception and usher in the end of times.

Folly’s opposing virtue is Prudence. If we read the virtues and vices starting at the east wall and culminating in the *Last Judgment*, these two form the opening to the virtue and vice


cycle. Thomas Aquinas explains the this pairing: “Every virtue (is) a kind of knowledge and every sin a kind of ignorance.”\textsuperscript{37} Folly, then, symbolizes this ignorance, which leads to bad judgment and thus initiates downfall, while Prudence symbolizes knowledge, specifically the knowledge of the power of God, and the good life that will bring you. Wisdom is the more conventional pairing for Folly, but Prudence and Wisdom are similar in definition, both possessing knowledge. Prudence might be in fact more appropriate in this case: in practicing prudence, one’s thoughts are turned toward the Last Judgment and where one’s soul will end up, perhaps realizing that if one wants to end up in heaven, they should embody the virtues rather than the vices.

Prudence sits at a desk in an elaborate chair, examining a mirror while writing in a ledger (Figure 25). She wears a wrapped headdress, open at the back to reveal an elaborate coiffure. Pfeiffenberger has suggested that this is a Janus head,\textsuperscript{38} logical considering Janus’ all-seeing power and in this case, the power to see towards the future. However, since unusual coiffures and head coverings are commonplace among the virtues and vices, I believe her tufts of hair to be simply a strange hairstyle. The figure of Prudence is seen echoed not in the usual narrative frescoes, but instead in the decorative quatrefoils that frame them. In the two quatrefoils directly above Prudence sit two figures at desks, and directly across the Chapel above Folly are two similarly studious figures (Figure 26). They seem to be New Testament figures, and perhaps one bishop. Their desks and chairs are noticeably less ornate than Prudence’s, but they seem to be carrying out similar tasks, writing and contemplating. The purpose of the quatrefoils is to correspond to the adjacent narrative scenes and add or confirm greater meaning. The two scenes corresponding to these sitting quatrefoil figures are the \textit{Last Supper} and the \textit{Pentecost}, the only

\textsuperscript{37} Pfeiffenberger. \textit{Iconology}, 11:3:12.
\textsuperscript{38} Pfeiffenberger. \textit{Iconology}, V:183.
two scenes of figures around a table. In these two scenes, sight into the future is a prevalent theme. In the Last Supper, Christ makes the prediction that one of his followers will betray him, and in the Pentecost, his followers receive ability to speak many languages and thus, the ability to convert and provide a prosperous future for the Church. The path from Prudence to the quatrefoil figures to the narrative scenes might seem contrived, but it is these complex relationships that contemporary viewers would have been looking for and that Giotto intended.

If Prudence begins the line of virtues, then Hope concludes it. Closest to Heaven in the Last Judgment, Hope flies upward in one graceful movement, as if to join her fellow virtuous figures in heaven (Figure 27). She accepts a crown being awarded to her by an angel in the upper right hand corner of her niche. Hope’s hair is pulled into an unusual spiral-shaped bun low on her neck, and she sports wings identical to those of the angels in heaven. She wears a long tunic belted under the breasts and gathered at the waist, which flutters in the wind of her ascension. The tunic mimics that of Charity. While it is most likely not being suggested that they are the same figure, Giotto uses visual methods to connect these two figures and sustain an upward movement toward heaven. They also both look up to the right and reach in the same direction with a slightly bent arm.

We see Hope’s form echoed in the figure of Christ in the Ascension (Figure 28). Here, Christ moves in a similar upward motion, arms slightly bent, gaze following his reach to the upper right. A bit of his robe flutters behind him, mimicking Hope’s wing. If we look at the chapel as a whole, he is flying toward the east wall, which features God enthroned above the Annunciation. Bruce Cole notices God looks down to the left, towards his ascending son, welcoming him into heaven. Christ is not the only figure who mirrors Hope in the Ascension. The crowds flanking Christ raise their arms before them in pray, but which also resembles

Hope’s gesture. Hoping and praying are conflated in this scene. The kneeling Virgin poses similarly, arms raised in prayer. The abundance of Hope’s parallels in this scene seem to indicate that hope and rising into heaven go hand in hand; with hope, and perhaps prayer, one will be accepted into heaven as God accepts Christ.

Most angels in the Chapel parallel Hope, given their uniform wings, flowing robes, and low buns, but some are particularly evocative. Cole notes that two angels hover under the hands of Christ in the Crucifixion, collecting blood from his wounds (Figure 23). The angels closely parallel the figure of Hope, their wings extend behind them and their reach and look upward. Perhaps they are tiny harbingers of the good things to come in the Ascension. They tell the viewer that in every grievous situation hope must be held on to, because good things can come from the bad. Another Hope-like angel visits Joachim in Joachim’s Dream. The angel swoops out of the sky in a similar dynamic movement to Hope’s, gaze following outstretched arm. This angel is indeed an embodiment of hope for Joachim: she tells him that despite her old age, his wife Anna will bear a child, the future Virgin Mary. The fact that many angels in the Chapel resemble Hope perhaps has the purpose of linking Hope with the concept of heaven. Giotto suggests that by possessing hope, one is guaranteed a place in heaven. This very human and sensitive message would have been particularly powerful to Enrico. That chances that he would end up in Hell were substantial, given his sins and the sins of his family. Enrico is told in these visuals that by praying and possessing hope, even he could make it to heaven. As Enrico walked through his final resting place, the images of hope that abounded would no doubt help to placate his fears of the future and increase his optimism.

Opposite Hope on the north wall lies Despair, the closest vice to the Last Judgment (29). If Folly symbolizes the beginning of a life of sin, then Despair represents the culmination. As

Ladis says, despair is the last sin before damnation because despair leaves no room for penitence.\footnote{Ladis, \textit{Giotto’s O}, 39.} One filled with despair possesses no hope or thoughts of heaven, and thus is doomed to Hell. Perhaps this explains why the devil, the cause behind all the vices, appears only in Despair: it contradicts the hopeful message that pervades the chapel. Because the devil associates only with Hope’s rival, we must assume that Hope is important to Enrico.

Scholars often regard Giotto’s Despair as interchangeable with \textit{Acedia}, meaning listlessness or despondency, similar to our definition of modern depression. This is because in contemporary literature, suicide was seen as a result of \textit{Acedia}; the two went hand in hand.\footnote{Lackey, “Giotto in Padua,” 561.} Here, the figure of Despair hangs from a pole in the ceiling, head lolling to the side, tendons straining in her broken neck. Her hair is undone and falls loose down her back. She still has some life however – her arms have been flung to the side in a gesture of frustration. Giotto’s interest in naturalism is especially evident in the portrayal of this vice. Her weight is very real: the pole in the ceiling bends in the center under her mass, the scarf from which she hangs is taut and rigid, and gravity pulls her heavy head towards the floor, straining her muscles and tendons. The accuracy almost makes it more gruesome. Despite the physical naturalism, this figure occupies an imaginary space: she is dead and hanging, yet she moves her arms to express emotion as if still alive. This is similar to the other-worldly character of all the virtues and vices.

Suicide by hanging in a Christian context of course recalls Judas, an image of whom we see in the immediately adjacent \textit{Last Judgment} (Figure 30). Here he hangs, feet dangling, his viscera spilling out before him. Like Despair, he is a weighty figure who hangs from a rod, head lolling to the left. Another connection to Judas is the devil that visits both figures. A small black
devil flies down to assume Despair’s soul. In *Judas Receiving Thirty Pieces of Silver* we see the same devil, this time larger, guiding and also encouraging Judas as he betrays Christ.

We see Despair’s form echoed in many other places in the chapel. Surprisingly, she is not embodied by traditionally sinful figures, as we have seen above; instead, she is seen echoed in the most virtuous. Here arises a particularly unprecedented technique of Giotto’s. It might be seen as heresy to depict holy figures as sinful but the effect is actually very humanizing. This coincides with the contemporary movement encouraging closer and more personal connections to God and Christ. Visualizing these holy figures as human made them more relatable and thus more believable. Here, John the Evangelist throws his arms behind him in a gesture of anguish as he lets out an almost audible wail in *The Lamentation* (Figure 31). Many of the flying angels in both *The Lamentation* and the *Crucifixion* fling their arms back in the same gesture, expressing their grief at the passing of Christ. Ladis notes that Virgin’s posture in the *Crucifixion* is perhaps the most reminiscent of Despair (Figure 23). Here, the Virgin faints into the arms of John and a Mary, consumed by grief and hopelessness. Like Despair, her whole body slumps, her arms are out to her sides in a despondent manner, and her head lolls to the left. It might seem startling to link such a holy figure to a vice with whom the devil cavorts, but the Virgin’s doubt in the Crucifixion is known in scripture. Augustine says, “the blessed Virgin at the time if the death of Christ was stunned, as it were, into doubting.”

43 By having the forms of Judas and the Virgin echo Despair, Giotto invites the viewer to contemplate the grief that both these figures felt over the loss of Christ. The Virgin deals with her grief by momentarily losing herself to emotion, but still keeping her faith and remaining strong, while Judas takes the cowardly route and commits suicide. The Virgin is humanized through these connections to sin, but so is Judas. If holy figures

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43 As quoted in Ladis, *Giotto’s O*, 39.
can sin, then perhaps sinners are not less human. Everyone sins, the holy, the sinner and the normal person, thus, all can be forgiven and hope reigns.

The angels in the *Lamentation* and the *Crucifixion*, all holy figures, are remarkably expressive and show a wide range of sins. Below Christ’s left arm in the *Crucifixion* we see an angel in red tearing at his clothes with his head thrown back, echoing Anger even more passionately than Caiaphas (Figure 32). Many angels in both scenes fling their arms to their sides, mirroring Despair, like John and the Virgin, while still others tear at their hair, wring their hands and hide their faces. These angels express their sorrow and displeasure at Christ’s death in very human ways: many people react to the loss of a life with anger, while others feel frustration and still others hopelessness.

We have seen in the above examples how Giotto used the visual devices of echoing and paralleling to illuminate complex moral messages. These visual relationships showed the viewer that messages of charity and hope abound, Judas’s envy was particularly looked down upon, and perhaps most surprisingly that even holy figures are flawed and can experience sinful feelings. Through examining another of Giotto’s visual devices, even more messages can be gleaned from the Chapel. Along with visual rhymes, Giotto uses the concept of movement and action among the virtues and vices to convey meaning. Similarities in movement among the virtues and vices as a whole as well as individual displays can imply significant messages to the viewer.

If we view the virtues and vices as one unit, several things become apparent. All the vices are facing or inclining to the left, towards the *Last Judgment* and the Hell scene on the west wall. Similarly, the virtues face to the right, towards heaven. This funnels our gaze to the west wall and makes us reflect upon the scene depicted there. The *Last Judgment* holds a place of importance in the Chapel, due to its monumentality. In accordance with evidence we have seen of Enrico’s anxiety about his afterlife and salvation, this emphasis on the Last Judgment is
logical. Enrico’s preoccupation with the afterlife reflected a general concern in the public for what happened after death: the details of purgatory and the Day of Judgment were regularly debated. In the eyes of many of his contemporaries, the purpose of every action on earth was in preparation for the Day of Judgment. At that time, earthly deeds would be judged and one would either suffer an eternity in hell or join God in heaven. No doubt looking at the horrific hell scene would remind Enrico to resist partaking in sinful activities. The public undoubtedly would have been affected by these images in a similar way, and come away with similar comparable thoughts.

There is more to be gleaned from compositions involving movement among the virtues and vices. It has been noted that the virtues display a “rising” movement from east to west, while the vices seem to be “falling.” The virtues start out with the sitting Prudence, then end with the reaching Charity and finally the gravity-defying Hope while the vices commence with the grandiose, upright Folly, followed by the unstable Inconstancy and end finally with the hanging Despair with her characteristic downward movement. Despite this, not all the virtues and vices adhere to this convention: for example, the standing Temperance is followed by the seated Justice. This idea does, however, bring our attention to Hope and Despair, the cycle’s concluding pair, and their dynamic movement in relationship to the Last Judgment. Hope ascends upward, reflecting not only the psychological nature of her virtue, but also the path that she, and all who practice hope, will take as they are welcomed into Heaven. Despair, on the other hand, sinks under the weight of her anguish; death here is a falling motion. She reflects the descent into Hell that the sinners nearby are acting out, evoking the fate of anyone who falls too deeply into despair.

44 Pfeiffenberger. Iconology, II:3:45.
In a similar fashion to Hope and Despair, many figures convey the psychological traits of their respective vice or virtue through body language. This is another of Giotto’s visual innovations that departs from previous renderings of the virtues and vices. At Notre Dame in Paris, the virtues are portrayed as identical figures with only an attribute or two to define them. (Figure 33). Giotto here for the most part foregoes relying on objects that are decipherable only to a trained eye, and he instead uses body language - a universal language - that can be understood by anyone, however literate.

Courage or *Fortitudo* is placed second from the east wall (Figure 34). Dressed in soldier’s garb and the Herculean lion-skin, she holds a spear and a large shield emblazoned with a lion, the traditional symbol of courage. Cole notes how here Courage is a literal pillar of strength and bravery.45 The two verticals created by her body and the shield are solid and unmoving; they complement her niche and architectural elements of the dado. The pleats on her military uniform resemble the flutes of a column. Courage as a principle is dependable, strong, and bold. Giotto uses physical appearance to reflect the nature of the virtue.

The figure of Inconstancy is a particularly dynamic one (Figure 35). A woman rides dangerously upon a wheel rolling along the impossibly tipped floor of her niche. The floor is uniquely elaborate; we see a similar red marble floor only in the niche of Prudence. Pfeiffenberger believes this figure recalls the Wheel of Fortune,46 and represents the volatility of luck. Indeed, Inconstancy’s body language is unstable, fickle and erratic. Although we have her label, it is almost not needed given the demonstrative nature of physical movements.

Anger tears her clothes from her body in a visible expression of rage (Figure 13). Overcome with exasperation, she paws at her own garments to placate her fury. Anger as an

emotion is boiling, violent, and explosive, and Giotto translates that expertly into visual form. On the other hand, Anger’s antagonist, Temperance, stands peacefully with a slight S-curve to her elegant body, binding her sword, literally sheathing her aggression (Figure 36). She wears a bridle in her mouth, a symbol of restraint. Her physical nature and actions show both outward and inward composure. Justice appears as the model queen, reminiscent of a judge at his chair, Jesus the arbiter in heaven, and the enthroned Madonna. Her strong body is grounded and unwavering, as justice is hoped to be.

A materializing theme in these descriptions is the stability and calmness of the virtues and the instability and dynamism of the vices. This is a convention that has roots in traditional depictions of virtues and vices. We can see this again at Notre Dame in Paris: the top row of virtues sit calmly holding their attributes, while the vices below are everyday figures who carry out their sin through dynamic activities. Similarly, Giotto’s virtues are calm and stable; one notices that Courage, Temperance, Fidelity and Charity share the columnar appearance with solid verticals and long, fluted robes. Prudence and Justice sit calmly. Hope is the only virtue with dynamic movement, but it is a graceful, elegant movement. It is difficult to find similar figures among the vices because they are all different. Folly strides forward pompously, Inconstancy perches precariously on a wheel, Infidelity totters towards a fire, and Despair sinks towards the grounds, arms flailed to the side. Giotto may be combining old traditions with the contemporary belief that asymmetrical things were signs of evil and corruption, while symmetry was valued and was seen as the highest beauty. The limbs of the vices protrude this way and that, poking out of their niches, while the virtues remain compact and contained. It is of note that the hair of the virtues is all carefully and securely coiffed and often veiled, while the vices have strange hats and hair styles. The hair of Anger and Despair is unbound, and it reaches down past their waists. While loose hair can be symbolic of an unmarried girl or of grieving, it has been
suggested that perhaps it symbolizes here a lack of order and decorum.\(^{47}\) Indeed, while disorder, chaos and asymmetry reign in the vices, uniformity, peacefulness, and control grace the virtues, suggesting that the virtues would be the better choice to emulate.

Clearly, Giotto employed many different visual techniques to illuminate the virtues and vices in the Arena Chapel. He echoed forms and gestures throughout the Chapel to create complex relationships between figures, and used body language and movement to add dynamism and provide further identification. The virtues and vices are often neglected in scholarship, but when we examine at the visual evidence, we can see it was not Giotto’s intention for them to be; they are vital and important. Cole describes the virtues and vices act as mediators between the viewer and the narrative.\(^{48}\) Indeed, they were instructional and helped viewers reflect on the lessons learned in the narratives and how to connect them to their own lives, both in the religious sense and the secular sense. In a way they were like a prayer guide: they helped summarize the story in quick, easy images that would help viewers remember the important points, such as the despair of the Virgin, the justice of Christ, the envy of Judas. In this sense, they are like memory tools for how to and how not to achieve salvation. The outcome of viewers’ choices is made clear in the *Last Judgment* before them, where Christ beckons towards the virtues and welcomes them to heaven, but holds up a scornful hand to the vices and banishes them to hell.

Here is the interesting thing: Giotto doesn’t force one way or the other on viewers - they get to chose which path they take. The virtues are not larger and more majestic than the pitiful vices, as at Strasbourg, where viewers are clearly meant to associate with the virtues (Figure 2). At the Arena Chapel, the virtues and vices are equal in size and humanity; Giotto does not force one or the other. Viewers recognizes their own human emotions in both the virtues and vices,

\(^{47}\) Pfeiffenberger, *Iconology*, V:73  
\(^{48}\) Cole, *Virtues and Vices*, 373.
Unlike at Aulnay where it is unlikely viewers would associate with the animal-like demons (Figure 1). In Giotto’s virtues and vices, viewers associate with both, because they recognize the familiar emotions and body language. His depictions are sometimes so accurate that we can identify the virtue or vice just by examining its body language. With such human renderings, Giotto has allowed viewers to see themselves in each virtue and vice, reflecting the very human notion that there are both in each of us; our task is to choose which group to embody.

Despite the widely accepted thought in Giotto’s time that the only purpose in life was to prepare for the next, Giotto shows close and sensitive attention to the earthly human experience in his Paduan Arena Chapel. Visitors to the Chapel are invited to contemplate these aspects of life, tuning back and forth between a virtue and its corresponding vice, pondering and reflecting. The virtues and vices take up their weapons and form a line, like a battle front, with the prize in the center – the viewer’s soul. The viewers are literally surrounded by the virtues and vices, symbolizing the equal occurrence of both in life, with the grand outcome of their earthly choices in the Last Judgment in front of you. Here, viewers are in charge of what they take away from the Chapel, and Giotto allows them to make the ultimate choice about their own salvation.
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