

To be an *understanding* (or, alternatively, thinking-speaking) animal is one thing; to be a *rational* animal, something else. To be an understanding animal is to have the use of abstract concepts or universals, such use being indicated behaviorally by the use of language and other kinds of symbols. To be a rational animal is to think and to act rationally, in accordance with the dictates of reason, theoretical as well as practical.

To be an understanding animal is to be, among other things, a moral (or ethical) animal, in the sense that one is either moral (or ethical) or immoral (or unethical), but cannot be simply neutral, i.e., nonmoral (or nonethical). This means that, if one is an understanding animal, one ever faces the twofold option: shall I or shall I not generalize regard for myself so as to take account of my entire personal future *and* shall I or shall I not generalize regard for others to include the entire future of the whole circle of others whose welfare depends upon my action?

To be a *rational* moral animal, then, is to act in accordance with the only ideal that can withstand all rational criticism: to value all other individuals on the same basis—for the same reasons and by the same criteria—as one values oneself, helping all others in proportion as one is in a preferred position to help them, and helping oneself only for the same reason. This ideal is not particularly hard to state, though many are the philosophers and theologians who have failed to state it. But the greater difficulty by far is in realizing it in one's own concrete case. Love of self is rational only as a special case of love of life, experience, and consciousness in general. But we remain human beings who perceive the world from our own animal perspective as its center and are therefore unable altogether to transcend selfishness.

Withal the moral (or ethical) will is the rational will, which is the only will appropriate to an understanding (or thinking-speaking) animal. In this sense, to love others as oneself is a command of reason, not just a gift or demand of revelation.