

## **Part One: Understanding Relationships**

### **Chapter 3: Points of View**

*The wider our horizons become, the wiser are our  
judgments and decisions.*

How often it happens that well-intentioned persons have different opinions on the same subject: no matter how much they argue and discuss the issue, they cannot come to an agreement. Many times we have heard someone say, "It's impossible! No matter how I explain it, you still don't understand me!" We tend to think that it only takes an explanation of our opinions for everyone to see clearly that we are right. However, as we have all seen so often, this does not work in relationships, either between persons or between nations. Rather than trying to demonstrate the correctness of our opinions--which is what we usually do--we really should try to discover what are our points of view.

We must not confuse "opinion" with "point of view." Each point of view generates opinions. These opinions are coherent within the perspective of the particular point of view. All opinions can be correct if they are consistent with the point of view that produces them. For example, let's imagine a group of people who get together to plan a trip and can't agree on where to go. Some want to go to the mountains; others would rather go swimming in a river; still others prefer a walk in the woods. Since each person wants the group to take a trip to the best place, each has given an opinion according to the way he or she evaluates places. But it is doubtful that they will arrive at an agreement, since at this level their opinions do not have anything in common. Everyone imagines that they agree because they all want to take a trip. But they really don't agree because each one understands the trip in his or her own way. If they realized that the problem is in the nature of their points of view, they might quickly come to understand one another. In this particular case, they could clarify the reason they are taking the trip in the first place. If the purpose is not to decide what the best place is, but rather to go somewhere together, no one will hesitate to give up a preference for the sake of having a common objective.

Every time we have to evaluate or decide something, we cannot avoid taking a point of view. Sometimes we are aware of this, but more often we are not. It is better to choose a point of view consciously, considering all the options we have. In the majority of cases we can choose from a whole range of viewpoints, from those which are strictly personal to those which are universal. For example, if I am a lawmaker, I can take any number of points of view: I can consider only my private interests; I can consider the interests of the group to which I belong; I can consider the interests of my nation or

those of all humankind. In practice, this implies that, before giving an opinion or adopting a resolution, I have to ask myself which point of view I will base my decision on. Even though at times it seems that what we think and do does not have much relationship to any one else, we all influence and are influenced by one another. The human race receives the consequences of what each of us does and decides. For this reason we must not forget others when they have to make decisions.

Undoubtedly, this way of thinking will force us to give up some of our preferences. We will move from a limited point of view to a more expansive one, and we will begin to see the whole of which each of us is only a little part.

The more we know, the broader the vision is with which we contemplate the world and life. Moreover, the wider our horizons become, the wiser are our judgments and decisions. When the legislator makes laws, he thinks of the needs and the good of his constituents. The better he knows history, the better he knows how to correct past errors. The better he knows the present, the better he knows how to prevent future ills.

Every time we have to make basic, far-reaching decisions, we must look at the whole, at the totality. Once a decision is made, we have to concentrate on the realization of the chosen objective.

The art of living consists in limiting oneself without losing scope; concentrating without ceasing to see the whole; viewing the whole without failing to give importance to details.

In certain cases it is necessary to begin from a reduced point of view to be able, eventually, to acquire a broader one. For example, I might be concerned with solving the world's problems. This is, of course, magnificent.

But at the same time I need to limit my viewpoint and see whether in practice I am self-sufficient and really solve the problems I create for people around me. The good of the world must not be a daydream that prevents me from seeing what is actually within my power to improve.

In other words, a broad point of view is made concrete by realizing reduced points of view. When a student sees how illness produces suffering, he can ask himself what he can do to alleviate it. While his global vision of human suffering allows him to understand that he cannot eliminate it totally, if he reduces his point of view he realizes that he can indeed help some people. He can decide, for example, to study very hard and become a surgeon. Of course, when he is later performing a delicate operation, he cannot have a cosmic vision of humanity; he has to concentrate completely on what he is doing at that moment. When he is working at his specialty, the surgeon reduces his point of view; when he leaves the hospital, his world expands.

Whenever we adopt an opinion or make a decision, we are choosing a point of view. If we are able to see that point of view clearly we can better foresee the consequences of our decisions and our way of thinking. Moreover, to see that particular point of view clearly often allows us to discover other points of view which, because they are broader, show us better possibilities.