

The Great Commandment and the Harmony of Interests

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is the most appropriate attitude toward another person. In contrast to all kinds of collectivist and altruist attitudes, it does not require elevating another person over oneself and renouncing self-love, that is, treating oneself as a significant end in itself. On the other hand, in contrast to naive forms of individualism and egoism, it also does not require elevating oneself over another and treating oneself as the only or the most significant end in itself.

Instead, what it suggests is that treating others as equally significant ends in themselves is a necessary condition of genuinely treating oneself as an end in itself – that loving one’s neighbor as oneself is a necessary condition of achieving the deepest and fullest form of self-love, which is a manifestation of the deepest and fullest harmonization of one’s own and another’s personal potential. In addition, in contrast to all of the attitudes mentioned above, it is an attitude that is unambiguous in its ethical maximalism – that is, in its suggestion that it is moral perfection, not just decency or respect for individual rights, that is a necessary condition of achieving the fullness of personal development and psychological well-being.

In other words, it is not implausible to suggest that this 2000-year-old commandment, which is often thoughtlessly reduced to an idealistic slogan, indeed captures both the deepest foundation and the highest goal of all mature ethical reflection.