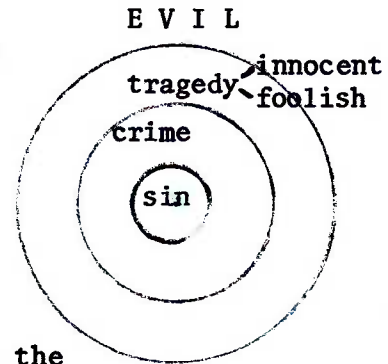


Right now (Aug/84), our lawcourts are agonizing over compensation questions vis-a-vis the personal and generative fallout from our military use of A.O. as herbicide in Vietnam. One Vietvet: "I'm to get a mere \$2,000--when I'm to die within 2 years, and have 5 severely defective children?" What would YOU do if you were on one of these juries?

This thinksheet says (1) everybody's a theologian on the problem of evil-categorizing, and (2) everybody's responsible for intelligent-compassionate action vis-a-vis this problem. (Schopenhauer was sour but not insensitive: "Compassion is the basis of all morality.")

...Let's handle first the \$ question. In that I'm taking LIMITS with increasing seriousness, I'm increasingly "NEO-liberal," which is a species of "chastened liberal." The \$ pie is too small for all the deserving victims of A.O. to get the size slice they deserve/need: the U.S. Treasury is getting larger and, in light of all the legitimate demands, looking smaller--so triage-decisions are becoming more severe both (1) because of objective factors of wealth and (2) because of the subjective factor of Americans' rising litigiousness.



SIN is a church-concept, exclusively so ("church" meaning a religious society committed to learning, celebrating, and promoting the biblical way of seeing and living in the world--which is true equally of synagogues). Thank God, our U.S.A. forbids the government to make and execute laws on the basis of "sin": the government can't get me, or even get to me, by telling me I'm in trouble with God. Yes, sin means a particular kind of being in trouble with God--viz., consciously or even unconsciously being deviant from what God expects, viz., conformity to the divine will, which derives from the divine nature (character). Cheap religion preaches (Chas.Colson) "recruitment instead of repentance." All persons/institutions are sinners: church stands to itself and to world in the accusative mode but with the good news that sin need not win. I judge "Vietnam" a sin from the start, so of course Agent Orange was sinful, and we are being "punished" for it: the punishment-idea is an essential correlative of "sin," in the paradigm that puts "righteousness" and "reward" in tandem, and both in tandem with "promise" and "threat" as a tandem pair. Much theology is squishy on this, falsely imagining that one can be faithful to the paradigm while eliminating its negatives (viz., "threat," "punishment," and even "sin"). Those of us who insist on the integrity of the paradigm are called "judgmental," "moralistic," "legalistic," brickbats that give me pause but do not deter me.

CRIME is, by the Am. style of statecraft/churchcraft, as much the exclusive province of the lawcourt as "sin" is of the church/synagogue. The court's dynamic is the jurisprudential adjustment, casuistically (i.e., in the particular "case"), to (1) justice as goal and (2) the codices, criminal and civil (i.e., the body of laws and legal precedents). Judge and jury cannot, should not, however, eliminate all considerations of "sin" and "tragedy": a tricorn hat, with the front and dominant corner labeled "crime."

TRADEGY is the slipperiest of the three concepts. "Vietnam" was, metaphorically, a "crime against humanity" if the U.N.-and-parallel documents are set aside: if not set aside, "Vietnam" was codically, actually, a "crime against humanity." But it was also a tragic miscalculation of the effect our Gulf-of-Tonkin gunboat diplomacy would have in the psyche of Ho; and every subsequent decision, till our decision to get out, compounded and deepened the tragedy. The whole situation was tough luck (=tragedy) for everybody. Foolish tragedy...The other kind of tragedy is innocent. E.g., the innocence of the Agent-Orange-defective children, or the thalidomide babies before them. Or most cancers? Many Third-World problems should be viewed from the advantage-points of these two kinds of tragedy, social-change rhetoricians to the contrary notwithstanding.