



Schindler's Motives

Lawrence Blum

When Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's List* (originally *Schindler's Ark*) appeared in 1982, it joined a small but growing literature on the rescue of Jews by non-Jews during the Nazi era. The study of rescue had met with resistance; some members of the Jewish community felt that focusing on the few who showed decency and humanity would mitigate the horrors of Nazism, and especially of the murder of 6 million Jews. By the 1980's, however, greater distance from the Nazi horrors, the greater willingness of rescues to speak out, and the desire to accord due credit to the few who risked much to save lives had made

the study of rescue more acceptable within the (still largely Jewish) Holocaust research community.¹

Moreover, rescuers provided a crucial moral lesson for understanding the Holocaust in general.² Their example served as irrefutable testimony to the role of human agency in creating the mass murder. No longer could people think, "There was nothing one could do." These rescuers, from every occupied country and Germany and from every social stratum, showed that there was *something* that virtually anyone could do.

Steven Spielberg's filming of *Schindler's List*, however, has revived the initial concerns, and raised a host of additional worries. The film, released in late 1993, has become a cultural event, one of the most talked-about films in years. It won several top Academy Awards, grossing over \$100 million in the U.S. alone (prior to video release). While the film's focus, like that of Keneally's book, is on one man's heroic efforts to save Jews from Nazis, the film is also one of the very few commercial films to deal with the Holocaust at all.³ The film's overwhelming cultural presence makes it likely to remain the predominant (and, some worry, especially for many younger Americans, virtually the *only*) image in the American mind not only of rescuers of Jews but of the Holocaust itself. Thus the film treatment of Schindler has understandably and appropriately raised a set of concerns and critical perspectives not pertinent to Keneally's book.

Criticisms of the Film

My concern is with Schindler himself—with his motivation to rescue, with his complex moral character, and with moral insight to which Schindler's example can lead us. Since the film's portrayal of Schindler will inevitably condition public understanding of him and of his historical setting, I want to mention some of the major criticisms levelled against the film, most of which have been raised by Jewish commentators. I enumerate these without comment here (except for criticism #6), except to say that while in my opinion some of these criticisms have merit, the combined force of their merit does not undermine the fundamentally extraordinary achievement of the film.

(1) Echoing the original concerns about attention given to rescue of individual Jews, the film focuses centrally on the survival of 1100 Jews, thereby offering its viewers reassurance rather than compelling them to

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face the horror of the death of the non-rescued millions.⁴

(2) In a similar vein, while many Jews are killed in the course of the film, all the Jewish characters in whom the audience comes to have some emotional investment (e.g., Helen Hirsh, Goeth's servant; Yitzchak Stern, Schindler's accountant) survive. Thus the emotional impact of the murders of many others is muted.⁵

(3) In partial contradiction to #2, some critics felt that no Jewish characters were portrayed fully enough as individuals to allow for audience emotional investment in them, and thus in their fate. The only substantial personalities in the film are, on this view, Schindler himself, and Amon Goeth, the psychopathic commandant of the Plaszow labor camp, where the Schindler Jews worked. So a story primarily about Jews is conveyed to the audience through a non-Jewish hero, Schindler. This approach to the Holocaust can be taken to reflect an assumption that a mass American audience will not warm to a story with Jews as its central characters, just as Hollywood films *Cry Freedom* (about the black power movement in South Africa) and *Mississippi Burning* (about the Civil Rights Movement) placed white characters at their center, as if a mass audience would not accept a politically-charged film about blacks with black characters as their focus.

(4) Standard features of Hollywood film genres frame *Schindler's List's* portrayal of the Holocaust in ways that distort its character. One is the triumphal ending, wrapping up the story with a too-neat sense of

closure, subtly implying that the problems portrayed in the film have been dealt with so that the audience need not trouble itself further.⁶ A second, quite different, Hollywood genre issue is the concentrated attention on the struggle between two individuals—the one good, the other evil—thus masking the systematic nature of Nazism's dehumanizing character, which did not require truly evil and sick individuals like Goeth to carry out its murders and brutality.⁷ Third, more generally, some critics object to almost any Hollywood (non-documentary) filmic treatment of the Holocaust as utilizing a medium inherently incapable of truthfully conveying the horrendous character of the Holocaust.

(5) The film shows almost nothing of the rich and varied Polish Jewish culture itself, for example in Cracow, where the film is set (and was shot).⁸ It also shows nothing of resistance on the part of Jews to their treatment. Jews are portrayed as almost entirely passive in the face of their extermination. Thus they are seen almost entirely as cultureless, historyless, victims.⁹

(6) Finally, almost any inadequacy in the film's conveying of the character of the Holocaust is magnified by the worry that *Schindler's List* will come to constitute the American image of "the Holocaust"—that few other films will now even be attempted on this subject, and those that do will find only a small audience. Only time will tell if the exact opposite effect of the film will result—that filmmakers and studios will see that serious films about the Holocaust can have a wide audience. Somewhat worrying

Letter To Editors

At Risk of Being Female

So I was reading excitedly away, gratefully underlining "The Rhetoric of Risk" [*Psychoculture*, Vol 1, No 1] and thinking hard, when I was brought to a screeching halt by the very last sentence*—a reaction no doubt intended by Iain A. Boal. The suddenness of his own rhetorical jab made me wonder whether he was speaking from the injuries of personal experience; perhaps Dr. Boal had fathered a Down's baby or an aborted one. Still, on reflection, his (possibly mean-spirited) provocation is not unknown on the left: think Christopher Hitchens. What I mean to say is that Dr. Boal, in trying to get under our skins, uncritically accepts the "at-risk"-ness of the adult population most immediately responsible for the care of Down's babies. He proposes a world for all of us "deviants" (and who could disagree with that?) by falsely opposing the victim Down's baby to the victimizer taxpayer. In so doing, he eclipses and implicitly indicts women who, fittingly, make the final decision about abortion. He thus re-

installs women right where he forgets they are—"at risk" of being female in a still sexist society (yes, I know it sounds old-fashioned, but remember that the unfashionable is not necessarily out-of-date). There are ways to raise this argument to an appropriately complicated level, for example, Michael Bérubé's new *Life as we Know It*. If, as it seems, that's what Dr. Boal wants, why does he continue in such an oppositional way?

Muriel Dimen
New York

*Editors note:

Please note, Muriel Dimen is indeed referring here to the sentence that appeared to be the closing one in Iain Boal's article, as printed, but there was a printing error. The sentence that should have been the last sentence of the text was mistakenly printed as the first sentence in the Acknowledgements section, for which we apologize sincerely. However this misprint in no way affects the issues raised in Dimen's letter.

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in this regard is that there are in fact no signs of further Hollywood-generated feature films concerning the Holocaust, though the superb *Anne Frank Remembered* did win the 1995 Academy Award for Best Documentary.

Schindler as Rescuer: An Overview

Both the film and the book have left many with a sense of bafflement about why Schindler rescued all those Jews. Some have criticized the film on this very ground: they wish for a clearer explanation of Schindler's motivation than Spielberg provides. Others have praised the film for this very reason: heroic goodness may just be inexplicable. Many viewers and reviewers see Schindler's motivation in a slightly different way: as not exactly mysterious, but ambiguous, as falling in a "gray area," somewhere between suspect and honorable.

Schindler was indeed a morally complex individual. His character as a whole embodied several dishonorable or morally questionable traits, and some distinct vices. Nevertheless, I will argue, with regard to his rescue of Jews there is little moral ambiguity in his motivation. He was a genuine moral exemplar, taking great risks for a noble end, impelled by unquestionably moral motives. To the extent that some of his vices played a role in his rescue activities, they were almost entirely subordinated to—indeed were often in service of—his nobler moral motivations to rescue.

The idea that Schindler's motives are either mysterious or morally ambiguous is misleading; both views detract from the moral challenge posed by Schindler, as by all rescuers. If his motives are seen as *mysterious*, rather than—like compassion, or human decency—familiar and unremarkable, it becomes easier to distance oneself from his example. Similarly, regarding the motives as ambiguous makes it easier to deny that goodness is present here, thus closing one's eyes to the challenge to one's own actions or character. The conceptualization of Schindler as morally ambiguous places him in a category with rescuers who showed genuine compassion for the rescued and took personal risks to shelter them, but whose actions were conditional upon being paid by the rescued (or hired by others to do so).¹⁰ I will argue that Schindler's motives are not ambiguous in this way.¹¹

Several confusions about motivation in general, about temporal variability within a single person's motivation, and about the image we have of what a heroic rescuer of endangered persons must be like contribute to this misplaced sense of mystery or moral ambiguity in Schindler's motives.

Schindler's Moral Trajectory

One source of confusion regarding Schindler's motives is how markedly they changed over time: striking

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Ruttner/Broughton

motivational change does not comport with an essentially Aristotelian picture of character as stable over one's adult life. In the early years Schindler appeared no different from any war profiteer, following the German army into Poland with the purpose of making a financial killing off the cheap labor of the captive people. He was, moreover, a member of the Nazi party, and appeared to have been a spy for the *Abwehr* (a dissident intelligence unit within the German army), though sheer opportunism rather than political conviction or patriotism appears to have motivated these involvements. Significantly, however, both the book and the film portray Schindler as unaffected by anti-semitism, and some sources suggest an interest in Jewish culture.¹² With the help of his accountant, Stern (played by Ben Kingsley in the film), Schindler began to hire Jewish workers—not, however, out of a desire to assist them but because they were especially cheap labor.

However, as the persecutions of Jews intensified, Schindler was drawn into a more substantial concern for the plight of his particular Jewish workers, or of those with whom he had some contact. This concern took him beyond a purely instrumental relationship to a burgeoning moral one. He began to protect these Jews from some of the harshest brutality and he became increasingly opposed to and alienated from the Nazi regime. In this early period (1940-1941), however, Schindler appeared to believe, as did many, that the storm would blow over, and that he would be able to make a financial killing while still protecting Jews.

A sense of moral ambiguity and "gray area" does characterize Schindler's motivation in this period. He was sheltering Jews, but he was also making money; and one is far from certain that had he been forced at that time to choose between the two aims, he would not have chosen financial success over the Jews. If one *could* be certain of the outcome of this hypothetical—*either* saving Jews *or* stopping protection of Jews when doing so risked his profits—*then* it would have been possible to declare his motives either noble or ignoble. But evidence presented in both the film and the book leaves either possibility open.

However, by the last two years of the war, Schindler's motivational orientation had distinctly and irrevocably changed and lost this ambiguity. As the life-threatening nature of the Jews' existence under Nazism became increasingly salient to him, he began to take action to protect the Jews, action that required him to sacrifice profit-making. He ultimately spent fortunes bribing various officials to allow him to continue his operation and to treat the Jewish workers the way he wished. There is no single point at which the change in the balance of these two motives (human concern and profit) took place. But it is entirely intelligible and expected that his increased involvement with his workers would lead to a stronger commitment and motivation to help. Such a process is familiar in the case of many rescuers who took initial steps to help, then found themselves more deeply involved over time, and perhaps more than they would have agreed to had they known beforehand that the increased commitment would be asked of them.¹³

By the time Schindler spent a fortune bribing German officials in the Armaments Ministry and the SS to allow him, in October 1944, to move his workers (those whose names were on the famous list of the film's title) from Cracow to Brunnlitz in Czechoslovakia, Schindler was quite aware that he had no hope of coming out of the war with anything. By the liberation in 1945, he was virtually destitute. Moreover, he took tremendous risks of personal safety, and was several times jailed, for various breaches connected with being too favorable to Jews.

Schindler's motivation in this latter period of the war seems to me unmysterious and morally unambiguous.¹⁴ He was moved by several factors. The strongest appears to be a simple concern for the welfare of the particular people in his charge, bolstered by a sense of responsibility for them stemming from his being in a position to be able to help while not being comparably endangered.¹⁵ The limitations of this sort of motive will be explored below, but the moral value of the motive in its own right is unquestionable. Concern for the welfare of others, with no ulterior motive, is a paradigm of altruistic morality.

Spielberg shows Schindler resisting this motive in himself: he eschews the gratitude of an old and disabled worker, partly because he does not want to admit that he has taken important steps down the path toward the role of protector, and partly, perhaps, because he fears that greater personal contact will lead to eliciting stronger compassion that may then constrain him. This effort of psychic resistance further confirms the presence in Schindler of the motives of human concern and personal responsibility.

What needs explaining here is not why a man such as Schindler, face to face with the horror of persecution and murder of persons to whom he is connected, would respond with common decency and a desire to save

people from that fate. The question is rather why so many other persons *failed* to have that reaction. A large part of the reason is that Nazi policies deliberately attempted to create physical, emotional, and moral distance between ordinary citizens and Jews. Propaganda defamed and dehumanized Jews. Policies progressively, but incrementally, deprived Jews of basic rights, thus declaring them less worthy. Ghettoization removed them from ordinary interaction with the non-Jewish populace. Rescue was severely penalized, with the intended result of dampening the moral impulse to see the Jew as a fellow human being, since acting on that impulse would then become so costly.

Schindler's foibles make the moral challenge to which he rose seem more like something that we ourselves might be able to attain.

Schindler's situation of daily contact with Jews as fellow human beings made this emotional and moral distancing much more difficult. Moreover, as mentioned, he lacked the personal anti-semitism that might have allowed this personal closeness to be dominated by the demonizing and dehuman-

izing propaganda (as it did in the case of many other Germans who worked closely with, and employed, Jews).¹⁶

The explanation for Schindler's actions, then, is simply compassion for those in one's personal vicinity who are in extraordinary danger and suffering. Is further explanation necessary? If it is his willingness to take risks to act on his compassion that is thought to require explanation, then in this regard Schindler in the latter part of the war period does not differ from rescuers in general, where the depth and strength of the human concern or devotion to justice supported a willingness to countenance acknowledged risk to themselves.

Even granting this account of Schindler's motivational transformation, it still remains extraordinarily unusual and unexpected for an opportunistic Nazi capitalist to become an exemplar of moral heroism. Spielberg provides a scene in the film that some viewers have latched onto as a transforming moment in Schindler's moral trajectory. In March 1943, the Germans clear the Cracow ghetto, and Schindler and his mistress happen to be out riding on a hill overlooking the scene. Schindler watches the systematic round-ups, the casual shootings, and the order-in-chaos of the herding of people into trains; his eyes light particularly on a little girl in a red coat who, wandering through the brutal scene, inexplicably manages to escape the round-up. (Later she is seen in a pile of dead bodies.)

This scene is taken directly from Keneally's book. Spielberg focuses our attention on the girl by coloring her coat a gray-red, while the film (except for the very beginning and end) is in black and white. But this is not merely a Hollywood trick, as some viewers have thought. Keneally too regards the moment as crucial for Schindler. Yet the significance differs somewhat in the two accounts. Keneally has portrayed Schindler as already a distinct possibility as a savior for the Jews.

When Schindler first meets Stern, the accountant, he passes on to Stern some intelligence that there will be a raid the next day on Jewish property in the Jewish part of Cracow (this is before the ghetto has been formed). Stern begins to see Schindler as "that rarity, the Just Goy."¹⁷ Schindler's development into the full realization of his moral potential is much more gradual in the book, though with a minor leap at this ghetto-clearing scene. Spielberg, working with the requirements and expectations of his film medium, has oversimplified by providing a single scene as a possible "explanation" for Schindler's moral transformation.

Schindler's Vices and the Meanings of "Morality"

Apart from the matter of motivational development and transformation, a confusion about the nature of virtue and vice may be masking Schindler's moral motivation and exemplariness. This concerns the various virtues and vices that make up an individual person's full character, in contrast to the specific motivations that prompt him or her to engage in a particular set of activities. Because persons, like Schindler, who saved the lives of Nazi victims accomplished such a great good, there may be a tendency to want or expect these persons to be entirely noble of character in other respects. Part of what is so fascinating about Schindler is the questionable, even sleazy, aspects of his character that remained virtually undiminished during the period of his supreme moral heroism.

The first of these vices is Schindler's lack of fidelity to his wife, Emilie. In the book, Schindler has a "mistress" and is also having an affair with his secretary. Spielberg clearly sees Schindler's infidelity as detracting from the noble image that, in the main, the director wishes to sustain. Thus he inserts a scene late in the film, after Schindler has brought his Jews back to Czechoslovakia, where he again begins to live with Emilie (who visited him in Cracow but did not remain there). In a church, Schindler pledges his fidelity to Emilie and says he will never again subject her to the humiliations she faced in Cracow. Nothing corresponds to this scene in the book, and in an interview with Emilie (presumably in the 1980's),¹⁸ she says that Oskar loved beautiful women, and there was no point in fighting it. The church scene in the film rings false. Spielberg has perhaps succumbed to an audience-pleasing imperative that contradicts his better instincts in sustaining the complexity of Schindler's character. A second, not unrelated, less-than-noble dimension of Schindler's character is his proclivity for the pleasures of a *bon vivant*. Perhaps for similar reasons as those mentioned above, Spielberg pulls back slightly (though only slightly) from Keneally's unabashed portrayal of Schindler as a sensualist and libertine seemingly quite unashamed of his devotion to the pleasures of sex, food, wine, fast cars, and silk shirts.

What is the significance of these two character foibles for an understanding of Schindler's motivation to rescue? On one level, both the sensuality and the infidelity may contribute to Schindler's seeming to be a "human being" rather than a "saint." From the

perspective of the moral impact of the film, such a reaction has one salutary effect. Sainly characters—or in any cases persons *perceived* as saintly—may be objects of admiration, but they are much less likely than someone like Schindler (who seems to share our human imperfections) to be objects of direct *emulation*. Schindler's foibles make the moral challenge to which he rose seem more like something that we ourselves might be able to attain.

At the same time there is no inconsistency whatever between being a libertine and possessing the moral motives that prompt heroically risky rescue activities such as Schindler's. Hence there is no reason grounded in the nature of those motives themselves for bafflement at someone who possesses both sets of motives. This is partly because, contrary to the claims of some moral philosophers, there is no "unity of the virtues"; the possession of one virtue does not, in general, require the possession of particular other ones. An individual can be compassionate yet dishonest, honest yet unreliable, conscientious yet cowardly. Thus Schindler can be courageous and compassionate in his response to Jews, yet unfaithful to his wife.¹⁹

We may be misled here by different understandings of "moral." On the one hand rescuing Jews under the threat of death, from unselfish motives and with considerable risk to oneself and knowledge that one will have to jettison much of what one was aiming for in life (e.g., material well-being), has to be regarded as a supreme moral accomplishment. On the other, a perfectly recognizable tradition of moral thought places sexual morality at the center of morality itself, seeing sexual fidelity within marriage, and an absence of sensuality more generally, as a *sine qua non* of someone's being a "moral person."²⁰ Indeed, this tradition informs some widely-shared locutions using the term "moral." For example, we might well find it odd and improper to say, of Schindler, "he was a very moral person." Nevertheless, and without pretending to engage in any adequate way with the differences between secular and religiously based moral traditions that lie behind these different conceptions of morality, I would suggest that on any understanding of morality (secular *or* religious) that gives a central place to the relief of human suffering at great cost and risk to the self, a moral tradition that accords Schindler's rescue activities moral exemplariness will greatly overshadow one that denies him moral excellence on the grounds of his marital infidelity and sensuality.

Personal Vices for Virtuous Ends

A third, somewhat different set of vices comprises Schindler's opportunism, his fortune-hunting in the wake of the German takeover of Poland, and his conviviality with Nazis. As the film brings out well, all these vices were entirely integral to Schindler's ability to engage in his rescue activities. That he was able to make high Nazi and military officials think him a splendid fellow and a social asset in their gatherings is part of what allowed him to keep them from cracking

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down on his enterprise.²¹ This deceptive opportunism enabled Schindler to sustain his Jewish workers at a distinctly higher level of health than Jewish workers elsewhere, and to pull strings to relocate his workers to Brunnlitz from Poland when it became clear that Plaszow would be shut down and the Jews would otherwise all be shipped to Auschwitz. Schindler's Nazi contacts and his ability to dissemble or keep up false appearances when necessary were non-virtuous motives put to virtuous ends. It is clear that Schindler himself understood them in this way.

However, the use of a vice for a virtuous end does not make the vice any less of a vice. Here we must make a distinction. In some cases rescuers who found lying and dissembling morally objectionable and distasteful nevertheless learned to engage in these practices in service of the greater good of saving lives. Magda Trocme, one of the two moral stalwarts of the oft-noted rescue activities of the French village of Le Chambon, says how difficult it was for her to learn to lie to Vichy officials, to participate in the creating of false identification papers, and the like.²² In such circumstances Magda has not come to possess the vices of being a liar, dissembler, or opportunist; because her participation in these morally questionable activities was so exclusively motivated by the desire to save lives, her character lacks the motivational structure of a true liar, dissembler, or opportunist.

Schindler is a different story. He was *already* an opportunist and a dissembler. At first he used these traits to build his financial enterprise, and, more generally, to sustain contacts that he hoped would be valuable to him in some way later. Later, when he came to put these very same vices to the goal of rescue, it was still no less true of him that he was opportunistic, lying, and manipulative. Here, in contrast to Magda Trocme, while we are grateful that Schindler possessed just the vices necessary to sustain his rescue operation under the noses of the Nazis, it remains true that these vices were dimensions of his character. In this way he is, in terms of his total character, a less admirable human being than Magda Trocme.

That having been said, there is nothing in the possession of these dishonorable traits that casts any real doubt on the virtue of Schindler's actual motivations for rescue. Some reviewers and an occasional interviewed survivor have implied that Schindler's motives were less than fully moral, *because* he possessed these vices.²³ It is true that these sleazy aspects of Schindler's character are not generally found in tandem with highly moral motives. Nevertheless, Schindler is dealing here with life or death matters. It is perfectly consistent to treat people in a manipulative manner, yet to balk at their murder and to want to do something to stop it, for no other reason than compassion for the potential victim, or belief that such murder is wrong. In fact, as Nechama Tec reports, some rescuers of Jews were themselves distinctly anti-Semitic.²⁴ If someone can dislike Jews and think they are evil, yet take personal risks to rescue them because, despite these attitudes, he

or she does not think Jews should be killed, it should be even less surprising that a manipulative, opportunistic, fortune hunter like Schindler could become a morally motivated rescuer.²⁵

To summarize, then, Schindler possessed several unsavory traits of character that render him a good deal less than a saint. Yet none of these traits counts as evidence against the genuine moral goodness of his motives for rescue, at least once these became dominant over his desire for financial profit.

Limitations to Schindler's Moral Motives

To say that Schindler's motives were unquestionably moral ones is not to say that they were among the highest or most admirable forms of moral motive. There is a plurality of types of moral motive, not all equally admirable. Schindler's motives were in important ways quite limited in their moral scope and significance. This is brought out tellingly in a scene in the film to which nothing corresponds in the book, a scene that has rightly come in for a good deal of criticism. The war has just ended and Schindler is planning to leave his workers to find refuge with the Americans, rather than with the nearby Russian troops. The workers give him a ring in token of their gratitude, and he breaks down crying with remorse at having not saved more Jews. The moral assumption implied by this outburst—that Schindler was concerned about *all* Jews, that he was motivated by a principle of concern for all—is at odds with his moral motivation as portrayed in the rest of the film. His primary motivation has been compassion for Jews who work for him, and, somewhat secondarily, for Jews he knows of (e.g., relatives of his workers, Jews mentioned by those close to him as being in need, employees of a nearby uniform factory). While Schindler has shown some recognition of the plight of Jews across Europe, he has not given a hint of rising to the level of moral motivation of, say Andre Trocme, the pastor of Le Chambon (and husband of Magda Trocme), who set out very deliberately and systematically to make Le Chambon a haven of refuge for any Jewish or other refugee who might be capable of making their way there.²⁶ Andre Trocme and other rescuers had a breadth of moral vision and sweep of moral concern that Schindler appeared distinctly to lack.

Perhaps the presence of this emotional breakdown scene merely betokens one of Spielberg's lapses into crude sentimentality, and manifests a Hollywood sensibility of which Spielberg is one of the great contemporary exemplars. Or possibly Spielberg may yet again have succumbed to a temptation to make Schindler seem more morally noble and heroic than he actually was. A final possibility is that the scene was included for a worthier purpose—to remind the viewer, at precisely the moment that, cinematically (if not in actual fact), the 1100 "Schindler Jews" have decisively been spared, that millions more were sent to their deaths, and no one was there to save them.

Whatever the reason, Keneally's (and, generally, Spielberg's) treatment of Schindler preserves the

important moral truth that genuinely moral motives can come in very localized and limited forms. In exceptional circumstances, such as the threatening of life on a mass scale, such limited motives can prompt extraordinarily good and noble action. Yet others may have motives, even in the very same circumstances, that are more admirable, and more worthy of emulation and awe.

Schindler's moral limitations—and the limitations of the film as well—should not be denied. But aside from the thousands who have seen it, the film is being used in hundreds of high schools as a teaching tool.²⁷ It behooves us, therefore, to highlight the salutary moral lessons that can be derived from Schindler's life as depicted in the film—that people are capable of moral change and may possess moral resources for goodness of which they are not aware until placed in a situation that calls them forth, that human compassion and concern can be powerful human forces, that a single individual's efforts can make a difference, and that one need not be a saint to be capable of moral excellence.²⁸

I would like to thank the staff of Facing History, and especially Phyllis Goldstein, for assistance in locating much of the material used in this article. I am grateful also to Sarah Blun-Smith for comments on an earlier draft, and to John Broughton for his superb editing.

1. The most important scholarly studies of rescue from this period are Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Samuel and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

2. I retain the commonly used term "Holocaust" to refer to the Nazi murder and attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The term is somewhat problematic, however: (a) it refers only, or almost only, to the murder of Jews, not to the many other groups (Romany [Gypsies], homosexuals, communists, Poles) also brutalized and murdered; (b) the use of the term as a definite description ("the Holocaust") can be taken, perhaps unfairly, to imply that other mass murders of distinct social groups (such as the Turks of Armenians in WWI, Khmer Rouge of other Cambodians in the mid-70's, Serbs in Bosnia from 1992 to the present, Tutsis of Hutus in Rwanda in 1994, etc.) are not so horrible; (c) a term that implies a kind of natural disaster masks the role of human agency in bringing about the murders.

3. Other popular Hollywood films dealing with Holocaust-related subjects are *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), and *Sophie's Choice* (1982). However, none of these deal nearly as centrally and extensively with the range of horrors that *Schindler's List* takes on.

4. Gertrud Koch, p. 29, and J. Hoberman, p. 30, in "Myth, Movie, and Memory," roundtable discussion in *Village Voice* (29 March 1994); Jason Epstein, "A Dissent on 'Schindler's List,'" *New York Review of Books* (21 April 1994), 65.

5. Hoberman, "Myth, Movie, and Memory," 31.

6. Koch, "Myth, Movie, and Memory," 30f.

7. Leonard Fein, "Schindler's Tilt," *Jewish Forward* (24 December 1993)

8. Hoberman, "Myth, Movie, and Memory," 30

9. Eli Hecht, "When Will Jews Let It Rest?" *Los Angeles Times* (2 Jan 1994).

10. The category of paid rescuers is itself internally complex. There is a significant moral difference between, for example, those who agreed to charge a certain amount but then, once the rescued Jews were in their charge, exploited this situation to charge more; and those who say they would have engaged in the rescue for nothing but simply did not have the personal resources to cover the expenses of the rescuees, and so charged the rescuees only an amount strictly necessary for that purpose. For discussion of the category of paid rescuers, see Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, chap. 5.

11. In this respect, it is significant that Yad Vashem, the Israeli memorial that honors rescuers of Jews as "Righteous Ones of the Nations of the World," excludes persons who took money, but chose to honor Schindler.

12. Herbert Steinhouse, "The Real Oskar Schindler," *Saturday Night* (April 1994), 43. Steinhouse's article was written in 1949 but was never able to find a publisher; it was based on interviews with Schindler himself, as well as with Stern. See also Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's List* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 48.

13. This motivational truth holds only for the most part, not as an ironclad rule. Many rescuers did ultimately turn out people whom they had helped over a long period of time because, for whatever reason, they came to feel that the risk was too great for them to sustain.

14. If I am right in seeing Schindler's motives as going through a distinct, if incremental, change over time, and if such a scenario applies to other rescuers as well, this throws into question Eva Fogelman's claim in her recent book *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) that "the act of rescue was an expression of the values and beliefs in the innermost core of a person. It is a core nurtured in childhood, which came to expression during the Holocaust in the act of rescue, and then continued in the postwar years" (xviii). Unless this statement is taken as the tautology that if a person does something at some point in his life, he or she must have had the potential from the beginning for developing into the sort of person who would do that thing, then Schindler is a distinct counterexample to it. The moral nobility he displayed in the war was, as far as we know, not evidenced in his childhood, nor did his behavior after the war display a comparable moral energy or commitment.

15. In *Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985), Robert Goodin argues that a sense of responsibility toward those vulnerable to our actions and choices is the fundamental motive or principle that should underlie moral action toward other persons.

16. By the end of the war, a second component of Schindler's motivation was a hatred for Nazism, and perhaps an associated sense of shame at being German. One expression of this is that Schindler makes clear that he does not want his shell-casing factory in Brännlitz to make one shell or casing that can be used by the German army. To the extent that this motive is a principled one consisting in resistance to evil, it is certainly a moral one; yet it appeared to play a secondary role, compared to compassion and concern for particular Jews, in Schindler's engaging in rescue activities.

17. Keneally, *Schindler's List*, 68. Stern plays a far more significant moral role in the book, a role only hinted at in the film. Especially in the early years of the war, he served as a kind of moral mentor and conscience to Schindler. More generally, and in keeping with the individual-centered perspective typical in Hollywood film, the film gives short shrift to the collective character of Schindler's rescue activities (as it does the systemic character of Nazi oppression). Many Jews in the leadership of the Emalia factory themselves showed extraordinary courage and dedication in helping Schindler to organize the running of the factory, to prevent killings and brutalizations of workers, to bring more Jews into the factory, and to help with the rescue effort more generally. Steinhouse, in "The Real Oskar Schindler," speaks of

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a circle of Jews in the factory who sustained Schindler's contact with the underground resistance, and were part of his rescue activities.

18. The interview is contained in a BBC documentary broadcast on WPIX in New York as part of a larger program called "Schindler: The Real Story" (date unknown).

19. In the BBC documentary interview, Emilie Schindler mentions some other vices of Oskar's—boastfulness, childishness, laziness, and undependability about money. Leaving aside the question of Emilie's full reliability about the personal character of a former husband toward whom she maintains some bitterness, none of these traits is actually inconsistent with a rescuer's being morally motivated.

20. I read somewhere of a Christian conservative who praised the film but said that "moral viewers" would be turned away by the scenes of explicit sexuality, which were actually very few and minor.

21. A striking example of Schindler's success at maintaining deeply deceptive appearances is that Amon Goeth, the brutal commandant of the Plaszow labor camp, who engaged in random summary killings of his inmates, wanted to call Oskar, who considered him an enemy, as a character witness at his trial for war crimes.

22. Magda Trocme and Le Chambon are mentioned in virtually every account of rescue, and are treated at length in Philip Hallie's *Le Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). See p. 126 for Magda's feelings about the deception she had to practice.

23. Hecht, "When Will Jews Let It Rest?" Mr. Kunstlinger, a late Schindler rescuee (added to the list at the end, and not a Schindler worker) said "To me he was a guy who made money" (from WPIX/BBC "Schindler: The Real Story")

24. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, chap. 6.

25. I have not discussed another dishonorable motive, what James Young calls "Schindler's hunger for power" ("Myth, Movie, and Memory," 25). I do not think that being somewhat enamored of one's own role as a savior of lives (a characterization applicable to Schindler) can be equated with an autonomously existing desire or hunger for power, in which those one rescues are merely a means to satisfy that desire. While the former motive probably played some role in *sustaining* Schindler's rescue activities, it could not have been its basic motivation, as it is dependent on a concern for the rescuee's lives for their own sake.

26. For more on Andre and Magda Trocme, see reference in footnote 22 and this author's "Moral Exemplars: Reflections on Schindler, the Trocmes, and Others," in Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). The current article draws on some ideas from the latter chapter.

27. Spielberg and Universal studios plan to, and have begun to, send the film to every high school in the United States, and have designated the curriculum development group Facing History and Ourselves to prepare teaching material—called *A Guide to the Film 'Schindler's List'* (with a foreword by Spielberg)—to accompany the film.

28. I omit here the many other moral lessons to be derived from a study of *Schindler's List* and of the era it depicts—lessons about genocide, racism, intolerance, totalitarianism, the need for individual responsibility in the face of injustice, the pressure of group conformity, and the like—that are so assiduously conveyed in Facing History's material on Schindler, and more fully in that organization's semester-long curriculum unit on Nazism and the Holocaust.