

Altruism and the moral value of rescue: resisting persecution, racism, and genocide

Samuel and Pearl Oliner's book *The Altruistic Personality* elicits our great admiration and gratitude for the few who risked so much to shelter Jews in Nazi Europe. This work is of the first importance for moral philosophers concerned to understand the highest reaches of moral excellence. No firm line can be drawn between psychology and philosophy in this area. Both attempt to understand what it is to be a person of heroic virtue, such as the individuals studied by the Oliners; and this quest cannot be severed from the attempt to understand how we can *become*, and help others become, morally excellent, or at least morally better. The Oliners suggest that the rescuers they studied had "altruistic personalities" and that by studying their histories we can learn how to promote altruism in others. I will claim that the concept of altruism by itself is insufficient to express the moral accomplishment of these rescuers. I will argue that there are other moral values implicated in such rescue activities that supplement and enrich – but are distinct from – the value of altruism *per se*. First is the moral value of resistance to evil. Acts of rescue constituted resistance to Nazism, specifically resistance to both persecution and racism, in addition to being acts of altruism. Second is the value of resistance to genocide, which implies a positive value being placed on the existence of the Jewish people as a people (over and above the value embodied in altruism, of saving individual Jews). I will also discuss the issue of risk and sacrifice as a dimension of altruistic action distinct from altruism *per se*. My argument will attempt to place altruism within the scheme of these other related though distinct values.

The argument has implications for personal and moral development. The psychic structures underlying altruism are not sufficient to generate the range of virtues involved in heroic rescue. Hence a theory of the psychic conditions for and underpinnings of altruism will not give us all of what the Oliners want in a theory of heroic rescue, though their failure to distinguish the different values involved in altruism does not preclude their having successfully identified, in the name of altruism, some of the prerequisites of the other relevant values. But philosophical clarity serves developmental efficacy here. Until we get clear on the values that we

want to promote, we cannot proceed clearly to inquire how these are to be developed.

ALTRUISM AS AN AGENT-CENTERED VALUE

"Altruism" as a positive value is necessarily an "agent-centered" value rather than a "consequence-centered" value. To call an act altruistic is to say more than that it produces beneficial consequences for someone; it is to confer praise on the agent of that action. That is, altruism refers necessarily to an agent's motivation.

Social scientists have understandably found this element in the notion of altruism troublesome. For it is notoriously difficult to be certain of people's motivations — hence difficult to study altruism in the way social scientists wish to do so. For this reason social scientific writers on altruism sometimes try to deny, or at least to mute, the agent-centered nature of altruism by defining it without its full motivational reality. Thus, in *The Altruistic Personality* Pearl and Samuel Oliner say, "For the purpose of our study, we prefer the definition [of altruism] which relies on objective measurable criteria," and the Oliners take their definition to avoid reference to "internal psychological states."¹

The subsequent discussion in the Oliners' book, however, belies this aspiration. The rescuers cited in the book all appear to (and are taken by the Oliners to) have acted from concern for the rescuee or from moral principle. That is, a condition referring to motivation is in fact adopted in the Oliners' working definition of "altruism," and this is in accordance with their implicit recognition that altruism is necessarily an agent-centered concept.

Rescue presents a less problematic case of genuine moral motivation than do other beneficent acts. Rescuers who received monetary reward were not counted (by the Oliners). Most rescuers could not have acted for the egoistic goal of social approval, first because it was too risky to let others know that one was engaged in rescue, and second because in most cases the norms prevailing in their society or community did not approve of such rescue. Furthermore, even if a rescuer were concerned about approval (of the rescuees, or of a few confidants who knew of the rescue), the personal gain in such approval was so obviously outweighed by the risk to life and freedom in engaging in the rescue that a desire for

1. Despite this disclaimer, earlier (p. 3) the Oliners make explicit use of a motivational conception of altruism. Altruistic personality is defined as "a relatively enduring predisposition to act selflessly on behalf of others." "Selfless" makes essential reference to motivation, however difficult it might be to discern it in practice.

such approval could not intelligibly be regarded as the motive for rescue. I suggest that the move to a behavioral or consequence-centered definition of altruism defeats the purpose of studying altruism in the first place, and hence serious students of altruism like the Oliners will inevitably end up drawing on an agent-centered conception.

ALTRUISM AND RISK

Some psychologists and philosophers oversimplify the nature of altruism and its value by defining it as involving sacrifice, or at least the risk of it. The element of risk is central to the case of rescue and surely does constitute an important part of why rescue activities are admirable. Nevertheless, building self-sacrifice into the very definition of altruism generally (heroic rescue being only one type of altruism) is misleading. For it masks the fact that it can be morally good or admirable to be genuinely concerned about the welfare of others even when there is no risk or loss to the self. The epithets "compassionate," "thoughtful," and "kind" all refer to admirable traits that involve altruism (in the sense of genuine concern for others), yet none of them requires loss or sacrifice to the agent.²

What altruism does require for the specific value that it has is an absence of concern for the self—a direct concern only for the other. But absence of concern for the self is not the same thing as sacrifice or risk to the self.³ In many ordinary circumstances it is possible to be helpful to

2. It might be replied to this that even when there is no other kind of loss, one always loses the time spent in helping the other, and that this inconvenience constitutes a loss to the self. This distinctly economic conception of human nature reflects prior theoretical commitments rather than attention to the phenomena of loss. We do not necessarily experience the time we take to help others as a loss to ourselves. We do not regard as a loss to ourselves every moment in which we fail to pursue gain. See Michael Slote, *Beyond Optimizing: A Study of Rational Choice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), for a compelling argument that it is not always rational to maximize gain to oneself.
3. In her very interesting article, "Altruism vs. Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1993), Neera Badhwar argues that rescuers typically did act out of self-interest. Her argument for this point is that the rescuers had a strong sense of individuality and personal efficacy, and that in their rescue efforts they were typically affirming their values, and in that sense affirming themselves. Badhwar is right to argue that some forms of concern to live up to one's existing values are not incompatible with altruism, though some—namely, ones that get in the way of a primary focus on the plight of the other, or that treat the altruistic act as a means to realizing one's values—are incompatible with it. Having a strong sense of personal efficacy and individuality are not, however, the same as being concerned for one's interests. Leaving aside that it may be misleading to speak of affirming one's values as a form of "self-interest," as long as the motivational source of the agent's action

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someone out of compassion or sympathy, and yet to lose absolutely nothing (though gain nothing either). Sacrifice and risk are indeed an important part of what gives rescue its value. But the concern for others shown in that rescue is a separately valuable element, which can exist without the risk.

ALTRUISTIC SPECIALIZATION

Although concern for others may be *ceteris paribus* a good thing (independent of the sacrifice involved), we do not actually *admire* persons or confer positive agent-centered worth on their concerned actions in all contexts. For example, normally we do not admire someone for her concern for family members or friends. Rather, this is simply expected.

Distinctly praiseworthy altruism involves either a degree of concern toward family members or friends that is above and beyond some threshold, or a scope of concern wider than intimates. How wide in scope does altruism have to be before we count it praiseworthy?

Let us take an example here, which will help to illustrate both the value of altruism and the value of rescue: Jacek is deeply devoted to the welfare of his community. He lives in a relatively poor neighborhood and is always helping his neighbors individually, attempting to secure better services for them, organizing them to articulate their needs politically, and the like. Jacek is genuinely compassionate and caring toward his neighbors. He is tireless and selfless, energetic and imaginative in his efforts to help.

Let us note, however, that Jacek's altruism involves a degree of what we might call "moral specialization" (or "altruistic specialization"). His altruism is targeted to a specific group of persons – defined residentially or by a shared condition. To explore the significance of this fact, let us imagine that a political refugee who is of a different race or ethnic group moves into Jacek's community and either by herself or through an intermediary asks Jacek – as a knowledgeable and helpful person in the community – for help and refuge. Let us further imagine the refugee as a Salvadoran, who is in danger of being killed if she returns to El Salvador. [AUTHOR'S NOTE: This was written before the January 1992 peace accords between the FMLN and the ARENA government of El Salvador.] The U.S. government will not grant her political refugee status and she is thus threatened with deportation.

involves concern for the other's well-being, the agent's further knowledge that performing this act constitutes an affirmation of her values in no way detracts from the act's altruistic worth.

Suppose that Jacek refuses to be concerned about the Salvadoran refugee. He feels he has enough to do taking care of the people already in his community; they have urgent needs too, and he spends all his time helping them. He has no interest in the refugee.

What do we think of Jacek in light of his response to the refugee? Do we reconsider or withdraw our previous judgment that he is an altruistic person deserving of admiration? Let us be clear that his unwillingness to help the refugee does not call into question the authenticity and sincerity of his altruistic efforts on behalf of his community. It is not like discovering that all along Jacek has been secretly employed by a wealthy benefactor who is paying him to help the community.

It is true that Jacek has all along been altruistically specialized. But we knew this about him from the beginning and it did not affect our initial judgment of his worthiness. In any case most people are in some ways morally specialized. Their moral efforts are targeted primarily to members of specific groups, whether defined in terms of proximity to the agent or as sharing some characteristic. Are we entirely to reevaluate our moral judgments about the admirability of morally specialized altruism?

At the same time, Jacek's response to the Salvadoran refugee does reflect on Jacek's moral character, and casts a new light on his previous altruism on behalf of his community. The appearance of the refugee constitutes a new moral situation for Jacek, in which the moral specialization becomes a kind of parochialism. Although in usual circumstances Jacek's moral specialization is not inappropriate and does not render his altruism less than admirable, in this new situation his failure to go beyond that specialization does mark a deficiency in his altruism. This is partly because the refugee's life may be in danger; she is in a situation of greater and more urgent need than the members of Jack's neighborhood. But this is not the only reason. Even if her need were at the same level as that of his neighbors, it would still be a deficiency were he to fail to have some concern for her and a willingness to help.

It would, I think, be too harsh to say that Jacek's altruism toward his community is entirely deprived of moral worth in light of his failure to help the refugee. Yet it seems importantly diminished in moral worth. Jacek himself is rightly admired less in regard to his community-focused altruism.

It seems, then, that in some situations mere altruism – understood as concern for others besides oneself (and, let us stipulate, beyond the bound of family and friends) – is not enough. The altruism has to have a certain degree of scope or inclusiveness to warrant full worth and admira-

tion. It must at least go beyond a narrow or customary ethnocentrism or other group centeredness to include groups different from oneself.

This analysis is implicit in judgments many of us make about rescue and other altruistic efforts in the context of Nazi occupation. We regard it as a failure of some kind if a Christian was not able to extend help, or at least concern, to Jews, refugees from other countries, and other groups perceived as different from herself. For example, no matter how heroic a Polish Christian was in sheltering members of the Polish underground from the Nazis, if such an individual refused to be concerned about the plight of Jews as well, then something was lacking.

This is not to make a blanket judgment of condemnation of, say, Polish Christians who did not help Jews. The penalty for helping was death to the helpers (visited upon at least two thousand Polish rescuers), and no one is in a position to condemn those who failed to take such risk – especially not those who have never faced anything like such risks themselves. What can be said with more justification, however, is that a person whose refusal to help a Jew stemmed not from fear of the consequences but rather from an inability to extend her altruistic concern beyond national and religious boundaries evidenced a less-than-admirable trait of character. Although perhaps none can in good conscience condemn Polish non-Jews for failing to help Jews, the indifference of so many to the Jews' plight merits criticism.⁴

UNIVERSALISTIC ALTRUISM AS AN IDEAL

In light of reflection on the Nazi context, and on other situations in which the normal moral specializations prove insufficient or inadequate, it might be tempting to define altruism not as concern for others but as concern for others *simply as human beings* – thus building inclusiveness or universality into the concept of altruism itself. For if one is concerned about others simply as human beings, then one does not exclude from one's concern any human being, no matter what her relation to oneself. If it were true of Jacek that he is concerned about members of his community simply as human beings, than he could not fail to be concerned about the Salvadoran refugee. Such a definition of altruism requires that differences of race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, class, and the like not affect one's caring for others – or else this caring is not to count as "altruism." Jacek's failure to care for the Salvadoran refugee shows that he cares for his neighbors not simply as human beings but

4. On this point, see Istvan Deak, "Strategies of Hell," *New York Review of Books*, vol. 39, No. 16:8–14.

rather as persons standing in a certain relation to himself, hence, on this proposed definition, not "altruistically."

The temptation to so define altruism should be resisted. My suggestion would be to retain this universalistic or fully inclusive concept of altruism as an ideal, but to reject it as a definition. Otherwise one has deprived all altruistic specializations of any of the moral value attaching to altruism, and I have argued that this goes too far and is untrue to our reflective moral understanding.

My proposal acknowledges the value perspective informing the Oliners' book – that universalistic altruism is a higher form of altruism than specialized altruism and that the rescuers exhibited such altruism. (To put it another way: The more inclusive the altruism, the more worth it has.) Beyond this, I have argued also that in some circumstances universalistic altruism is not only an ideal, but constitutes a standard against which specialized altruism becomes parochial and loses much (though not all) of its worth.

ALTRUISM AND RESISTANCE TO EVIL

Although universality or inclusiveness must supplement and qualify altruism in order for it to provide an adequate conceptual framework to express the moral accomplishment of rescuers of Jews under Nazi occupation, I want to argue that a full understanding of this accomplishment and its distinct worth requires an appreciation of several other values distinct from – and not merely qualifying – altruism itself. The first of these is the extraordinary riskiness of rescue activities discussed earlier.

I will discuss two further dimensions of rescue of Jews in Nazi Europe – resistance to evil, and preservation of the Jewish people. It is a morally significant feature of rescue in the Nazi context that to save a Jew was to resist evil – the evil of Nazism. This evil, in turn, has at least two distinguishable aspects – persecution and racism. The Jews were a persecuted group, and were persecuted because of their ethnicity or religion (their [alleged] "race").

Resistance to evil is a feature morally distinct from altruism itself. The perspective of altruism sees the persecuted Jew as a person in need, whose life is under threat of death. The motive of altruism is activated in the altruist insofar as she sees the other as a person in need (or, more generally, as a person whom she can benefit).

But to help, or to save the life of, someone who is persecuted is to do more than just to save life, as in a flood or accident. It is to recognize a further evil – the evil of persecution (by which I refer here to state-

sponsored persecution)—and to resist that evil by saying that one will not let persecution be successful in the case of this particular individual. This is why the Salvadoran political refugee implicitly presents to Jacek a moral issue over and above the urgency of her individual need. She presents an issue (persecution) that is not present in the neighbors who are the usual subjects of Jacek's helping activities.

If a rescuer acts with the recognition that in helping the persecuted person one does more than save a life but also resists persecution, the notion of altruism alone is insufficient to express her moral accomplishment. Many of the rescuers in *The Altruistic Personality* articulated this dimension of rescue in the Nazi context, by speaking, for example, of the wrongness of punishing the innocent (see Oliner and Oliner, 1988, pp. 166–7). Beyond those who explicitly voice this dimension, many others can be presumed to have seen their rescue activities at least partly in this light. For the fact that Jews were being persecuted was known to virtually everyone in the Nazi-occupied countries, and certainly to all rescuers. Thus rescuers were aware that in saving a Jewish life they were also saving the life of a persecuted person, and so were resisting or in a sense protesting against persecution. They can be presumed to have understood that saving a Jew from the Nazis was in this regard not simply like helping the victims of natural or technological disasters.

The failure to mention the aspect of persecution could stem partly from the fact that the rescuers took its significance for granted. But there may be another reason as well. Although the existence of persecution was evident, it is also a more abstract consideration than the more immediate one of the danger to the particular, individual Jew or Jews who are potential rescuees. It is not surprising that 76 percent of the rescuers focus on the needy condition of the potential rescuee (Oliner and Oliner, 1988, p. 168); this is the most immediate consideration. Yet it is not the only consideration. Upon reflection, a smaller number of persons would no doubt avow that asserting the wrongness of, or resisting, persecution played some role in their motivation.

Moreover, considerations that function as distinct motives to rescue do not exhaust the way that moral (or other) considerations can play a role in an agent's action. A consideration can be a necessary condition of a motive occurring, or of having the motivational force that it does have.

What directly moves a person to act does not exhaust the meaning that the action has for the person. This point is illustrated in the film *Angry Harvest*, which deals with the rescue phenomenon in its Polish setting.⁵ A

5. *Angry Harvest* (original German title: *Bittere Ernte*), directed by Agnieszka Holland, 1986.

lonely and sexually frustrated but materially comfortable Polish farmer comes upon a hungry and terrified Jewish woman in his woods; he takes her to his home and shelters her. His motive in initially helping her would naturally be described as compassion. At the same time the farmer might well not have had such a compassionate reaction to a Jewish male. What young females represent to this farmer's complex and unhealthy consciousness (wife, helpless dependent, sexual partner) may not have been a direct motive itself but have nevertheless been a condition of the actual motive of compassion operating. Analogously, it may be that in some rescuers the Jews being victims of persecution played a conditioning role in the strength of the concern that led people to engage in rescue.

Beyond this, the moral meaning that an action has for an individual comprises considerations that play a role (conscious or unconscious) in what the act means to her; and this goes beyond both motivation and necessary conditions for motivation. Some rescuers may have been fully aware that their actions constituted resistance to persecution, and this could have been important to the meaning that this action had for them; yet the consideration may not have played a *motivational* role. In helping a friend, one may be moved directly by his sorry plight. At the same time one may be aware (whether explicitly or not) that in helping him one is also affirming the importance to oneself of this friendship, and one takes for granted that one's friend is aware of this. This latter element, then, is a part of one's self-understanding of one's act even though it has no direct, or perhaps even conditioning role. In the *Angry Harvest* example a possible interpretation is that the farmer is unconsciously aware of the woman as potentially representing the fulfillment of other desires but this plays no role in his motivation, even as a necessary condition (for the compassion). Still, in describing the meaning of the action for the farmer (even though this meaning is partly unconscious) one would have to include the former element.⁶

To say that rescue of the persecuted involves a further moral dimension beyond that of altruism alone is not to say that a persecuted individual's life is worth more than the life of a nonpersecuted person (e.g., of a drowning person, or a victim of natural disaster). It is not to say that the refugee's life has greater worth than the lives of the community residents (in the example of Jacek) or that a Jew's life was more valuable than a German soldier's. The point has nothing to do with the worth of persons,

6. For further criticisms of the focus on motivation and motive for being insufficient to capture the full moral meanings of human action, see L. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), Chapter 6.

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but with the moral character of rescue activities and the range of values instantiated by them.

I say that resistance to the evil of persecution is an element over and above altruism in the rescue of the Jews, and it is an element that need not (though it may) function as a direct motive. But can it also be an actual motivation all its own, operating in some cases in the absence of altruism altogether? The Oliners say that some rescuers were motivated primarily by their hostility toward Nazis. They quote one rescued survivor describing his rescuer's motivation: "He explained to me in very simple words: 'I decided to fight the Germans by saving those persecuted by them. Who were the most persecuted? The Jews'" (Oliner and Oliner, 1988, p. 144).

One must here distinguish the motive of resistance from that of revenge or hatred. Revenge or hatred does not have a moral character, even if one's reason for hating or for wanting revenge stems from the immorality of the object of hatred or intended revenge. By contrast, resistance to evil is a moral motive whose goal is to prevent evil, or at least to take a stand against it — and not merely to vent hatred or revenge.

Keeping this distinction in mind, it seems to me difficult to believe that a person who rescued Jews as a form of resistance to the Nazis was not at least in some small degree motivated by altruism as well. For in recognizing what is evil about Nazism one recognizes the harm it does to human beings, to those whom it persecutes. Care for human beings must be part of the recognition of the evilness of Nazism in the first place. Hence some of the overall motive (of, for example, the Nazi-resisting individual quoted above) in rescuing must surely involve altruistic concern for the potential rescuee.

This is not to deny that resistance to evil can function as a distinct motive or that some people are more dominantly motivated by resistance and others by altruism. Certainly once some underground resistance movements officially adopted the position that rescuing Jews was to be taken on as a resistance activity, some persons whose altruistic motivation by itself was insufficient to get them to engage in rescue began to do so from a motive of resisting evil.

ALTRUISM AND RESISTANCE TO RACISM

So far, I have discussed persecution as one part of the evil that rescue activities resist. But a further distinguishable part of this evil is the racism involved in the Nazis' persecution of Jews. (By "racism" I mean here the victimization of persons because of their [imagined or actual] race, ethnic-

ity, religious affiliation, national heritage, and the like.) Racism is a particularly virulent scourge, beyond that of persecution itself, which can be visited upon someone for nonracist reasons. One can see this in the case of Jacek and the refugee. If Jacek's refusal to help the refugee stems (in part) from racist sentiments, his inaction is more blameworthy than if he fails to help because his moral energies and imagination are too bounded by his neighborhood community. (One can envision the latter situation if one imagines the refugee to be of the same race as Jacek himself.)

That racism adds a dimension of moral turpitude to an action that is also wrong on other grounds is sometimes recognized in the law as well. A racial attack on an individual is treated more harshly than an attack grounded in jealousy or economic gain, even if the harmed individuals are harmed equally in both situations. In the former case the attack can be a civil rights violation in addition to being an assault.⁷

Thus resistance to racism constitutes a further good element of an action that is morally good on other grounds as well, for example, as an act of rescue. A white sheltering a black on the Underground Railroad during the days of slavery (in the United States), a Turk saving an Armenian driven from his home at the time of the Armenian Holocaust,⁸ and a Christian sheltering a Jew — all these actions by their very nature resist the evil of racism being perpetrated against the groups in question. They all do more than save an individual, or even a persecuted individual; they assert the fundamental principle of human equality across racial, religious, and national differences. They help to keep the evil of racism from being triumphant.

Again, many of the rescuers interviewed in *The Altruistic Personality* recognized this antiracist dimension of their actions. Yet, as in the case of persecution more generally, the fact that some rescuers did *not* articulate it does not mean that they were unaware of it, or that it failed to play a role in their action. All rescuers were certainly aware that the Jews were being persecuted for their religion or ethnicity (and alleged race), and most (though not necessarily all)⁹ of those

7. For examples of such "hate crimes" legislation in the United States, see Lawrence Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Hanover: New England University Press, 1990), pp. 392, 564. For a discussion of their rationale, involving the punishing of racial bigotry, see James Jacobs, "The New Wave of American Hate Crime Legislation," *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy*, vol. 112, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1992.

8. Turks rescuing Armenians is discussed by Richard Hovanessian in "The Question of Altruism during the Armenian Genocide of 1915," in P. Oliner, S. Oliner, L. Baron, L. Blum, D. Krebs, M. Z. Smolenska, *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological and Historical Perspectives on Altruism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

9. The generalization that most rescuers could have been presumed to have been declaring opposition to racism is true only for the most part; for some rescuers were them-

engaged in rescue can be presumed to have thought such racial persecution wrong.

In looking back at the activities of these rescuers, and in honoring them for their moral accomplishment, I think we implicitly place these acts in a wider framework than that of altruism alone. We see the actions as resisting the evil of Nazism, as asserting the wrongness of persecution and racism. This is part, I think, of what accounts for our generally unqualified admiration for these actions. If the actions were solely ones in which one person risked her life and often those of her loved ones and other members of her household to save the life of another endangered person, it is not clear that many such acts—for example, ones in which several lives were risked to save one Jew—would or should not be regarded as foolhardy rather than as courageous and morally honorable. If I am in a burning building with two of my children and I endanger their lives and mine to attempt to rescue another person in the building, there would at least be disagreement as to how morally admirable such an action is.

And yet we do admire rescuers who endangered their own and their loved ones' lives to rescue Jews. (The Oliners report that 84 percent of the rescuers lived with other persons, 27 percent with children ten years or younger, all of whom were endangered by rescue activities.) I have often been troubled by the easy and seemingly unambivalent admiration that those involved in the study of rescuers (including myself) feel for these rescuers and assume that others will feel as well. I think the reason such admiration is ultimately justified is that the situation of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews (and Turkish and Arabic rescuers of Armenians) is only partly analogous to the burning house situation. The analogy is in the motivation to preserve life and in the risk to one's own life and (sometimes) those of loved ones and other members of one's household. But the disanalogy is that in the rescue context something larger than saving lives is at stake, namely, resistance to a great evil transcending the particular situation. It is, therefore, not merely a matter of one life against another, but, rather, of fundamental human principles and values at stake on top of (though not apart from) the saving of life. The actions of rescue have an historical importance in their role as countering the hegemony of Nazi power and Nazi values.

Perhaps this point deserves some qualification. I think some moral perspectives do encourage admiring actions of rescue involving nothing

selves avowedly anti-Semitic. They did not object to the racial element of persecution per se, but thought the Nazis were wrong to have taken this to the extreme of killing Jews. See Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland*, Chapter 6.

more than the risking of one's own life to save that of another. Ewa Kurek-Lesik cites a moving example of a nun from the Order of the Immaculate Conception describing a meeting called by one of the sisters, Wanda Garczynska, to decide whether to continue sheltering several (possibly many) children and adult Jews. The nun remembers: "She explained that she did not wish to jeopardize the house, the sisters, the community. She knew what could be awaiting us. There was no thought of self. She knew: you should love one another as I have loved you. How? So that He gave His life."¹⁰ The example suggests a Christian Christlike moral outlook in which risking one's own life to save another – independent of whether the threat to that life arises through persecution and/or racism – is itself a high, or even the highest, form of moral endeavor.¹¹

I suspect that most admirers do not share the moral standard involved in the literal interpretation of sister Wanda Garczynska's remarks. If this is so, I suggest that their reaction of unqualified admiration for most instances of rescue depends partly on considering resistance to racial persecution an important element of the action.

Our moral reaction to rescuers is necessarily made from the historical vantage point of hindsight. We see, in retrospect, that acts of rescue were part of a resistance to Nazism. We see their significance as the historical one of asserting a different way of living and different values than those of the Nazis – an assertion not made by bystanders (those who did nothing to help), whatever their actual disagreements with the Nazi regime and philosophy. We see individual acts of rescue, whatever their detailed self-understanding, as imbued with this historical significance – a significance not everyone needed to have been explicitly aware of at the time (though some certainly were).

To summarize: Rescuers are altruistic, and this is certainly part of what we admire in their actions. But it is not only altruism – understood as a concern for the need of the other – that confers on rescuers their exceptional place in our moral evaluation. Aside from the obvious risk and sacrifice, there is the dimension of resistance to evil that their actions involve. In this way, the title of the Oliners' book, *The Altruistic Personality*, is in some ways misleading in implying that the notion of altruism itself is sufficient to conceptualize the moral significance of rescue. Rescu-

10. Ewa Kurek-Lesik, "The Role of Polish Nuns in the Rescue of Jews, 1939–1945," in P. Oliner et al., *Embracing the Other*.

11. Even this case may be ambiguous. For Sister Wanda and the other nuns knew that the lives of the Jews were not just endangered but were endangered because of racist persecution. Even though the biblical passage referred to (John 15:13) does not specify this aspect, it may be that the sisters' sense that it would be wrong to give up the endangered Jews was in part influenced by the recognition of this persecution.

ers were also resisters of persecution and racism, and these are distinct elements in our understanding of their moral accomplishment.

From a developmental point of view, the psychic underpinnings of the value of resistance to persecution and to racism are surely at least somewhat distinct from those of altruism. The former are more conceptually complex values, requiring an understanding of human practices not required for altruism, which can exist in rudimentary forms on the basis of little more than individual empathy. They also involve a degree of abstraction not specifically present in altruism but explored in developmental theories (such as Lawrence Kohlberg's) emphasizing the acquisition of general moral principles.

ALTRUISM AND AFFIRMING CULTURES

There is one other element of moral significance, beyond altruism pure and simple, involved (at least potentially) in the rescue situation we are considering – and that is the preservation of the Jewish people as a people. In contrast to resistance to evil, this aspect was (or could be inferred to be) seldom present in the self-understanding (explicit or implicit) of rescuers.

"Preservation of the Jewish people as a people" is one example of a general value, which I will refer to as "affirming cultures." That value is embodied in valuing the existence of any distinct people (though the boundaries of a "people" may be hard to define), with its distinctive culture, values, traditions, and ways of life (such as the Iroquois, Poles, African-Americans, Gypsies, Lithuanians, Armenians, Turks, Germans). Octavio Paz states this value well, in the context of an attack on a certain notion of "progress": "By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. . . . Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life."¹² Thus, for a Turk to help an Armenian, with an understanding that in doing so he was helping to preserve the Armenians as a people, would be to instantiate the same value I am referring to in the case of the Jews.

The Jewish exemplification of this value as applicable in the Nazi context is this: Under the Nazis the Jews as a distinct cultural, ethnic, religious group were threatened with extermination. This was the goal of Nazi policy. In rescuing an individual Jew or Jews, a rescuer did more than save an individual life; she contributed to preserving the Jews as a

12. I am grateful to Jack Shaffer for this quote. Neither he nor I know its original source, but it appears to be from 1987.

people. By helping to keep alive a bearer or possible bearer of the Jewish tradition, she helped to preserve that culture and tradition, with its particular values and ways of life.

In asserting the distinct value of this preservation of a people, I am not asserting that the Jews have a greater worth than other peoples. Because of the Jewish notion of being the "chosen people," and the way this has been used against them even in the present day, it is particularly important to distinguish *greater worth* from *distinct worth*.¹³ "Distinct worth" implies a kind of worth that is different from, but neither greater nor lesser than, that of other peoples.¹⁴ The value of preserving Jews is thus one example of a general value – preserving a people and affirming their worth. The salience of this general value in the case of Jews stems, of course, from the fact that the Nazis were declaring Jews to be a people unworthy of existence, and were attempting to realize their view in genocidal action.

The value of affirming cultures or people is recognized in the category of "genocide" as a particularly heinous crime, expressed for example in the 1946 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The implication is that in wiping out a people one does something more evil than killing an equivalent number of individuals. A people is more than a collection of individual human beings, and there is value in preserving a people that is over and above the value of saving individual lives. (Part of the evil of genocide can be practiced without directly taking lives, e.g., by preventing a people from reproducing, as by sterilization, or by forcible conversion.)

13. In 1984, a group of Carmelite nuns established a convent in a building on the perimeter of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland. Jewish groups protested this site and in 1987 Jewish and Christian groups and individuals from several countries, including the Archbishop of Cracow, signed an accord promising that the convent would be moved by February 1989. When this move did not take place, Jewish groups protested and a few demonstrators climbed the walls of the convent, an action criticized by many other Jews. Jozef Cardinal Glemp, the Roman Catholic Primate of Poland, protested the actions of the demonstrators by saying (among other things), "[D]ear Jews, do not talk with us from the position of a people raised above all others," in an apparent derogatory reference to the "chosen people" notion. See "Poland's Primate Denounces Jews in Dispute on Auschwitz Convent," *New York Times*, August 29, 1989.
14. The Oliners confuse this point in their book. They deny that most rescuers saw Jews as "particularly worthy" (p. 249) or as "exalted or uniquely worthy of help" (p. 154). Their point is that (most) rescuers acted from universal and human values rather than from a special liking for Jews. Notwithstanding this important point, the Oliners imply that the alternatives are limited to (1) seeing the Jews as especially worthy, and (2) seeing them as human beings like oneself, ignoring their religion. But a third possibility is to see the existence of the Jewish people as having a distinct worth – parallel to the worth of the Armenian people, the Polish people, and so on.

Preservation of the Jewish people as a people is related to the value and goal discussed earlier of resisting racism against the Jews. But it is by no means the same thing. The resister of racism declares a human equality and human kinship in the face of its denial. Thus the resister of racism rescues the Jew as a fellow human being (and some rescuers explicitly articulate this dimension: "Jewish people are the same; all people are the same" [Oliner and Oliner, 1988, p. 166]). But she does not necessarily rescue him as a Jew – that is, as the bearer of the specific cultural and religious traditions of Jews. Those traditions are affirmed by the rescuer who sees the Jew as a Jew. The antiracist rescuer, by contrast, does not necessarily assert the worth of Judaism or Jewishness as a specific culture or religion. What she does is to resist its denial as that denial is used to denigrate the Jew as a human being. What she does positively assert is simply the worth of a Jew as a human being.

The difference between the antiracist perspective and the perspective of asserting the specific value of Jewishness or of the Jewish people is evident in the fact that very few rescuers seemed to evince the latter value, but many (at least implicitly) adhered to the former and saw their rescue activities in light of it. Rescuers interviewed for *The Altruistic Personality* who mentioned the Jewishness of Jews generally did so only to assert the wrongness of victimizing Jews, and to say that they, in contrast to the Germans, saw the Jew as a human being. Several expressed this by saying, in essence, "I did not see him as a Jew, but as a human being." (See *Altruistic Personality*, p. 154: "I did not help them because they were Jewish," attributed to several rescuers.)

Polish rescuers, for example, almost never saw the value in Jewishness per se. Anti-Semitism ran so deep in Polish culture that the moral accomplishment of the Polish rescuer was to rise above that anti-Semitism and see the Jew as a fellow human being (Nechama Tec emphasizes this point in her study, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland*). Iwona Irwin-Zarecka points out in her book, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland*, that Poles have almost always regarded the Jew as "other," as a problem, defined from the point of view of (non-Jewish) Polish society. They almost never saw Jews from the point of view of the Jews themselves; hence they were not able to appreciate the value of Jewishness in its own right. This has been true even of Poles who are not anti-Semitic in the sense of having negative, racist attitudes toward Jews. Given this history, the rarity of the Polish rescuer who could see the distinct value of preserving Jews as a people is hardly surprising – although, given the

particularly rich form of Jewish life in Poland for so many centuries, it is a deeply painful fact.

The value of preserving a people is not only a value over and above saving the life of individuals, though it is that too. It is also a value connected with the sense of identity of the rescued individual. Even when conversion of Jews was done for pure security reasons and with no sense of spiritual advantage for the Jew of becoming a Christian, it must be recognized that this conversion constituted a violation of the Jew's identity (unless of course she herself chose to be converted for heartfelt religious reasons).¹⁵ Ewa Kurek-Lesik found that some of the nuns rescuing Jewish children appreciated this fact, and did not convert them, although others had no such compunction. Still others presumably held positions in between, recognizing that it might constitute a kind of violation of a Jewish child to baptize and convert her, but feeling that considerations of security (to both the rescuers and rescuees) weighed in favor of doing so.

One group that did have a sense of the value of Jews as a distinct people were members of the Dutch Calvinists discussed in Lawrence Baron's "The Dutchness of Dutch Rescuers: The National Dimension of Altruism."¹⁶ These Calvinists take seriously, as part of their theological outlook, the sacredness of the Old Testament, the Jewish origins of Christianity, and the fact that Jews were regarded as God's chosen people. In saving an individual Jew, a member of this faith saw herself as doing more than saving life — she was also helping preserve a religious group she saw as valuable.

Yet these Dutch Calvinists embody only one form of the recognition of the value of preserving the Jews as a people — and it is a less than ideal one, for it depends on the idea that Jews possess a special value as the "chosen people." This value, therefore, could not be embodied in other peoples. Hence the way the Dutch Calvinists value Jews would not be transferable to other peoples, and would give no grounds for their valuing, for example, a Muslim or a Buddhist. It is not an example of the *general* value of affirming cultures or peoples.

15. The Oliners cite a striking and complex example of this respect for an individual's cultural and religious identity (pp. 69–70). A French Christian woman placed several Jewish children in parochial schools and convents. These children wanted to be part of the Christmas celebrations going on, wanted to take communion and, in some cases, to convert. The woman felt that conversion would be a violation of their identity, although the children themselves were too young to see this and quite understandably wanted to take on and be part of the way of life of those who were being so good to them.
16. Lawrence Baron, "The Dutchness of Dutch Rescuers: The National Dimension of Altruism," in L. Baron et al., *Embracing the Other*.

ALTRUISM AND EXTENSIVITY

The value of affirming particular cultures may seem morally limited in its particularism, and a retreat from a universal moral concern. But, I will argue, affirming culture is much closer to a form of universal moral concern than it may seem.

Let us distinguish two paths to a universal moral concern, that I will call "care" and "principle." A universal moral concern based on *principle* involves the possession of explicitly universalistic principles such as love or beneficence, or affirming the worth of all persons. Universal "care" involves caring about each individual known to oneself. This will have to involve not only individuals whom one encounters personally, but also individuals known to one but not personally encountered. The caring does not involve appeal to principle but does involve caring about each individual independent of the person's racial, ethnic, religious (and other such group) differences from oneself. The distinction between a caring and a principled universalism is well exemplified by two now well-known rescuers of Jews, Magda and Andre Trocmé.¹⁷ Although there are arguably differences in the specific *forms* of moral concern generated by care and principle, each generates a universal moral concern.

Affirming the value of specific peoples can be a further – distinct but not competing – way of generating a near-universal moral concern, or at least a form of moral concern that goes beyond one's own local concerns and attachments. For most persons have a cultural identity that is important to their own individual identity; they are part of some cultural, national, ethnic group.

Hence affirming cultures will encompass most persons within its scope of moral concern. Yet this value should not be seen as an *alternative* to care and principle. That is, affirming the value of peoples – and of an individual's cultural identity – is not a different way of reaching the exact same place (helping someone because she is a human being); it is not analogous to the way that care and principle are different ways of reaching that place. Rather, affirming cultures is a *complement* to both care and principle. Recognizing a person's distinct cultural identity does not distract from caring for her as a human being; but it is not simply a *way* of caring for her as a human being either. One might say that it is a way of caring for her as a specific individual (with her specific cultural identity); this is a kind of enriching of a care for her as

17. For more on the Trocmés and the care-principle distinction, see Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars," and Phillip Hallie's *Left Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

a human being.¹⁸ One takes her specific individual identity into account in a way that the notion of "caring for someone else as a human being" does not capture.¹⁹

Thus, although affirming the value of Jews as Jews (Armenians as Armenians, etc.) is in one way more particularistic – in encompassing and valuing a particular cultural/religious/ethnic identity – than a principled obligation to all humankind, it is nevertheless not so much less universalist.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that attention to the moral significance of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews can help to place the concept of "altruism" in its proper value perspective. Altruism is of value in its own right. But several other dimensions – some of which are present in all cases of this rescue, and all of which can be present – are also distinct sources of value. These other

18. Charles Taylor, in "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton University Press, 1992) develops the idea that affirming a person's cultural identity is a way of affirming that person as an individual, and is at the same time distinct from a desire for equality or being treated the same as others.
19. These remarks can be placed in the context of current debates about the "morality of care," a notion developed by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984). The Oliners draw on the notion of "care" to suggest that previous studies of individuals performing morally exemplary acts have overemphasized individual moral autonomy and individually generated rational principle; the Oliners find, by contrast, that a great number of rescuers can be characterized more accurately in terms of an emotion-based responsiveness to other human beings and direct concern for their welfare, that is, "care." I am accepting this perspective, though the Oliners use "care" to include general principles such as helping others in need, whereas I have wanted to restrict "care" to a one-to-one responsiveness in order more clearly to distinguish it from acting on principles of whatever sort. Nevertheless, I agree with the Oliners that genuine activities of rescue can be prompted by either care or principle.

But in this section of the essay, I am arguing that there is a limitation on *both* care and principle when understood as directed toward human beings qua human beings. The limitation is of failing to grasp the particularized identities of persons, one component of which is cultural/ethnic/religious. It is true that Noddings and Gilligan, in contrast to moral theories seen as more abstracted from concrete realities, emphasize that care is for the particular, and particularized, individual, not for "human beings in general" or "the social good." But most literature on the morality of care does not explore the constituents of individual identity which would need to be taken into account in a true caring toward a particularized individual. In particular, the cultural/ethnic/religious dimension has generally not been explored, and is not explored by Gilligan or Noddings in their best-known works.

The limitation of a pure morality of care can be seen as well, or even better, in relation to the first two values I have discussed – resistance to persecution, and to racism. For even if we understood caring as "caring for each individual" (where that included ethnic/religious identity) rather than the less particularized "caring for someone as a human being," the former notion would still fail to capture the fact that in caring for *this* individual, one resists evil and upholds justice.

ALTRUISM AND THE MORAL VALUE OF RESCUE

sources are sacrifice or risk; universality (extending one's concern to all human beings); resistance to evil in the form of persecution; resistance to evil in the form of racism; and valuing and preserving a people (here, the Jewish people) as a people. The moral accomplishment – and historical moral significance – of these rescuers can only be understood if these factors are taken into account. Altruism alone cannot express that accomplishment and that significance.

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