6-1995

Rescue as Imperative for the Preservation of Integrity: A Study of Gentile Rescuers During the Holocaust and Their Motivations

Lynn M. Osborn
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commons, and the Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/3832

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee for all of their guidance and support. Shirley Bach, Joseph Ellin and Michael Pritchard all took time out of their busy schedules to provide ideas, sources, and constructive criticisms. Not only were they wonderful teachers and mentors, but they were also good friends.

Secondly, to all of my family and friends who continuously provided support and encouragement, I owe a debt of gratitude. This includes my mother and father, Linda and Jack Osborn, who never challenged my study of philosophy and accepted my choices; my sister, Lisa Kielbas, who always defended my decisions; my friend, Beth Barnes, who listened to my ideas and helped me organize them; and my boyfriend, Peter Pearce, whose pride and belief in me never failed.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to two boys who only blessed the earth for a short time but who will always be remembered and loved, Austin and Adam Kielbas. May you rest in peace.

Lynn M. Osborn
When Nazi policies dictated the gradual and continual reduction in the liberties and rights of those deemed undesirable, most did nothing. Most continued to do nothing when these policies were extended to include mass sterilization and extermination. In spite of this, there were a few who acted. They gave of their own meager resources of food, money, and space, to help those who needed it. They risked their very lives as well as the lives of their loved ones to protect and save fellow human beings from the Nazi reign of terror.

Research into rescuers and their motivations have shown primarily one common attribute among them--all rescuers saw rescue behavior as their duty. As such, they saw no alternative but to help in order to preserve their personal integrity and remain true to themselves.

Contrary to what some insist, I will argue that this self-interested aspect of the rescue behavior does not detract from its value or withdraw its altruistic merit, but only adds to and deepens it. This is because the usually conflicting motives of self and others were united, even identical, in the minds of rescuers, a fact which allowed them to act wholeheartedly altruistically--to really love their neighbor as themselves.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. BACKGROUND ON NAZI GERMANY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Climate After World War I</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitler's Rise and Ideology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stages of Anti-Semitic Measures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative and Legal Measures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of These Policies</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of Policies to Conquered Nations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESCUE IN THIS CONTEXT</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types and Extents of Rescue Behavior</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Factors</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardships and Punishments for Rescue Behavior</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarity of Rescue Behavior</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. EXPLANATIONS FOR RESCUE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monetary or Material Rewards</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Retribution From Allied Nations</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal or Group Approval</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Impetus</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliations</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to Nazism</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance or Friendship With Victim</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of These Explanations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESCUERS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize Need for Rescue Behavior</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Characteristics</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable of Effecting Change</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Behavior as Spontaneous or Natural</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long History of Helping Behavior</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Activities as Unremarkable</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Concern for Others</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Rescue</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Gratification or Satisfaction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents---Continued

CHAPTER

Analysis of These Factors .......................................................... 35

VI. SELF-INTEREST AS EXPLANATION FOR RESCUE ....................... 37

Traditional Concept of Self-Interest ........................................... 37

Self-Interest as Self-Affirmation ................................................ 38

Explained in Terms of Personal Morality .................................. 40

Positive Rather Than Negative Value ....................................... 41

Evidence From Rescuers .......................................................... 43

Implications for Altruism ......................................................... 44

Does Not Negate Possibility of Altruism ................................... 44

Enhances or Deepens Notion of Altruism ................................. 45

VII. CONCLUSION ........................................................................ 47

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................... 49
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Nazi policies dictated the gradual and continual reduction in the liberties and rights of those deemed undesirable, most did nothing. Most continued to do nothing when these policies were extended to include mass sterilization and extermination. However, there were a few who refused to follow the Nazi dictates and attempted to help those in need. They gave of their own meager resources of space, money, and food to help those who were denied access. They risked their very lives as well as the lives of their loved ones to save fellow human beings from the Nazi reign of terror.

Traditional explanations for the rescuers' behavior fail to fully explain why these people did what they did, why they rescued Jews while so many others sat idly by. These explanations, which include expectation of material reward, societal or group approval, social class, political ideals, and ties of friendship, have been repeatedly shown to be wholly inadequate explanations for the behavior of rescuers. In fact, research into the motivations of rescuers provide completely dissimilar accounts that rely primarily on one common thread among the rescuers—all thought it was their duty to rescue. As such, they saw no other option but to help in order to maintain their personal integrity and remain true to themselves. Furthermore, this duty was so integral to their personal identities that their behavior was often spontaneous and unplanned; there was no conscious deliberation.
about either the benefits or the costs of extending their help before it was offered.

Some might argue that this motivation is selfish. Rather than acting solely for the needs of others, they contend, these rescuers were motivated by the desire to satisfy their own needs and support their sense of integrity. Not only could this be interpreted as selfish, but it also detracts from any positive value the actions otherwise may have had.

Contrary to this, I will argue that behavior is not so easily compartmentalized into two separate and distinct categories of solely for the sake of self and solely for the sake of others. Rather, there may be a third category of motivation, a category that uniquely combines and unites the two motivating forces into one inseparable force. In this way, the interests of the self and the interests of the other become identical--there can be no differentiation between them. The self-interested aspect of rescue behavior motivated by this type of inseparable force is very different from other selfish motivations. These purely selfish motives rely solely upon the needs of the self and consider others only as instrumental means to these ends, whereas the self-interested motivation of affirming one's integrity relies equally and identically on one's own needs as well as the interests and needs of others.

Furthermore, I will attempt to prove that this self-affirming aspect of rescue behavior does not detract from its value or deprive it of its altruistic status, but, rather, adds to and deepens the level of altruism present. The rescuers' success in loving their neighbor truly as they did themselves allowed them to avoid regret for their sacrifice on the one hand, and self-congratulation and pride for their efforts on the other. They
succeeded in integrating and satisfying both needs without conflict or dissension and, for this, they should be awarded even greater praise for their behavior.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND ON NAZI GERMANY

Political Climate After World War I

Germany's defeat in World War I challenged its citizens faith and pride in their country. The citizens had believed their country was indestructible, superior to others, but their defeat proved otherwise. Coupled with the humiliating loss, the country was subject to repercussions and reparations for the war as determined by the Treaty of Versailles. These repercussions not only did not allow the country to forget their destruction and shame, but also subjected them to supervision by Allied forces and regulation of their military operations and conquests. For example, Germany was required by the Treaty to abolish its compulsory military service, to limit the number of its troops and naval ships, and to stop all importation, exportation, and nearly all production of war materials. Furthermore, the territory it gained during the war was returned to its previous owners.

Along with this, while the country was suffering from the economic hardships of depression, it had been ordered to make significant financial reparations for damages incurred by the Allied powers during the war. These financial reparations included money

---

1 Fogelman, p. 21-38; Gushee, p. 19-44; Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 3-23.
as well as ships, trains, livestock, and valuable natural resources. Coupled with the costs of rebuilding and repairing the country, these expenditures led to precarious financial times for Germany.

Hitler's Rise and Ideology

Amid this humiliation and desperation, a man named Adolf Hitler came to power. His extraordinary power to speak and captivate a crowd led many to believe in his promises concerning the resurrection of the great state of Germany. He preached of the superiority of the German peoples and vowed to repair their collective psyche by leading Germany into future victory. Hitler and his promises and visions were embraced by the German people. They longed for the triumph of Germany and accepted his understanding of and solutions for the ills of German society. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was named Chancellor and was thus awarded the opportunity to make his promises come true.

Included in Hitler's plan for conquest were decidedly anti-Semitic positions. He felt that Germany's inferior position was the result of the degradation of the society by the inclusion of inferior peoples, peoples which included the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the physically and/or mentally handicapped. The Aryan race was touted as superior to all others, and Hitler's plan to rebuild the great Germany and lead it into victory thus included the cleansing of the German population by the eradication of those contaminating elements.

---

2 Henry, p. 308
Despite the fact that these intolerant and prejudicial sentiments were a part of Hitler's plan as well as a standard and long-standing part of the Nazi platform, they were at first peripheral and marginal to his support from the citizenry. In time, however, their prominence in public policy grew until they prevailed over all other concerns.

Stages of Anti-Semitic Measures

Initially, the focus and importance of anti-Semitic measures as a part of the rejuvenation of Germany was slight. Gradually, however, they grew in importance as well as in degree. At each stage, the measures were met with the support and cooperation of the majority of the country; many different segments of society awarded their approval and accepted the incremental measures as a necessary component of future success. Those who did resist the anti-Semitic measures were overcome and quieted.

Propaganda

The first stage of measures directed against the Jewish population consisted of an increasingly intense propaganda campaign. The German government under Hitler played upon the already existent anti-Semitism and blamed Jews for a great number of societal ills. For example, Jews were blamed for the economic hardships by being portrayed as money and power hungry peoples who dominated and exploited both the press and the

---

4 Fogelman, p. 176; Marion Pritchard, *It Came to Pass...*, p. 48.
banking industry to their own advantage, completely disregarding the interests of other German citizens or the country as a whole.

In addition, the great accomplishments of Jewish people were down-played, ignored, and even destroyed. Literature, music, even scientific findings formerly praised as great accomplishments were degraded and even outlawed for use.

The picture given to the Germans of the Jewish peoples as such a horrible element of society was then coupled with the idea that the mingling and socializing of the two groups was harmful and should be avoided at all costs. It was even asserted that the very existence of the German state depended upon the expulsion of all of Jews from within its borders.

Administrative and Legal Measures

When the propaganda campaign had succeeded in convincing the population of the harmful effects the Jews had upon society, attendant administrative and legal measures were sought to prevent them. To prevent supposed harms upon the economic life of the country, for example, Jews were forced out of the job market and the vacant positions were awarded to Germans. The strategy that was implemented to bring about such vacancies and economic advantages to Germans included boycotting Jewish establishments, from medical and legal practices to commercial businesses, as well as the expulsion of all Jewish academics including teachers and professors in addition to

---

5 Fogelman, p. 4-5, 24-25.
students. Also, control of successful Jewish businesses was obtained by the government and given to non-Jews for a much-reduced price, the proceeds of which went directly to the government, not to the former Jewish owners.

Measures were also taken to deny Jews of their citizenship rights. The Nuremburg Laws which were enacted in September of 1935 denied citizenship to all Jews, regardless of how long a person or a family might have been a citizen. All Jews were relegated to the status of aliens. Consequently, Jews were also stripped of all voting privileges as well as of all rights to hold public office, whether it be civil service or the state health service.

Control over the private lives of Jews was also taken by the German government. Regulations were passed that forced all Jews to wear identifying gold stars and prohibited them from appearing at public recreational sites or business, except perhaps during certain designated hours. Orders were issued for all Jews to turn over their property for community purposes. Furthermore, the marital and sexual practices of Jews were subject to jurisdiction as well. A ban of all marriages or non-marital sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews was issued.

Eventually, all Jews were ordered by official proclamation to relocate their residence into certain predetermined ghettos. The ghettos were enclosed by walls or fences and attempts were made to assure total segregation of the Jewish population within from the German population outside its walls.

---

The ghettos turned out to be only a temporary solution to the problem of segregating the Jewish population from the others. Eventually, the ghettos were liquidated and all inhabitants were sent to concentration camps. Such camps were characterized by their lack of living supplies including food, water, shelter, clothing, and bathing and bathroom facilities. Furthermore, inmates were subjected to forced labor and harsh treatment as well as, in some cases, various medical and scientific experimentation.

Finally, attempts were made to eradicate the entire Jewish population. People were sent to extermination camps to await their demise, which was orchestrated as a part of a highly organized and efficient program.

Ultimately, there were over 400 administrative and legal measures taken against the Jews. For the most part, the measures succeeded in driving the Jewish population out of German professions, government, culture, public life, and country, not to mention depriving them of their lives.

**Violence**

These different stages of treatment of the Jews were accompanied by varying degrees and types of violence. At first, violence directed at Jews was random and unplanned, merely the result of skirmishes in the street, but gradually it became an established and even planned aspect of their treatment. Violence thus ranged from arbitrary and indiscriminate fighting and beating, to burning of Jewish books, homes, and synagogues, to planned raids of harassment and attack. In the end, violent treatment of
Jews that included torture and death was not only common, but familiar and accepted as well.

Acceptance of These Policies

It has been argued that the expansion of the anti-Semitic policies in these small doses led to the easy acceptance of the much broader anti-Semitic policies by German society. The measures were administered in small enough doses to not elicit much opposition in the beginning. Subsequent measures were viewed as meager, even insignificant expansions of old and established behaviors and policies and, as such, did not seem to warrant resistance either. Each step in the entire process was seen as a logical and consistent addition to the last and was therefore not challenged. Had the adoption of the policies been more dramatic, they may have elicited more opposition from society.

Another factor in the easy acceptance of these policies involves the communities' ignorance of the true events. In an effort to assuage resistance to their activities, the Nazis suppressed the information about them as much as possible. Instead, they offered more humane and merciful accounts of their behavior and went to great lengths to make these explanations seem plausible. For instance, Jews were told to pack their belongings to bring with them as they were deported to the concentration camps and, once there, were forced to write letters to others at home, telling of their tolerable treatment and living conditions. Thus, those at home were led to believe that everything was all right; they did not know that the luggage brought to the camps was confiscated for use by the
Nazis or that the actual conditions were deplorable. Of course, not all were fooled by such measures, but at least some may have been deceived and were thus truly unaware of the heinous inhumane acts.

Expansion of Policies to Conquered Nations

The measures as thus described were typical of Germany. However, as Germany engaged in war and expanded its influence and control into neighboring countries, the policies and treatment of Jews were extended to include their populations as well. Although the exact happenings and control over a particular area varied extremely from place to place, the basic attitude towards and treatment of the Jewish population remained largely the same.

---

7 Tec, *When Light Pierced...*, p. 6
CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESCUE IN THIS CONTEXT

Types and Extents of Rescue Behavior

There were many different types of helping behavior that necessarily varied as the situation and need changed. Thus, during the initial stage of the Nazi campaign against the Jews and other "undesirables" that was characterized by a reduction in both rights and job opportunities, help included such things as aid in securing adequate food, providing child care, and help in managing the household while adults that were forced out of work sought new employment. In addition, help was given in securing employment opportunities and by providing fair business dealings that were not required or even permitted by law. This last category of help included such things as offering a fair price for businesses that were seized by the state and sold for much less than they were worth, and operating and owning businesses in name only, thus allowing the profits to be given to the rightful owner.

During the next stage of the Nazi campaign wherein Jews were required to relocate to ghettos, help was needed and provided by sending family treasures abroad, offering a fair price for them, or even offering to keep them for the family until they could

---

return to reclaim them after the war. Aid was also given to make ghetto life more comfortable and less dangerous; warnings of upcoming raids and other valuable information were given, medicine was brought to the sick, and communication was facilitated with relatives in other areas and cities. Food and employment were also important forms of aid during this time.

Once it was believed that the fate of the Jews was precarious, aid was provided in an attempt to remove them from danger. Attempts were made to smuggle people out of the country into safer areas; if these attempts failed or were found impossible, attempts were made either to hide their true identity or to hide their entire physical presence. To succeed in these attempts, false government and church documents had to be acquired, networks of Gentile "relatives" had to be established, and training in language, mannerisms, and religion had to be provided. Furthermore, safe hiding places had to be found or built and additional food had to be obtained, all without the suspicion of neighbors, shopkeepers, and government officials.

Situational Factors

To some extent, the ability to engage in successful rescue behavior was determined by various situational factors that were beyond an individual person's control. For example, the mere awareness of the happenings and the consequent need for help may

---

have been difficult. The Nazis explained what was being done to the Jews and others deemed undesirable in very different terms than what was really occurring; the atrocities being committed were sometimes disguised and misrepresented to the public at large so as to not evoke outrage or repercussions.\(^3\) One example of this type of deception by the Nazis concerns the deportation of the Jewish population into concentration, labor, and death camps. Rather than revealing the true nature of these camps, the public was merely told that the Jews were being "relocated" into different areas in the east. This type of distortion of the truth may have led individuals to underestimate the existence or extent of harm being imposed.

Another situational factor that may have affected the decision to engage in rescue activity was the extent to which the Nazi forces controlled a specific area and the local government and daily life within this area. Control over these different facets of life varied greatly from place to place and, thus, so did the need for help as well as the difficulty in extending it. The tighter the control over a given area, the less of a chance there was to engage in successful aid.

A third factor that may have affected rescue behavior was the extent to which practical resources were available to the potential rescuer. To be successful at helping Jews, one had to have the resources of food, money, and space, as well as certain skills including carpentry or forging abilities. These resources were scarce and in high demand. Persons lacking in them, therefore, were lacking in their ability to help.

\(^3\) See Chapter II, p. 10-11.
The risks involved in engaging in rescue activities constitute the final group of situational factors that may have influenced rescue behavior. These risks included such considerations as the geographical location of the rescuer, the distance from neighbors, the level of hostility the neighbors displayed towards helping Jews, and whether or not young children who were unable to keep secrets were in the helping household. Each of these and similar factors would determine the success of the aid and, thus, the decision of whether or not to extend it.

Again, these situational factors affected the success of the assistance given to those in need. Although the factors may have also affected the decision of whether or not to help, they did not negate the possibility of help altogether. Rather, they merely determined which types of help were offered in which particular situation. In other words, the situational factors did not dissuade the aid, but merely affected the decision of which type or kind of aid would be most successful and, thus, should be undertaken.

Hardships and Punishments for Rescue Behavior

The repercussions for this rescue behavior were considerable. Resources during the war were scarce and families often had to make due with considerably less than they were used to. To engage in helping others, however, these already meager resources had

\footnote{Fogelman, p. 59; Henry, p. 309; Monroe, p. 114; Oliner, The Unsung Heroes..., p. 130; Marion Pritchard, It Came to Pass..., p. 100; Smolenska, p. 213; Tec, Dry Tears, p. 1; Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 8.}
to be stretched even further. Resources including space, food, and money were in great demand and were essential to those in greatest need, those deemed undesirable who were left to fend for themselves with virtually nothing. Those who chose to help them gave of their own supplies in order to do so.

In addition to these practical hardships, the punishment for aid given to undesirables was severe. Those who helped and were discovered were subjected to imprisonment, forced labor, even murder, not only for themselves, but also for their closest relatives and loved ones.

Furthermore, inducements were made to lure others to reveal these illegal actions on the part of others. Monetary reward as well as praise and esteem were granted to those who came forward and informed on their neighbors and friends for their work in helping the undesirables.

Rarity of Rescue Behavior

For these reasons, it can be easily understood why rescue behavior was relatively rare. Some simply bought into the Nazi ideology and saw it as a way to redeem Germany for her losses and restore it to its glory, while others were simply afraid to help for fear of the abundant dangers and repercussions. Still others were blind to the need for

5 Henry, p. 315; Tec, *When Light Pierced...*, p. 5.

6 Estimates of the total number of people who engaged in rescue activities range from 50,000 to one million. Even the highest estimate of rescuers only constitutes less than one half of one percent of the total population under Nazi occupation (Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, p. 2).
help altogether. The interesting question is what made those who *did* help choose this path rather than merely fall into line with the others.
CHAPTER IV

EXPLANATIONS FOR RESCUE

There have been many attempts in the past to explain rescuers' behavior. Each of the major explanatory theories will be discussed below in an attempt to see if any can adequately resolve the question of motivation.

Monetary or Material Reward

The first explanatory theory to be discussed postulates that rescuers were induced into their helping behavior by the promise or presentation of monetary or material reward. Such financial gains could be the result of monetary payments, the promise of valuables, or the rescued individual's promise to work in exchange for the help that was to be given. This type of explanatory theory places little value on the lives of those in need, but focuses primarily on the positive financial effect that could result for the helping individual for their behavior. Indeed, it is believed that this motivation was so strong an inducement to help that a failure to provide such compensation would result in an outright and total refusal to help and, furthermore, that once help was begun, it could easily be withdrawn if the compensation ran out or was deemed inadequate.

1 Fogelman, p. 18.

2 Monroe, p. 109; Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 87-98.
Although it was certainly true that some chose to help others for this reason and would not have done so without this reward, this was not true of a large percentage of those who participated in rescue. Rather, most rescuers helped without financial compensation and often provided help using their own funds and resources. Thus, most rescuers were not positively affected financially, but were financially burdened by their help. Indeed, this lack of material reward is a necessary condition in order to be awarded the title of Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem, a memorial to those who perished during World War II which also pays tribute to those who saved Jews during this period. Rescuers must meet certain strict criteria in order to be awarded this high honor, and any financial compensation they received for their efforts completely disqualifies them from consideration.

Avoid Retribution From Allied Nations

Others believe that helping behavior was the result of individuals attempting to absolve themselves of responsibility in the eyes of Allied nations. These people undertook helping or rescue activities only at the time they suspected or believed that the Allied nations were going to be victorious over the German state. They knew that these nations would take a dim view of those who allowed the exploitation and harm to Jews and other

---


4 Approximately 11,000 people have been recognized for their rescue activities, with more under consideration (Gushee, p. 8; Tec, *When Light Pierced...*, p. 3-4).

5 Huneke, p. 145; Monroe, p. 109.
"undesirables" to occur and would likely seek punishments for this inaction. To avoid this retribution, they began helping those in need.

This explanation of motivation implies that concern for others was not the primary consideration in extending help; rather, it appears to be worth little or no consideration. Instead, one who was motivated by this type of reasoning was simply acting out of fear and a desire to avoid punishment and gain the favor of the victors. Avoidance of retribution may have been the motivation for some people in deciding to undergo rescue activities, especially Nazi party members or officials near the conclusion of the war, but it clearly was not the case for most rescuers. Rather, most rescuers undertook helping activities early on in the war, when the German state could not be defeated and it looked as though they might succeed in their goal of ruling the continent. At this point, to engage in rescue activity with its attendant hardships and punishments solely or even primarily to avoid retribution would be ridiculous.

Societal or Group Approval

Others believe a major motivating force behind the rescuers' helping activity was the reward they would receive for doing so in the form of societal or group approval. Accordingly, people choose to help others not solely because they are in need or because they are valuable in and of themselves, but, rather, in order to obtain the support and

---

admiration of others around them. This support and admiration may be desired for its own sake as a way for the rescuer to feel good about themselves or to feel as though they are a part of the group, or it may be desired as a means to further ends that require either group backing or an absence of group opposition.

There are two major problems with this explanation for many of those who undertook rescue activities on behalf of Jews. To begin, rescue activity was not something that was greatly supported or endorsed by the greater community. Most saw it, rather, as something one should not undertake. In many areas, the level of anti-Semitism was high even before the war and was only exacerbated by Nazi propaganda and policies. Therefore, help for the Jews was not considered to be a good or valuable activity, but was in sharp distinction from the treatment they really "deserved."

Secondly, those who engaged in rescue activities were forced to keep their activities hidden in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from the repercussions that knowledge of such behavior would provoke. Indeed, it was not uncommon for persons living in the same household to be unaware of the others' rescue activity, even when such activity took place precisely within that home. Furthermore, rescue activities were usually concealed long after the war had ended and the specific activity had ceased because of the continued high levels of anti-Semitism that existed; these levels of prejudice were so high that in some cases, social ostracism and censure would result when knowledge of the activity was revealed, even years later.
Religious Impetus

Religious teaching has been touted by many as the major impetus for rescue behavior. According to this argument, religion demands that people extend their concern to others, especially persecuted others, as part of one's religious duty. Thus, in the case of those who rescued persecuted Jews, religious beliefs must have been a major impetus or catalyst.

This explanation for rescue behavior seems to be in direct opposition to the facts. Religion in support of rescue behavior or religion demanding rescue behavior seems to have been relatively rare. Indeed, instead of supporting this type of behavior, many religious organizations remained mute on the subject of involvement, neither endorsing or condemning, while others were adamantly opposed to such behavior and saw the Jews as deserving of their fate. One striking example of a church official remaining unmoved by the Nazi atrocities is the Catholic Pope Pius XII. To remain in Nazi favor, the Pope chose to remain silent; his silence, in turn, suggested tacit approval of Nazi policies and practices. Such opposition may seem contradictory to standard religious doctrines, but those religious persons who believed that helping Jews was wrong often found religious reasons for their viewpoint. Typically, these reasons were grounded in the belief that


8 In each of the various studies, less than one third of the rescuers cited religion as one of their motivations to engage in rescue behavior; other motivations were given more significance to the ultimate decision of whether or not to help (Gushee, p. 13; Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 145).
Jews were the "killers of Christ," and therefore as members of a group that not only did not accept him as the messiah but were also responsible for his death, they deserved persecution.

For these reasons, it would appear as though religion certainly was not indicative of the motivations of the majority of rescuers. At best, religious beliefs may have motivated some specific individuals to act.

Social Class

Some have postulated that social class may be an important predictor in determining who engages in rescue activity. It is believed that those who are members of the working or lower classes showed a greater propensity to helping behavior than did people from other social classes. This may be so because people in these lower classes could more easily identify with and understand the plight of the Jews, since they too are poor and socially deprived. This common experience, it is thus argued, makes members of the lower classes more sympathetic and likely to engage in rescue activities.

This explanation or predictive factor is still not sufficient in explaining rescue activities. Analysis of the class distinctions among rescuers proves that no one social group or class was significantly more likely than another to help. Instead, rescuers came from all social classes, typically in close proportion to their numbers in the overall population.

---

Political Affiliations\textsuperscript{10}

Various political affiliations have also been brought up in an attempt to predict who would take part in rescue endeavors. It is believed that certain political ideals may be telling in what type of person the rescuer must be. Such political ideals are commonly thought to include leftist or liberal groups that took an active and alert interest in daily political life. Typically, such groups did not support the anti-Semitic measures that were condoned by their more extreme conservative rivals.

While this may be true, such leftist political leanings did not necessarily equate to positive helping behavior towards Jews. Such behavior as supported by political groups was often varied and unpredictable, more the result of particular group leaders than of a specific political ideology. Indeed, most rescuers expressed no definite political leanings or preferences when questioned, and their lack of direct political involvement and conviction was reiterated by those they helped and rescued.

Resistance to Nazism\textsuperscript{11}

Some believe that a major impetus to engaging in helping or rescue activity was simply the desire some had to act in resistance to the Nazi regime and occupying forces. Thus, it is believed that the Nazi government was so abhorred and detested for its


\textsuperscript{11} Monroe, p. 117; Oliner, The Unsung Heroes..., p. 135.
interference in and subjugation of the conquered nation that its inhabitants set out to do almost anything they could to protest the Nazi rule. The overriding or most important consideration in engaging in helping behavior was thus not any concern for the welfare of others, but was simply a desire to defy and resist their conquerors.

Again, while this may have been a motivating consideration for some, it clearly was not a significant motivating force among the wider rescuer population. In fact, those rescuers who expressed this type of anti-Nazi sentiment often were quick to note that while this was felt, it was not the most important or even a significant factor in the decision to help. Sympathy and concern for those in need was the motivation for aid, and the fact that the aid was in opposition to Nazi rule was secondary.

Acquaintance or Friendship With Victim

One of the most widely believed motivations for rescue behavior is an established acquaintance or friendship with the victim in need. Knowing people and being able to relate to them on an individual basis led potential rescuers to disregard the societal prejudices against them and see them, rather, as individuals who are in need and worthy of assistance.

Again, while there is evidence to support the fact that an established friendship may have motivated some individuals to help, there is additional evidence to support the

---

12 Gushee, p. 105-107; Monroe, p. 116; Marion Pritchard, It Came to Pass..., p. 97; Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 129-136, 153-154, 187-188.
fact that friendship per se was not a significant motivating factor overall. Rather, rescuers for the most part helped strangers. Indeed, stories of Jews turning to their Gentile friends for help in their time of need, only to be rejected and hurt, are abundant. Some who refused help were not true friends, and others were simply afraid to take such extreme risks, even for the sake of close and dear friends.

Status of These Explanations

Each of these explanations as thus far discussed appears to be insufficient in determining or predicting the most likely individuals to engage in rescue behavior and activities. While they may have had an effect on individuals and their particular decision to participate in rescue, none of the factors mentioned could, on its own, be used to indicate who would and who would not take part in these activities or indicate their motivations for doing so.
CHAPTER V

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESCUERS

The traditional explanations for rescue behavior on the part of Gentiles during the Holocaust have been shown to be insufficient in determining or predicting who would become rescuers and for what reasons they would do so. A more fruitful exercise may be to examine those characteristics found in the majority of, if not all, rescuers. These common characteristics may provide insights into new and different explanations for rescue behavior in particular or, more generally, for altruistic behavior.

Recognize Need for Rescue Behavior

The first major prerequisite to engaging in rescue behavior is the recognition of the need to help others. Without seeing the need to act, people had no reason to even contemplate action, let alone agree to engage in it. Although the need to help may be obvious in retrospect, it must be acknowledged that there were many factors present that may have precluded the recognition of a need for help. One such factor was external to

---

1 Batson, p. 76.

the person; it involved the deceptive tactics undertaken on the part of the Nazi regime.\(^3\)

Such tactics were utilized in order to mislead the public into believing that the treatment of Jews and other "undesirables" was not as harsh and cruel as it really was; such deception was thought necessary to ensure compliance with Nazi directives and policies without the threat of resistance.

Another such factor that may have precluded the recognition of the need for help was internal to the person; it involved unconscious self-deception as to the local conditions. This self-deception may have been generated by several different considerations, including a desire to avoid conflict or struggle in deciding what to do. Whatever the origin, this self-deception led many to trick themselves into overlooking or explaining away the evidence of persecution, torment, and extermination to which the Jews were subjected.

Neither of these two different types of deceptive factors could be present in the minds of rescuers. Before they could engage in rescue activities, they had to have real knowledge of the persecution and the realization that their help was needed.

Personality Characteristics

Independence

One attribute consistently found among rescuers is their independent nature. Generally, rescuers were not reliant upon others for their self-esteem or life direction, but were extremely self-reliant in all aspects of their life. This personality trait is important for several reasons. To begin, the independence felt by rescuers allowed them to act in accordance with their beliefs and consciences even when doing so was not widely accepted and, indeed, even when doing so may lead to very grave consequences. Thus, they were not subject to societal constraints on their behavior, but were allowed the freedom to think and act as they believed they should. In addition, this freedom of thought extended beyond mere societal evaluations of the behavior to include even those organizations and groups in which the person normally participated and from which they sought support. In other words, the independence exhibited by rescuers endured even the beliefs and pressures from those with whom one normally associated. Such was indeed the case in religious organizations; as it has been previously noted, such organizations were not always supportive of aid to Jews and may have even

---


5 The vast majority (approximately 75%) of individuals in each study reported experiencing a feeling and sense of independence. This independence was revealed in a wide array of circumstances, but was supported from outside sources (Tec, When Light Pierced..., p. 160).
gone so far as to forbid such help.⁶ Even though these organizations may have been very important to the individual, the individual was sufficiently independent to act against them when necessary.

**Capable of Effecting Change⁷**

Along with this independent nature, all rescuers saw themselves as capable of effecting change in their surroundings. They did not resign themselves to accepting the atrocities around them because of the inability of a single person to effect change. Rather, they saw themselves as competent and proficient persons who were able to make a difference if and only if they set their mind to it and tried.

This attitude was markedly different from that commonly found among those who did not engage in rescue activities. Several people who remained inactive were interviewed as control groups in the various studies of altruism and they consistently reported that they did nothing because they felt as though they could make no difference. They felt that, as only one individual coming up against a powerful regime that possessed vast support from the community, any action they undertook would not have a significant effect. They repeatedly articulated statements questioning the contribution they as mere individuals would have been able to provide and, believing themselves incapable of

⁶ See Chapter IV, p. 21

making any real change, resigned themselves to idleness and inaction.\(^8\)

The confidence of the rescuers in their ability to make positive and real change was very important to undertaking helping activity. It made an otherwise hopeless situation bearable and was necessary before any attempt to help was made.

**Rescue Behavior as Spontaneous or Natural\(^9\)**

All rescuers reported that their behavior was natural and spontaneous. They did not spend extensive time deliberating over whether or not to help, weighing the relative costs and benefits of doing so before arriving at a decision. Rather, when faced with a situation of need, they acted without hesitation.

An additional aspect to this spontaneous helping behavior was the rescuers' inability to explain it. It was so instinctive and natural for them to help that, when faced with questions concerning their reasons and motivations for help, most were startled. They did not seem to comprehend what the interviewer was asking; their behavior had been so natural and spontaneous that they had never stopped to consider any reasons or

\(^8\) This belief was cited by many of the various studies' control group members who had remained inactive during the war. Personality tests used to measure levels of believed competence also supported their expressed beliefs (Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, p. 177).

motivations for helping—they just did it.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Long History of Helping Behavior}\textsuperscript{11}

Another characteristic common among rescuers was their long history of helping behavior, which extended from before the war and continued long afterwards. Typically, these were not people who helped only in the times of greatest need; rather, helping was a part of their entire lives. The help that was extended varied from time to time according to the needs of those around them, but their lives were never without it; their help during this time was not merely an isolated incident.

This finding suggests that helping behavior was not some chance happening in the rescuers' lives, but was an established and enduring part of their very identity. Evidence to support this fact came not only from the person himself/herself, but also from the Jewish survivors who knew and were helped by them as well as others who knew them well.

\textsuperscript{10} When approached for interviews or asked about the motivations for their involvement, a great majority of rescuers exhibited surprise. When pressed, they reported a failure to consider their involvement in such terms (Tec, \textit{When Light Pierced...}, p. 174).

\textsuperscript{11} Fogelman, p. 288; Huneke, p. 149; Monroe, p. 112, 115-117; Oliner, \textit{The Altruistic Personality}, p. 245-247.
Rescue Activities as Unremarkable\textsuperscript{12}

One of the most surprising aspects of rescuers' testimony was their overwhelming reluctance to discuss their behavior. They would speak about their aid only when pressed, and only then with great embarrassment. They did not seem to understand why so many wanted to talk with them about their good works, let alone give them special attention and recognition for them. Indeed, some have gone so far as to refuse the award offered them by the Yad Vashem Committee for their help because they did not believe their actions were extraordinary or worthy of such a distinction.\textsuperscript{13}

A further indication of their belief that the rescue activities were unremarkable was that the rescuers tended to downplay their behavior. They typically neglected to tell the interviewer particularly perilous instances of aid or of their past history of aid in other circumstances. Knowledge of these activities was provided instead by those who were rescued and others who knew the rescuers for a long period of time.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Fogelman, p. 157-158; Gushee, p. 138; Hallie, \textit{Lest Innocent Blood...}, p. 20-21, 286; Hallie, \textit{From Cruelty...}, p. 27; Monroe, p. 109, 122; Paldiel, p. 379-380; Sauvage, p. 31-32; Vincent, p. 79-80.

\textsuperscript{13} For example, Maruska, who was a Silesian countess during the war and later became a veterinarian, and Leonie, who was a seventeen year old Dutch girl during the war and is now a psychotherapist, each refused the honor awarded by Yad Vashem, saying that they had not done enough to deserve it (Monroe, p. 107-109).

\textsuperscript{14} This evidence supports the previous contention that rescuers did not act in an attempt to earn societal or group approval. Not viewing the helping behavior as extraordinary, they certainly could not expect to gain esteem or approval by doing it; if they did not see it as worthy of such distinction, they could not expect others to do so either.
Universal Concern for Others\textsuperscript{15}

Common among rescuers was the belief that \textit{all} persons were worthy of their concern and attention. There was no distinction made between individuals or groups as to who should and who should not be the recipient of aid. Rather, rescuers exhibited a universal concern for others that saw themselves as one among a common humanity.

This universal concern was extended to include even those that the rescuer did not personally like or, in some rare cases, even had prejudices against. Rescuers admitted that living with particular persons that they were sheltering was not always easy; personality clashes as well as disputes over living habits often entered into the picture. Furthermore, in some cases, the rescuer sheltering or otherwise helping did so at the same time that they fostered deep-seated prejudices and biases against them; although rare, there were cases of staunch anti-Semites extending their help to Jews. Absolutely no person was excluded from the realm of concern for the rescuers.

Responsible for Rescue\textsuperscript{16}

Evidence also suggests that rescuers for the most part felt that their behavior was a part of their responsibility. They did not see the help they offered as optional or worthy


\textsuperscript{16} Fogelman, p. 58; Gushee, p. 104-105; Henry, p. 314; Huneke, p. 147; Monroe, p. 121; Oliner, \textit{The Altruistic Personality}, p. 173, 266.
of notice, but viewed it as something that was required for them to do. The fate of others was not something that was foreign to them, but was a part of their obligation. Thus, they would have felt culpable for any inaction on their part that allowed the persecution of the Jews to continue unabated.

**Personal Gratification or Satisfaction**

Another characteristic of rescuers is the fact that all seemed to derive some sort of personal gratification or satisfaction from their helping activity. This satisfaction came from the contentment of knowing that they had acted in accordance with their moral beliefs regarding the treatment of others. They had a universal concern for others and felt personally responsible for what happened to them; thus, they would not have been able to live with themselves if they had failed to help when they could. In other words, their actions allowed them to act in accordance with their beliefs and consciences and, hence, to avoid feelings of regret and pain that would have otherwise resulted; it allowed them to maintain their integrity.

**Analysis of These Factors**

The personality traits of rescuers were remarkably similar in many respects. For the most part, those who engaged in rescue activities were independent people who were confident in their ability to bring about positive change when interacting within their

---

17 Ezratty, p. 54; Fogelman, p. 60-62, 66, 161; Paldiel, p. 381; Riding, p. B1.
environments. They viewed their helping behavior as a spontaneous and natural expression of their felt responsibility and thus saw it as unremarkable; it was simply necessary for them to help others who they saw as part of a common humanity. Indeed, this behavior was essential to their personal integrity; helping others allowed them to preserve this integrity and remain true to themselves.
CHAPTER VI

SELF-INTEREST AS EXPLANATION FOR RESCUE

Traditional Concept of Self-Interest

Traditionally, the concept of self-interest has been depicted as meaning an interest in oneself that overrides and takes precedence over the interests and needs of others. One's own needs, interests and desires are the primary consideration and those of others, if they are considered at all, are secondary. Accordingly, the interests of others are only considered insofar as they affect one's own interests; they have nothing more than mere instrumental value as means to further more self-interested ends. Some claim that this is the way things are, that evolutionary biology and human nature dictate and necessitate that humans act with preferential treatment given to themselves rather than others. Furthermore, some claim that this is the way things should be; they believe that since this is all we as humans are capable of, that nothing more can be required from us and, moreover, that society works best if everyone seeks their own particular interests and needs.

Others find these claims contrary to our normal moral intuitions, if not morally offensive. These people recognize an inherent worth of all people that is independent of all other considerations; all people and their interests and needs are important to them regardless of the effect they may have on others. In addition, they believe that it is
possible for us to act in other's interests rather than our own, that we as humans are capable of acting for others regardless of the effect the actions may have on ourselves. Indeed, those who accept and believe in the possibility and existence of altruistic actions require that no selfish motive be present in determining behavior and they praise and value those who are able to do so, those who are able to act solely with other's interests and needs in mind rather than their own.

Since actions are thought to require an absence of self-interested motivation in order to earn the status of altruism, those who believe in the existence of altruism wholeheartedly and adamantly resist any and all attempts to locate even the hint of self-interest or seemingly selfish motives for performing such actions. To do so would not only lessen or remove the value of the altruistic behavior, it would also negate the possibility of acting in the interests of others rather than self and imply that any attempts to do so were somehow wrong.

Self-Interest as Self-Affirmation

Recently, however, attempts have been made to prove that some degree of self-interest is acceptable and even appropriate to the performance of altruistic actions. In particular, attempts have been made to prove that altruistic and self-interested motivations can exist simultaneously and can, in fact, be congruent with one another. In other words,

---

It is possible for one's own interests to be the same as and inseparable from the interests of others so that the pursuit of one's own interests is always equal to the pursuit of the interests of others.

This account of motivation for action is markedly different from the normal dichotomy of motivation that is believed to exist. Normally, it is contended that the motivation for action must be either self-centered or other-centered. One may have conflicting motives of self versus other simultaneously, or one may satisfy the two differing motives by performing the same action, but the two motives are always understood as separate and distinct from one another. In this way, when conflict between the motives arises, one or the other of the two motives must prevail. Either the action decided upon must favor the self over the other, or it must favor the other at the expense of self.

The alternate account of motivation offered here, however, makes no such distinction between the motives. The two motives are united into a single determinant of behavior; rarely are there situations that arise wherein a decision must be made between the self and the other. This is precisely so because the interests of the self are congruent with the interests of others.

The type of self-interest that is involved in this type of motivation is restricted to interest of a very specific kind; it is restricted to interest in affirmation of personal

---

2 Batson, p. 70; Blum, *Moral Perception...*, p. 126; Monroe, p. 120; Schmidtz, p. 52-53, 57.
integrity or identity. In other words, the self-interest involved must include the interest in living up to one's standards, in remaining true to oneself, or in preserving one's personal integrity wherein the act of pursuing the interests of others is not merely an instrumental means to the further end of self-affirmation, but is an end in and of itself. Thus, the pursuit of this type of self-interest is not bereft of interest in others and concern for their needs, but, rather, necessarily includes them. Someone pursuing this type of self-interest has the personal need and interest of concern for and helping others; the fate and welfare of others is tied up with one's very identity and, to remain true to self, one must serve their needs. For this type of person, there is no separation between someone else's need and his/her own--the two are inexorably connected to one another.

Furthermore, it is argued that this self-interest not only fails to diminish the value of the act, but, on the contrary, only serves to enhance the act and confer additional praise for its performance.

Explained in Terms of Personal Morality

One may question how the fate and interests of others may be so linked to the fate and interests of the self. Such a devotion to others is certainly not required by traditional or normal conceptions of duty, but far exceed them. How then, could one view others as so central a component in personal identity? One explanation for this is that these

---

3 Blum, p. 93, 129; Gushee, p. 112-114; Michael Pritchard, Good Works, p. 157-159; Michael Pritchard, On Becoming Responsible, p. 160-180; Urmson, p. 203-205, 208-216;
people adopted a personal moral code that encompasses both the basic duties required by
the continuation of society as well as these higher ideals. In this way, the higher ideals,
those not demanded by society but nevertheless adopted as part of a personal morality,
become required for the individual. As part of their personal morality, any choice
concerning them is lost. That is to say, while the ideals and actions stemming from them
may be optional from an objective, detached point of view, the subjective standpoint of
the individual who adopts them forbids such an inclination; rather, it demands that they
follow their ideals without reprieve.

Positive Rather Than Negative Value

It has been said that it is necessary for those whose integrity is dependent upon
the fate of others to help; to preserve their integrity and remain true to themselves, they
must help where they are able. Indeed, as an integral part of their adopted personal
morality, they have no choice but to pursue the interests of others as their own. Some
have taken this as evidence for the belief that no praise for actions stemming from this
type of morality should be conferred, that, since the actions are necessary for the
preservation of personal integrity, no amount of honor or commendation should be
awarded. In other words, because performing the actions already rewarded the rescuers
by allowing them to maintain their integrity, no further reward by society need be given.
The self-interested aspect of the rescue behavior thus negates any need for societal
reward.
However, the mere necessity of the rescuers' actions on behalf of others does not remove its positive merit or worth. Rather than detracting from the value of the action, the necessity of their helping behavior should add to its merit; the necessity of the behavior illustrates the deep concern and commitment the rescuers had to the interests of others. The interests of others had become so important to the rescuers as to become *identical* with their own interests. For, if the interests of others are inseparable from one's own, a person may not act without them in mind; they are integral to personal identity and are *always* a part of the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the interest in maintaining personal integrity was never the conscious or deliberate goal of the rescuers. Rather, the rescuers simply recognized the need for their help and immediately sought to provide it; they did not deliberate for long periods of time, weighing the pros and cons of each action, plotting the best way of acting to maintain integrity. Instead, they saw a need and their integrity caused them to act instantly in response. The sheer spontaneity of the actions allowed for *nothing more* than the conscious realization of needs of the other. The needs of the other were important and integral enough to warrant action *on their own*.

This is markedly different from those who act altruistically for the benefit of others, but who do so only after great deliberation and consideration and, thus, with the real choice of how they want to proceed. For these individuals, whether or not to perform certain altruistic actions involves a conscious choice, a choice that may involve weighing the costs and benefits of such action and, thus, even the refusal or unwillingness
to perform it. As each situation to act altruistically presents itself, a new decision must be made as to whether or not this person becomes involved. Thus, one's own interests are distinct and different from the interests of others. This type of person is not demanded by his/her integrity to perform rescue behavior; s/he has both the objective and subjective choice of whether or not to act. It may be good for people of this type to act with the interests of others in mind, but it is not necessary for them to do so.

The necessity of the actions for the preservation of integrity, as is seen in the first group of individuals, however, illustrates that these people have fully succeeded in "loving thy neighbor as thyself" or caring about the fate of others to the greatest possible extent. It is only possible to care for others and be interested in their needs to this extent if their fate is viewed as identical to one's own. Otherwise, one can only care about others to the extent that personal needs and interests allow.

Evidence From Rescuers

This understanding of the necessity of altruistic action for the preservation of integrity is supported by evidence given by those who risked their lives to rescue Jews and others during the Holocaust. In each and every case, the rescuers interviewed insisted that there was nothing extraordinary about their actions, that they were simply performing their duty, and that they had no other option but to help if they wanted to be able to "look at themselves in the mirror." Each thought the rescue behavior was necessary to

---
4 See Chapter V, Characteristics of Rescuers.
preserving their integrity.

Furthermore, the rescuers admitted of these motivations only after bewilderment and confusion after being pressed for a response by the interviewer. They did not understand why anyone would question their actions or their motivation to help, but saw their behavior as simply a natural thing to do that required no conscious reflection or deliberation. They admitted that they had not contemplated their action in these terms before and maintained that they had blindly acted in response to need. Thus, although the actions did have the effect of allowing them to preserve and maintain their personal integrity, this effect was not overtly contemplated or sought; rather, it was a chance effect resulting from striving to help others in need.

Implications for Altruism

Does Not Negate Possibility of Altruism

As one can see, nothing that has been said negates the possibility of altruistic behavior. It was never disputed that people can act solely for the sake of others, without thought or concern for their own interests and needs, such as the traditional conception of altruism demands. Furthermore, the contention that those who acted to rescue Jews during the Holocaust saw their actions as necessary to the preservation of their integrity does not negate the possibility of altruism, either. Those who acted in this way saw the overwhelming need for their help and wanted to help for the sake of the other, not as a means to a further selfish end, but as an end in itself. In fact, they saw no difference
between acting for self and acting for the other—the two concerns were identical, each a necessary component of integrity. In this way, acting for the good of others was not done so as to ensure personal integrity, but was rather a necessary expression of that integrity.

Enhances or Deepens Notion of Altruism

As an expression of personal integrity, the consolidated concern for self and others illustrates the depth of conviction and concern that the rescuers felt towards the other. Their concern was not capricious and their aid did not come only after intense deliberation or calculation. To these rescuers, there was no decision to make; the other was so integrated into self that the two became an undistinguishable part of personal identity and integrity. In this way, the rescuers avoided the conflict of motives that others struggled to overcome. They did not have to subject themselves to conflicting motives of protecting self, yet seeming selfish, or, on the other hand, protecting others, yet putting oneself in danger and resenting this protection. They were able to avoid the shame and guilt attendant with pursuing one's own needs for the sake of others, and they were able to avoid the resentment and fear of pursuing the interest of others at the expense of self. Likewise, they were also able to avoid viewing the attendant hardships of helping others as such, and they were not able to become arrogant, feel superior, or take exorbitant pride for their behavior. Rather, their behavior was simply natural and instinctive. There was no struggle, no hesitation, no reluctance, no uncertainty about their choice, precisely because they had no choice.
These rescuers had no inner struggles to contend with because they had succeeded in integrating the fate of others with the fate of self; they had succeeded in fully caring about the other to the greatest possible extent. This success should not detract value from the rescue activity, but should add to it. These rescuers should be praised for their involvement in rescue activities, but they should receive additional commendation and acclaim for their ability to transcend the conflict between self and other. This transcendence is a goal long extolled in religious and moral lore, but is impossible for most to achieve. At best, most attempts result in the pursuit of the interests and needs of others as a separate and distinct aspiration from the pursuit of more self-interested interests and needs. These rescuers, however, succeeded in combining these two interests into one overriding concern and, for this, they should receive the highest moral commendation.

This understanding of rescue behavior clearly enhances and deepens the notion of altruism. No longer is altruism characterized simply and only by the victory of other's concerns over own's own; it has been expanded to include the fusion of these two seemingly contradictory motivations and proven that they are not incompatible with each other after all. Rather, their combination into a single, indistinguishable interest is not only possible, but highly praiseworthy as well. It avoids struggle, feelings of guilt and shame, even feelings of pride and arrogance over the chosen behavior. It succeeds in effecting the greatest possible concern for both as one.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the midst of the Nazi reign of terror over Jews and other "undesirables," some individuals chose to help those in need, even when doing so was neither expected nor rewarded, but was both forbidden and punishable. They gave of their own meager resources of time, space, food, and money, in addition to their compassion and caring. They risked their own and loved ones' lives to help others around them.

The traditional explanations for the rescuers' behavior have been shown to be wholly ineffective in explaining the rescuers' motivations and behavior. Unlike what was previously believed, it appears as though rescuers did not act out of a desire for financial gain or to acquire the respect and approval of others. They did not act because their social class standing, religious beliefs, or political ideals made them sympathetic to the needs and plight of others. They did not act to help friends, to avoid retribution from Allied nations, or even in an effort to resist and rebel against the hated Nazi occupiers. None of these traditional explanations satisfactorily resolves the question of what prompted rescuers to act.

On the other hand, closer analysis of the rescuers' personalities showed great similarities between them. Rescuers tended to be individuals who were extremely independent and confident in their abilities. They had a long history of helping in various
situations and regarded this behavior as a spontaneous and natural expression of their universal concern for and duty towards others. They did not think that their actions were remarkable or deserving of special praise or attention; the actions simply allowed the rescuers to live with themselves and preserve their integrity.

Contrary to what some may think, however, this self-preserving consequence of helping does not negate the possibility of altruism or warrant the denial of praise for the actions. The effect of self-preservation was not the motivating force behind the actions. Rather, the concern for the needs and interests of others was the compulsion to act that influenced the rescuers. Rescuers acted for others because the others were so important to them—the fate of others was identical in importance to their own; indeed, the two were so intertwined as to be indistinguishable in every way. Helping thus was not an option to rescuers but was a required part of their responsibility.

This synonymity of interests and lack of choice concerning involvement in helping activities illustrates the depth of conviction rescuers had towards others and proves that rescuers should be extolled for their behavior. They were able to overcome the conflict between the self and the other, they succeeded in loving their neighbor truly as they did themselves. This success demands our respect and admiration.


