THE PROBLEM-SOLVING POWER OF INTERPERSONALISM

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What makes things the way they ought to be and what helps things improve to even better levels is also what corrects what is not the way it should be. The characteristics of interpersonalism give it a problem-solving power for personal problems. Inasmuch as interpersonalism has the full range of characteristics existent in persons and associations between persons, it has the potential for solving all the problems that persons in relationship can have.

Interpersonalism allows for (1) the <u>objective-subjective variable</u>. In so doing, it can incorporate elements like intentionality, sincerity, invincible ignorance. It also allows for (2) <u>degree</u> because it builds on reciprocal causation, which can change things by degrees. In contrast to law, nature, and logic, interpersonalism allows for (3) <u>unspecified possibilities</u> (from another person's will) to be honored.

Interpersonalism allows for (4) "compatible opposites," or <u>dialectic</u> because of the reciprocation pattern and the objective-subjective variable that interpersonalism has (cp. David Myer's article in *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, Sept. 1987, pp. 128-39). This concept, for example, is the larger truth that qualifies grace and works as separate elements that are false as absolutes but true in combination. They can be combined via people's attitude. There is a psychological combination of otherwise opposites.

Often a society's <u>legal</u> set-up allows, even requires, situations that are not morally right or experientially preferable; but interpersonal mechanisms can ameliorate those situations. Paul appeals to that fact in dealing with slavery in the Greco-Roman world. He advises his readers to obey their masters as they would Christ and to do it willingly, taking hold of the situation positively rather than passively or resistantly. He turns the situation around the other way, too, telling masters not to threaten their slaves (Ephesians **6**:5-9; Colossians **3**:22-25).

Sometimes we cannot do anything about the <u>physical</u> situation itself, but by showing concern, we can relieve the stress and distress that is present in the pain itself. *"Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two"* (Matthew **5**:41). The personal ability to transcend circumstance provides a way out of it.

Circumstances arise that put conflicting principles in juxtaposition. The variable between <u>objective and subjective</u> helps people work through those practical difficulties. There was a case where a man was simply living with a woman by whom he had children. He had not divorced his former wife and had no idea where she was. He became a Christian. How could he handle such a situation? This and other cases involved in marriage and remarriage can be solved by applying the subjective-objective variable. Objectively the remarried person is in a situation that God

never intended. Subjectively the persons involved can affirm the ideals and values of Christ, can renounce and repent of those past acts that led them to the present circumstance, and commit themselves to live in the circumstance as if it were first marriage. That is the objective problem subjectively solved, and it partakes of the same contours of solution as salvation from past sin generally. (Here we are dealing with a present circumstance whose "solution" would be worse than the problem itself.) The past cannot be undone, but it can be removed subjectively by repentance on the part of the offender and forgiveness on the part of the offended so that it no longer affects present relationships. The present then proceeds as much as possible as if the past had not happened.

Law, nature, and ideas are timeless and spaceless. Not knowing about them is irrelevant to any error because of that ignorance. Intention on the subjective side does not account for anything. Interpersonalism can combine objective and subjective into an interacting whole between <u>inner and outer aspects</u> of a person. Science, law, and metaphysics do not do this. The added subjective component provides an additional basis for solving more problems that pertain to people.

The problem-solving power of interpersonalism comes from the "slippage" that is natural to it on both sides of it. Interpersonalism does not have a one-to-one relationship between one step and the next; that is, it is not deterministic. Slippage is created by (1) a breakdown in <u>communication</u> because of the limitation of human language; one person does not understand what the other person means. Slippage is also created by (2) a breakdown in <u>performance</u> because of human weaknesses; we do not do the good that we know to do; we do not even do the good we want to do.

The two breakdowns are remedied by "understanding" what it is like to be human. That understanding on the part of the first person means that repentance plus forgiveness can remedy what would otherwise destroy the relationship between persons 1 and 2. In the breakdown of communication, genuine ignorance is indicated by willingness to listen to explanation plus repentance when understanding comes. In the breakdown between knowledge and performance, repentance plus forgiveness occurs upon coming to our senses.

There is some difference in correction between the two types of failure. In the first instance, the first person may overlook honest mistakes before the other person realizes having made them. Then when the other person does notice the misunderstanding and consequent mis-action, the person repents and seeks to correct consequences; and forgiveness takes place even though overlooking had been occurring until further enlightenment had turned a situation of ignorant failure (that required nothing for it to be overlooked) to a situation of conscious error (that required repentance and restitution in order to be forgiven). When awareness comes, the

call for obedience comes with it. Consequently, the lack of changed characteristic behavior or the lack of correcting a past discrete error naturally changes the person from innocent to guilty.

The interpersonal character of Christianity accounts for the interesting phenomenon of positive commandment without necessarily having a corresponding prohibition or negation. Does an unbaptized believer do something wrong by partaking of communion, for example, a child raised in a Christian home? Since it is an interpersonal act, partaking does not equal sin nor is it illegal. We may say it is not appropriate or as appropriate, but intentionality and commitment may occur aside from the positive commandment for the formal act.