

Post scriptum

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Let me first say that Professor Reinders provides a thoroughly excellent analysis of *The New Golden Rule*. He correctly points to the essence of the argument as being very briefly as follows: societies cannot be built on one normative principle of the kind that drives many philosophical systems (e.g., liberty for liberalism); the essence of social life is that we must deal with partially incompatible normative claims and societal needs. Key among these is the tension between autonomy and order, none of which should be treated as trumping the other. We need a careful balance between the two. Public policy and societal change should push the opposite direction of an imbalance, thus campaign for more autonomy in contemporary China and more social order in the highly individualistic America of the 1980s. Above all, the more the social order is truly accepted, based on moral persuasion and not coercion, the more legitimate the regime. The tension between autonomy and order is reduced as we internalize our social obligations. (The tension can be reduced but not eliminated. There is always some room for coercive order, for instance when we must take drunk drivers off the road, however extensive our educational campaigns.) Moral order is promoted by moral education and continually fostered by the moral voices of the communities of which we are members. Moral commitments are not based on rational calculations of benefits and consequences, although these affect the extent to which we abide by our obligations. They result when we internalize values through non-rational processes such as our love for our parents and respect for educators and because we are keen to remain members in good standing of various communities. But in the end these commitments become part of ourselves; we come to see them as our choices.

I am especially grateful to Professor Reinders for noting the often overlooked difference of the sense of affirmation we have when we live up to our moral commitments as distinct from satisfactions that result when we serve our urges. Saving a child from rushing traffic, at a risk to oneself, generates a rather different sense than having a fine meal. His excellent quote “virtue is its own reward” says it perfectly. Also he correctly points to my emphasis that community can be not merely a source of some social constraints (a setting in which we are embedded,” which implies locked in, socially pressured), but also a source of human flourishing. I dare not write about Kant although during my studies with Martin Buber we often discussed him. Let me first point out to a subtle distinction in the English language between “duties” and “responsibilities.” Duties, like obligations, are largely imposed from the outside. Responsibilities we primarily feel we should be willing to do, because our internal considerations make us believe that assuming the task

involved is compelling. The moral order which I consider the basis of the good, communitarian society, is largely based on assumed responsibilities, not imposed duties. Also, I believe that I accurately suggest that for Kant duties are a matter one recognizes rationally. I hold that they combine a moral account with an affective commitment. Thus, to say that I have a duty to tell the truth is not merely something my mind leads me to hold, but something my heart compels me to do; if I lied, my feelings would be insulted, not just my reasoning. (Only, to me feelings is not the right word, affirmation is, but it still has an emotive content.)

Professor Reinders introduces the concept “akratic man” to show that I am a closet liberal, because I suggest that the authority that enforces our moral dispositions is internalized, is moved into the self. Indeed, if at the end of education, somewhere around the age of 18 to 21, the communitarian person would be guided by his own moral compass, he could be a liberal of sorts. However, the level of our moral commitments and their content never cease to be deeply affected by our communities. Hence, we never even approximate the very flattering but highly erroneous concept of the self that liberalism offers.

Finally I hope Professor Reinders will have a chance to bring to these pages what I consider the most challenging issue I tried to deal with in the last chapter of *The New Golden Rule*: a substantive basis for cross-cultural moral judgements, to move us beyond relativism, and the role of religion in such judgements.

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