

Sin, grace, and the redemption of suffering

David Albert Jones

The aim of this paper is to discuss the (Roman) Catholic account of the relationship between sin and suffering provided by JLA Garcia in 'Sin and Suffering in a Catholic Understanding of medical ethics'. Garcia's paper falls into two parts: the first draws on Thomas Aquinas to outline a natural law/virtue approach to ethics and places sin and vice in that context; the second contains a criticism of views of public health that omit consideration of sin and vice, and then, following Pope John Paul II, sets out some ways in which suffering can be put to a good use.

The paper contains interesting material and contributes to the theological understanding of this area. It draws on the Catholic tradition and particularly on the thought of Thomas Aquinas who remains an important resource for Catholic theology. Nevertheless, there are also features which are open to criticism, both in terms of omissions and in terms of positive claims. The following criticism is intended to be constructive, drawing out points of agreement and showing how the account could be further strengthened by the remedying of omissions and of certain mistakes.

Garcia on Thomas on law

Garcia begins with a definition of sin given by Saint Augustine, used by Saint Thomas Aquinas, and quoted, with approval, by the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church: sin is an 'utterance, deed or desire contrary to the eternal law'¹. However, before returning to the notion of law, Garcia sketches out what he regards as the core of Christian morality: It is 'not chiefly a matter of "Thou Shalt Nots"... but more positively of living a vocation... controlling our passions, under the operations of reason that we call conscience, so as to live virtuously' (Garcia, p. 4). This is a theme to which Garcia returns at several places in his paper. The struggle with sin, however important, is not the centre or the starting point of moral action. The starting point is good and virtuous behaviour which aims at human fulfilment. 'The virtuous life is self-fulfilment; living morally both fulfils our natures in our most fundamental needs and wants' (Garcia, p. 4). For his positive account of the virtues Garcia draws heavily on Thomas Aquinas² and, in particular, on certain sections of the Summa Theologiae. Hence also it is to Thomas Aquinas that Garcia looks for his account of sin, and of law, for sin is a transgression of the law.

According to Garcia, Thomas Aquinas considers law under four headings: (1) eternal law, (2) natural law, (3) human law and (4) divine law³.

(1) The eternal law is nothing less than Providence, 'God's benevolent ordering of Creation' (Garcia, p. 5). The eternal law is thus the creative plan of the eternal God.

(2) Human beings, having the natural powers of reason and free will share in this divine ordering of creation by means of their good actions. The participation in the eternal law of God is what Thomas calls 'natural law'. Natural law is not a complete set of human laws in heaven (as it were) but rather it is the basis, in human nature and human reason, for measuring the justice and reasonableness of human actions.

(3) Human law is the positive law that is laid down by human lawmakers, for the sake of the common good. To be valid, these human laws must be based on the principles of natural law, though lawmakers have some latitude for positively determining the particular form that a law takes. For example, the natural law might imply that there should be reasonable speed limits, but the laying down of precise speed limits for particular areas and the level of fine for breaking the limit, depends also on creative human choice.

(4) Lastly, there is divine law, the law given by God to the human race by revelation, and codified on Mount Sinai. According to Garcia, this divine law is like the 'instruction manual provided with some complicated new device' (Garcia, p. 6). Now the reason that it is good for the apparatus to keep it clean etc. is not simply because it says so in the instruction manual but because of the inherent properties of the machinery. The manual says that these things should be done because they are in fact good for the device. Thus, in effect, Garcia answers Euthyphro⁴ by saying that the commandments of God are good because they reflect the nature of human beings, not simply because they are from God. 'Likewise, in Aquinas' authoritative conception, it is not the Decalogue that makes parental dishonour, manslaughter, theft, adultery etc. to be immoral. That is already fixed by the nature of human beings, their natural needs and welfare'⁵.

Garcia asserts that the authority of the lawgiver is not based on power but on the fact that 'she has been entrusted with the community's custody' and 'is answerable for the community's well-being' (Garcia, p. 7). Thus, the authority of the lawgiver is based on his or her obligation to promote the common good: 'rights emerge from prior duties' (Garcia, p. 9). Garcia then states that 'we can best understand God's commands and thus sin on a similar model' (Garcia, p. 9). What he has in mind is the putative basis of the commandments of the divine law in the natural law, as directed to the good of individual human persons and to the community.

Thomas on the divine law

At this juncture it is necessary to assess the accuracy of Garcia's account of Thomas. This is not only a question of the interpretation of one theologian, for if elements of Thomas's thought have been significantly misunderstood this might well involve the misunderstanding important theological truths.

Let us begin with Garcia's account of the authority of a lawgiver. There are obvious theological problems with the application of this to the divine lawgiver. Is it really the case that God is answerable for the community's well-being or has prior duties to his creatures? This conception of the creator does not sit well either with the Scriptures or with the Catholic tradition. Surely, it is one of the themes of the book of Job that God is not answerable to human beings (Job 38.1-42.6). It is also the teaching of Thomas Aquinas that God is not bound by obligations to any creature (S.T. 1a, q. 21, art 1, ad. 3, S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 114, art. 1). In the words of Herbert McCabe (2005: 37), 'there can be no sense in the idea that God has any job or is under any obligation; if he were, there would be something greater than God which constrained him'.

This apparent characterisation of God as a moral agent, under obligations to the community⁶ is indicative of a general theological weakness in Garcia's paper. In his

introduction Garcia states that the fact that his 'education and writing are philosophical, not theological', is an 'advantage' (Garcia, p. 3) for the construction of a Catholic account of sin and suffering. However, it is strange to portray a lack of familiarity with any academic discipline (in this case, theology) as an advantage for writing within that discipline. It seems, in fact, that Garcia falls into a number of mistakes in the interpretation of Thomas precisely because of the construal of theological doctrines within a narrowly philosophical perspective.

A good example of such misunderstanding is Garcia's treatment of Thomas on divine law. Garcia links together 'the divine and human law' and characterises both as 'positive law' (Garcia, p. 5), that is, written law. He thus identifies the divine law with the law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and focally with the Ten Commandments. Divine law can thus be thought of as a kind of 'instruction manual' whose content is derived from 'the nature of human beings' i.e. from natural law⁷. However, Thomas himself is clear that the divine law is twofold, the old law given on Sinai and the new law of the gospel (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 91, art. 5; S.T. 1a-2ae, qq. 106-108). And whereas the old law takes the form of positive law (a list of precepts), the new law is more internal than external, a matter of the spirit rather than of the letter (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 106, art. 1). In fact, the new law is 'principally the grace itself of the Holy Spirit' (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 106, art. 1, corpus). Not only does Garcia fail to bring this out, but it is striking that nowhere in his paper does he refer to grace, nor to the Holy Spirit.

In this context another perhaps significant omission is Thomas's claim that the end of the divine government is God. Indeed there is a sense in which the eternal law *is* God: 'his [eternal] law is not distinct from himself' (S.T. 1a-2ae q. 91, art. 1, ad 3). The eternal law exists in the mind of God within which all things are God. This follows from the doctrine of divine simplicity (S.T. 1a, q. 3) but it also reflects the claim, made elsewhere (S.T. 1a-2ae, qq. 1-5), that complete human fulfilment could consist in nothing less than a participation in the life of God. Constantly we encounter within the writings of Thomas the themes of grace and beatitude, of the fulfilment which comes only as a gift of God and which consists of beatific communion with God. However, while they pervade Thomas's teaching, these themes are routinely neglected by those who wish to take from Thomas a method that is purely philosophical. Servais Pinckaers (1995: 189-190) has argued convincingly that Thomas's moral teaching is essentially evangelical in character. Thomas's extensive use of Aristotle may have 'deceived modern readers' into thinking of him more as an Aristotelian than as a Christian, but the core of his moral theology is the grace of the Holy Spirit and the theological virtues.

The neglect of the category of grace leads Garcia into a certain degree of confusion in explaining what the notion of 'sin' adds to that of 'vice'. Initially he seems to accept the definition given by Thomas: sin is an 'utterance, deed or desire contrary to the eternal law' (Garcia, p. 3). Yet later he states that, 'what the concept of sin adds to that of vice, then, is specific reference to God and to his commands' (Garcia, p. 14 emphasis added). At this point Garcia seems to have in mind the revealed commands of God, the positive aspect of divine law, for in the same paragraph he states that, 'sin depends on God's divine (positive) law, which itself follows the natural law rooted in our nature' (Garcia, p. 13). This last quotation is inaccurate in a number of particulars. In the first place the definition of sin which Thomas accepts refers immediately not to

the 'divine law', nor to the 'natural law', but to acts contrary to the 'eternal law', which is God himself, and is the measure of the natural and the divine law. In the second place, the divine law is not primarily positive law, though it does have an aspect of positive law. In the third place, the sinfulness of acts does not depend primarily on any positive law but on the fact that vicious acts, of themselves, contradict the eternal law. In the fourth place, the divine law does not simply follow from 'the natural law rooted in our nature' but goes beyond it.

Thomas is clear in a number of places that, unlike human law, divine law is not based on human reason nor is it derived from the natural law. It is, rather, a further participation in the eternal law that goes beyond the merely natural (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 91, art. 4, ad. 3; S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 62, art. 2, resp.; S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 71, art. 6, ad. 5). It certainly conforms with the natural law, for 'grace builds upon nature' (S.T. 1a, q. 1, art. 8, ad. 2 and elsewhere), but it adds a new principle of action and provides the basis of a new conception of virtue. The 'theological virtues' of faith, hope and charity are distinct in kind from those virtues based solely in human nature (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 62, art. 1). They are given freely by God and are the direct expression of the presence of God, the possession of the Holy Spirit, by grace.

The virtues of virtue theory

In general Garcia develops well the idea of acquired virtue⁸ and shows how it can function as a central moral concept. His paper is also interesting in that it relates the idea of virtue to that of role-centredness (or, in a medical context, patient-centredness). This is best done in the extensive footnote 16. Also helpful in this context was his analysis of the so call 'four principles' of biomedical ethics in terms of virtue theory. Much work in this area has already been done by Pellegrino (e.g. 1985, 1993) to whom Garcia does not refer, but Garcia's account remains a useful sketch of how virtue theory can be relevant to bioethics.

Given this strength, it would have been helpful if Garcia had developed the theme further and explored the relationship between the virtues and human life issues⁹ and, more particular, between virtue and suffering¹⁰. This latter could have been done through an analysis of mercy (misericordia) (S.T. 2a-2ae, q. 30, art. 2) the virtue through which one grieves over another's misfortune. Mercy in this sense, like virtue in general, is a mean between two vices. In this case it is a matter of being neither a coldly indifferent nor overwhelmed by sentiment. Understanding virtue in this way can help protect against emotional burn-out on the part of professionals. Also, it can help professionals to take decisions in difficult, emotionally-charged circumstances. It is particularly the difficulty of coping with another's suffering that can lead the professional to seek to escape this by cutting short the life of the patient, rather than helping the patient live well and as comfortably as possible his or her last remaining days. The difficulty of establishing when suffering is to be resisted (as something harmful and remediable) and when it is to be accepted (as something useful or inevitable) seems to imply that mercy must be guided by practical wisdom. Hence Thomas links the beatitude 'blessed are the merciful' with the gift of counsel: 'The beatitude of mercy specifically corresponds to the gift of counsel, not as eliciting but as directing mercy' (S.T. 2a-2ae, q. 52, art. 4). Such an account of the place of virtue in coping with suffering would have augmented Garcia's paper considerably.

An important qualification for Garcia's account of virtue is that, in the understanding of Thomas, the acquired moral virtues need to be informed and directed by the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Furthermore, the moral virtues are thereby radically altered. One aspect of this is that love in the Christian sense (*caritas*) brings with it all the virtues. Thus, in the case of the Christian believer, virtues such as courage and justice are 'infused', given freely by grace rather than being habits built up by previous actions. Another aspect is that the characteristic acts of the moral virtues are altered. For example, while for Aristotle the archetypal example of courage is the soldier nobly facing death for the sake of the city, for Thomas it is the martyr patiently enduring death in witness to the gospel (S.T. 2a-2ae, q. 124). Hence also, while pride is a virtue for Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics II.7) it is a capital sin for Thomas (S.T. 2a-2ae, qq. 161-162), for it threatens the fundamental source of virtue, which lies outside human capabilities. Finally, even the theological virtues need to be completed by the gifts of the Spirit, which are dispositions to be guided by the particular promptings of the Holy Spirit (S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 68, art. 2). These are needed because the end to which the theological virtues fit us, life in union with God, is beyond human understanding. The Christian relies on the particular guidance of the Spirit, in addition to the settled dispositions of faith, hope, and love, to bring this life to its true end. The overall portrayal of the principles of the Christian life by Thomas thus includes not only natural law and natural moral virtues acquired by practice, but theological and infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit (to say nothing of the beatitudes and the fruits of the Spirit). None of this is evident from Garcia's paper.

The significance of sin

It is certainly true that Christianity morality should consist in more than a series of 'Thou Shalt Nots' (Garcia, p. 4), and it is also true that sin is 'secondary' (Garcia, p. 7) in a metaphysical sense. In Christianity there is no equality between good and evil, God and Satan, grace and sin. Sin is parasitic upon good and can only be understood in relation to good¹¹. Nevertheless, especially within the philosophical account of law given by Garcia, it is difficult to agree with his assertion that 'sin is neither central to Catholicism's theoretical understanding of Christian life nor its ethical thought in general.' (Garcia, pp.7-8) A Catholic account of the Christian life requires treating not only the natural law and the natural moral virtues, but the grace that justifies sinners. Central to the Christian life is the idea of redemption: won by Christ through his life, death, and resurrection; participated in by Christians through grace; expressed and effected in the sacraments; and inspiring the theological virtues and gifts of the Spirit. What account can be given of Calvary and of its sacramental sign, the sacrifice of the Eucharist, without reference to human sin and divine reconciliation? How can any Catholic moral theologian claim that the need redemption is not 'central to Catholicism's theoretical understanding of Christian life'?

According to Thomas, the graced principle of action within the heart, the divine law, is destroyed by mortal sin, that is, by sin in its primary sense¹². Mortal sin is a catastrophe because it involves, of itself, the complete loss of the life of grace. It is a kind of death of the soul and for that reason it also leads, of itself, to the everlasting death of Hell¹³. There can be repentance and reconciliation after mortal sin, but this is possible, not because of a power human beings possess to pick themselves up after sinning, but only because of the grace of God which is sent into the heart to inspire repentance and to effect reconciliation. Without this special act of God the sinner

would remain dead in his or her sins¹⁴. Garcia alludes to the death of the soul at the very end of his paper when quoting Benedict XIV (2005, pp. 151, 152 quoted by Garcia, p. 25), but there is nothing in the first half of the paper which would explain why sin should have such a terrible consequence. Garcia talks of sin ‘distancing’ the sinner from God (Garcia, p. 7), but the idea of distance is relative not absolute, and it carries no connotation of the death of the spiritual life as described by Thomas. Hence a neglect of the specifically theological aspects of Thomas’s thought leads Garcia to understate the radical harm done by sin and the significance of sin (and grace) in the Christian life. This is an important issue not simply for the interpretation of Thomas but for the understanding of sin in itself and in relation to human suffering.

In the second half of the paper there is an interesting discussion of the importance of the category of sin for understanding health and public policy decisions (Garcia, p. 17), and in his conclusion, Garcia asserts that ‘it is at our peril that we delude ourselves into believing that we can wish sin away’ (Garcia, p. 24). Nevertheless, there is little grounding in the first section of the paper for this important theme. Rather, the weight of the first section is to show that sin is not a central concern of Catholic moral reflection. If this were indeed the case then it would be difficult to see why an acknowledgement of sin should be so important in relation to public health. If, on the other hand, Garcia is correct in identifying the acknowledgement of human sinfulness as significant for understanding public health policy, then it would seem that sin occupies a more significant place in the Christian understanding of the moral life than the first half of Garcia’s paper would suggest.

The redemption of suffering

Garcia asserts that ‘Jesus is reported to have explicitly repudiated [the view that] human suffering stems from our (or our parents’) sin’ (Garcia, p. 17). He gives no reference but probably has in mind the story of the man born blind (John 9.1-41). When Jesus is asked whether the man sinned or his parents, he replies, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.’ (John 9.3) Nevertheless, while this text has certainly encouraged Christians to repudiate too easy a relationship between sin and suffering, this goes beyond what can be inferred from this story alone. It may well be that ‘Jesus rejected the presuppositions of the view that our own (actual) sins always or usually cause our suffering’ (Garcia, p. 17), but all that can be inferred from this particular Gospel story is that in this one case the man’s blindness was not caused by sin but was allowed by God so that a miracle could be performed. The same explanation clearly does not apply to all those whose afflictions are not miraculously healed.

The book of Job also provides a justification for breaking the link between guilt and suffering, but again, as with the man born blind, Job could be regarded as an exception to the general rule. Certainly Job is exceptional in his uprightness and, according to the story, this is the reason why he suffers (Job 1.8).

Another Scriptural story which sheds light on this is in the Gospel according to Luke where it is reported that people came to Jesus telling him of terrible events that had befallen certain Galileans: Pilate had executed them and mixed their blood with the sacrifices. His hearers seem to have attributed these sufferings to the sins of those who suffered. Jesus’ reply is instructive: ‘Do you think that these Galileans were

worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’ (Luke 13.2-3)

One should note that Jesus does not deny that these people were sinners; he denies that they were worse sinners than other Galileans. Furthermore he warns his audience that they will ‘likewise perish’ if they do not repent. So, at some level Jesus does affirm the link between guilt and perishing, but it may be that the perishing he has in mind is not earthly suffering but the eternal suffering of Hell to which he refers in several places. (Matthew 5.22; 7.19; 13.50; 25.41; Mark 9.43; John 15.6)

What is important in the story of the man born blind and of the Galileans killed by Pilate is not that suffering cannot be due to sin, but that it is wrong to assume that someone who suffers is necessarily a worse sinner than anyone else. This act of judging someone else is itself a sin, the sin of self-righteousness. It is for this that comforters of Job are condemned by God (Job 42.7) and that the Pharisees who charge the blind man with sin are condemned by Jesus (John 9.41). This is important to bear in mind while affirming with Garcia the roots of much ill-health in human sin and ‘irresponsible conduct and habits’. The Philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe once remarked (1981:92), in a different context, that Christian teaching ‘ought absolutely not to be irrelevant to the unhappy and flattering to the lucky’. The danger of associating ill-health too easily with sin is it seems to blame those who suffer more and exonerate those who suffer less, while the latter may not be any holier than the former. They may simply be luckier.

Even where good health is due to hard work and virtuous living, the virtues of self-control this implies are not the highest (theological) virtues. Furthermore, they may even be the occasion of the sin of pride, through which love would be lost so that the self-discipline that remained would no longer be accounted a true virtue. This danger lies behind Augustine’s concern for those who have taken religious vows, ‘Give me one who makes profession of perpetual continence, and who is free from... all such faults and spots of conduct; for this one I fear pride, for this so great good I am in alarm from the swelling of arrogance’ (On holy virginity 34).

Augustine is concerned due to his theology of grace (later taken up by Thomas Aquinas) according to which salvation comes from God and must be received with humility. The sins against which every Christian struggles cause much of the suffering in the world, including the suffering of disease and disability. Nevertheless, the link between sin and suffering is not primarily individual, for many suffer as a result of the sins of others. Suffering is very often the result of structures of sin that are not easily eradicated from society. Thus we must carefully qualify the assertion of Garcia that ‘it is at our peril that we delude ourselves into believing that we can wish sin away by reconceiving its manifestations and effects as mere matters for improved ‘public health’ policies.’ (Garcia, p. 24) From a Christian perspective, the recognition of sin can only be fruitful if it is informed by the virtue of mercy and the hope of redemption. The reality of sin, which must be taken into account in working for all aspects of the common good, including public health, will include the self-righteousness of the strong (and the lucky) as well as the self-indulgence of the weak. A danger of relating sin and suffering without first giving an account of grace, is that virtue is conflated with good habits, and those who suffer from poor education and dehumanising circumstances are too easily blamed for their ills.

An unhappy separation

The two halves of Garcia's paper are oddly isolated from one another. The first half utilises Thomas Aquinas to provide a synthesis of natural law and virtue theory, but contains no discussion of grace and little discussion of sin. The second half begins with a discussion of sin and suffering but contains no reference to Thomas and seems to have little connection with the preceding section. Rather, it seems to begin afresh. It does not refer back to the philosophical discussion in the first half of the paper, but instead makes extensive use of the work of John Paul II, in particular Salvifici Doloris.

This is very difficult material and it is hard to reconcile some of the pope's statements, for example his assertion that suffering is due to evil, 'which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good' (1984:7, quoted by Garcia p. 13) is in tension with his claim later in Salvifici Doloris that suffering 'is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence' (1984:24, not quoted by Garcia). A relative lack of structure in Garcia's discussion, in addition to a certain reticence in commentary, does not help the reader to resolve these points of tension or to engage more deeply with the thought of John Paul II in this area. In relation to Salvifici Doloris it is better to go directly to the original than to struggle unnecessarily with Garcia's reworking.

As it stands Garcia's paper refers to Thomas Aquinas eighteen times in the philosophical first part but not at all in the theological second part. This creates an unhappy division between philosophy and theology of a sort that Thomas himself would not have recognised. It generates a portrayal of Thomas that is too philosophical and a theological discussion that does not benefit from the clarity Thomas would bring. More light could have been shed on this subject by turning to writers such as Gerald Vann who, in The Divine Pity, develops an insight of Thomas on the relationship of mercy and counsel. 'The gift of counsel is concerned with the choice of means to the desired end... Pain is an effect of evil; it can also be a means of good; but if you make it not a means but an end you deny the nature of God, and blaspheme.' (Vann 1946:117-118) Vann is conscious of the real tension that exists here and seeks to explore it within the theological framework provided by Thomas Aquinas. If Garcia had followed others such as Vann or McCabe, and had turned to Thomas for a theological account of the meaning of suffering, it would have provided a strong link between the two halves of his paper. This would have required an integration of philosophical and theological thinking of a kind that is by no means easy to achieve. Nevertheless, to address such deep and perennial questions, it is precisely such an integrated Christian approach that is needed.

Bibliography

Anscombe, G.E.M. (1981). Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Vol. III Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Bebbington, E. (1986). The Maker's Instructions: Six Bible Studies on the Ten Commandments The British & Foreign Bible Society.

Beauchamp, T. and J. Childress (1983, 1989, 1994, 2001). Principles of Biomedical Ethics. Various editions. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benedict XVI, Pope. (2005). Let God's Light Shine Forth: the Spiritual Vision of Pope Benedict XVI. Edited by Robert Moynihan. New York: Doubleday.

Cessario, R. (1989). 'The Meaning of Virtue in Catholic Moral Life: Its Significance for Human Life Issues' in The Thomist 53 (1989): 173-96.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (c.1994). Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Davies, B. (1985). Thinking About God London: Geoffrey Chapman.

Double, D. (1994). Follow the maker's Instructions New Wine Ministries.

Hauerwas, S. (1990). Naming the Silences: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

John Paul II (1984). Salvifici Doloris (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering) London: CTS.

Johnson, S.K. (1998). The Maker's Instructions: Helping Children Explore the Ten Commandments Christian Focus publications.

Jones, D. (1999). 'The Encounter with Suffering in the Practice of Medicine in the Light of Christian Revelation' in L Gormally (ed.) Issues for a Catholic Bioethic London: The Linacre Centre, pp. 159-172.

McCabe, H. (2005). God Matters London: Continuum.

Mouw, R.J. (1998). 'Religion and morality' in E. Craig (Ed.) Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy London: Routledge. Retrieved January 11, 2006, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/K081SECT1>.

Pellegrino, E.D., Thomasma, D.C. (1993). The Virtues in Medical Practice Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pellegrino, E.D (1985). 'The Virtuous Physician, and the Ethics of Medicine' in E. Shelp (ed.) Virtue and Medicine The Hague: D. Reidel Publishing Company, pp. 237-255.

Pinckaers, S. (1995). The Sources of Christian Ethics (translated by MT Noble) Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Vann, G. (1946). The Divine Pity: A study in the social implications of the Beatitudes London: Sheed & Ward.

¹ Garcia, p.3 quoting Augustine Contra Faustum 22, Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae (henceforth S.T.) 1a-2ae, q. 71, art. 6, Catechism of the Catholic Church para. 1850.

² Whereas Garcia asserts that 'St Paul reminded us that charity is the greatest virtue' (Garcia p. 4), the conceiving of charity as a virtue, in the sense which Garcia gives that term, relies on a later tradition, on Augustine to some extent, but more particularly on Thomas Aquinas

³ Garcia, p.5 drawing on S.T. 1a-2ae, qq. 90-97.

⁴ Plato Euthyphro 11b; see Mouw 1998.

⁵ Garcia, p. 6, though it is noticeable that in the footnote, Garcia defends this assertion not with any reference to the works of Thomas but with a reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

⁶ For criticism of this conception see e.g. Davies 1985:151-154, 212-216.

⁷ Garcia, p. 6. This is an analogy familiar from children's catechesis e.g. Johnson 1998; Bebbington 1986; Double 1994, and thus the criticisms that are levelled at it in this paper have implications for Christian education

⁸ For his treatment of virtue-theory Garcia draws upon the thought of Thomas Aquinas, though Garcia develops it in his own way. When discussing the definition of virtue, Garcia is correct to say that Thomas follows Peter Lombard's definition: 'a good quality of mind, by which one lives rightly and which no one uses badly, [and] that God alone works in man' (Garcia, note 6). However, while Garcia complains that some translations have 'maddeningly' translated the last clause as 'that God works within us without us', the Latin of this phrase (Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur) means precisely this. This is evident from S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 55, art. 4 where Thomas admits that this definition, as it stands, does not apply to naturally acquired virtues but only to infused virtues. It seems again that inaccuracy in Garcia's reading of Thomas (in this case, his preference for a less faithful translation) stems from a neglect of the categories of grace and infused virtue.

Garcia could also be charged with optimism in thinking that, apart from its Christian forms, virtue theory necessarily has an advantage over principlism of making it 'more difficult to justify' actions such as 'abortion and mercy-killings'. It should be remembered that Aristotle, esteemed as the father of virtue ethics, was in favour of both abortion and infanticide: 'As to the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live, but that on the ground of an excess in the number of children, if the established customs of the state forbid this (for in our state population has a limit), no child is to be exposed, but when couples have children in excess, let abortion be procured before sense and life have begun; what may or may not be lawfully done in these cases depends on the question of life and sensation' (Politics 7:16).

⁹ As Cessario (1989) does.

¹⁰ As I attempt to do in Jones (1999).

¹¹ Given that Garcia approaches the first part of this paper from a philosophical perspective, drawing heavily on the thought of Thomas Aquinas, it is surprising that he neglects any discussion of the nature of evil or badness, except indirectly in his quotation from John Paul II (Garcia p. 19). Thomas is well known for having developed Augustine's account of evil as a privation of good, and this account acts as a foundation for what he says about moral evil, vice, sin and suffering. See Augustine Confessions VII; City of God XI. 22; Thomas Aquinas S.T. 1a, qq. 48-49, McCabe (2005), Davies (1985), Jones (1999). For criticism of this kind of approach to theodicy see Hauerwas (1990).

¹² S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 71, art. 4; S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 88, art. 1. It is noteworthy that, while Garcia refers to 'actual sin', 'habitual sin' and 'original sin' (Garcia, p. 13) he makes no mention of 'mortal sin'.

¹³ S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 87, art. 3; for sin as a kind of death see also Augustine City of God XIII.1-15.

¹⁴ S.T. 1a-2ae, q. 109 art. 7; on repentance as raising the dead again see also, for example, Augustine Tractates on John's Gospel 49.