

RICHARD RORTY AND THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS

Norman Geras

In the early hours of 2nd February 1945, several hundred Russian prisoners escaped from Mauthausen. Apart from the killing centres in Poland, Mauthausen, not far from Linz in Upper Austria, was the most brutal of camps in the Nazi concentrationary system, those forced to labour in its stone quarry having a life expectancy of one to three months. The escapees were from the remnant (by then a mere 570) of some 4,700 Soviet officers sent to Mauthausen less than a year before, who were being subjected to a regime even harsher than the norm there and aimed specifically at destroying them all. They were dying at a rate of between twenty and thirty every day. Some of these men, once they had got beyond the outer wall, were too weak to go further, and more than half of them were caught and summarily killed during the same day. In the end only a dozen are known to have made good their escape and survived.

In anticipation of the advance of the Red Army, these Russian prisoners had placed their hopes in finding succour among the civilian population, but in vain. Their recapture was widely witnessed, in fright and sympathetic horror or with ghoulish curiosity, and the SS and local Nazi party encouraged citizen participation in the manhunt. It was forthcoming: the fugitives, many of them begging for their lives, were simply slaughtered.

In general, residents of the area who were approached by the fleeing men to shelter them, declined under public threat of lethal reprisals. Maria and Johann Langthaler, however – with four of their children living with them – did not. Taking in one man who came to their door, she persuaded her husband, at first alarmed at the awful risk, that they should harbour him. They then also took in a second man. Both of these hid there at the Langthalers for three months until the end of the war. We have Maria Langthaler's explanation of why she acted as she did. She was obligated as a Christian, she said, to help when someone was in need: "The Lord God is for the whole world, not only for the Germans. It is a community and there one must help. I did not ask them to which party they belong, I asked nothing at all; that made no difference to me. Only because they were human beings."

Only because they were human beings. Although the men she took into her home were in fact Russian prisoners of war, I let this story symbolize a continent-wide phenomenon of that era: against a background of the persecution and massacre of the Jews of Europe, in which very many Europeans were complicit as participants whilst very many more stood by in fearful or indifferent passivity, some—not nearly as many, but still, more than just a handful—were yet willing to take risks, often terrible risks, in their efforts to harbour and rescue those in danger. I want to address here the question of how common amongst these rescuers was the sort of reason voiced by Maria Langthaler.

I

I start from the contrary hypothesis: that it was not very common. This is the view of Richard Rorty, which I shall report first at some length. Rorty begins his essay, 'Solidarity', as follows:

If you were a Jew in the period when the trains were running to **Auschwitz**, your chances of being hidden by your gentile neighbours were greater if you lived in Denmark or Italy than if you lived in Belgium. A common way of describing this difference is by saying that many Danes and Italians showed a sense of human solidarity which many Belgians lacked.

Asserting that the basic explanatory notion in this connection is that of being 'one of us', Rorty goes on to argue that this notion carries less force when its sense is 'one of us human beings' than it does when referring to some narrower grouping, such as 'a comrade in the movement' or a 'fellow Catholic'. Typically, he claims, 'it contrasts with a "they" which is also made up of human beings – the wrong sort of human beings.'

Consider. . . those Danes and those Italians. Did they say, about their Jewish neighbours, that they deserved to be saved because they were fellow human beings? Perhaps sometimes they did, but surely they would usually, if queried, have used **more parochial terms** to explain why they were taking risks to protect a given Jew – for example, that this particular Jew was a fellow Milanese, or a fellow Jutlander, or a fellow member of the same union or profession, or a fellow **boogie** player, or a fellow parent of small children. . . . [Or] Consider . . . the attitude of contemporary American liberals to the unending hopelessness and misery of the young blacks in American cities. Do we say that these people must be helped because they are our fellow human beings? We may, but it is much more persuasive, morally as well as politically, to describe them as our fellow Americans – to insist that it is outrageous that an American should live without hope.

Our sense of solidarity, Rorty then says again, is strongest with collectivities 'smaller and more local than the human race' and 'imaginative identification' easier; whereas "'because she is a human being" is a weak, unconvincing explanation of a generous action."

I address myself elsewhere to some general philosophical issues raised by Rorty's argument. My concern here is only with the hypothesis about the rescuers' explanations of their **actions**.³ I shall take it as he presents it. I shall focus, that is to say, on the question of their motives. But I need to guard, then, against one possible misunderstanding, as I now briefly do.

Let us extend Rorty's comparison to cover the Netherlands. Where only 56 per cent of the Jews in Belgium survived the 'Final Solution', as compared with 99 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively, of the Jews of Denmark and Italy, the greatest catastrophe outside eastern Europe was actually that visited on the Dutch Jews. More than 70 per cent of them perished. This comparison now secretes a fact of some apparent relevance to the question to be pursued. No more than 10 per cent of the Jews living in Belgium at the start of the war were Belgian citizens. The rest were recent immigrants or refugees. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, these proportions were almost exactly reversed, only 10 per cent of the Jews there being refugees. A considerably smaller proportion of the Dutch than of the Belgian Jews was saved, in other words, notwithstanding any advantage the former might be thought to have had on account of longer established citizenship and social integration.

This fact however, though certainly relevant to Rorty's reflections, is not by itself decisive – and not only because of some further hypothesis we might venture as to modes of 'imaginative identification' by Belgians which reached across the divide of citizenship. The point is that such comparisons simplify a very complex historical issue. Identification with, and effective aid and support, to the Jews on the part of any given national population in Europe was only one of the factors governing their fate. Some others were the type and degree, if any, of German political and administrative control in each country; the time at which the Nazis moved decisively to deport its Jews to the death sites and the military prospect then – how soon a German defeat in the war might be anticipated; the response also of the Jews themselves in each country; the accessibility or otherwise of a secure haven (as the Danes had in nearby Sweden); and still other things beside. There is by now a large analytical literature on all this.⁴ To focus on the reasons of individual rescuers is to abstract only one feature from a much larger picture. With that clarification made, I shall myself adopt the same focus nonetheless. If the rescuers' solidarity and their motives for it constituted only one factor in the outcome, they were an important factor. And there are reasons I shall come to presently for caring about what their motives were.

The striking thing, however, is how abstract, even within that partial focus, how obviously speculative, Rorty's thesis about the rescuers is. 'Perhaps', he suggests, they occasionally said something like this; but 'surely' they more often said something like that. These rescuers were real people and there is a body of writing about them, though in-depth study is mostly quite recent. An early piece is worth mentioning. In 1955, Philip Friedman, a pioneer of what is now called Holocaust research, published a short essay in which, after referring to rescuers who were activated by love, friendship, association through work or politics, he went on to speak also of the many whose motives were 'purely humanitarian' and who 'extended

their help indiscriminately to all Jews in danger.' As a prime example of this latter kind of rescue, **Friedman** detailed some of the efforts made in different countries to save thousands of Jewish children.⁶ He was **writing**, it is true, at a time when it was rarer than it is now for scholars of progressive outlook to put in question the viability of a 'universalistic attitude': and his talk of purely humanitarian motives could be thought to be mere imputation, the construction of a pre-'post-modern' mind. But Friedman's example of the rescue of children may give one pause on this score.

Rescued children did not generally fall into such categories as 'comrade in the movement', 'fellow member of the same union or profession' or 'fellow bocce player'. They may, of course, have been fellow Milanese, Jutlanders, Belgians and the like, or even the children of fellow members of one parochial category or another. But it seems a nice point whether risking your life to save a child – or, as it was frequently, children – requires a more difficult act of sympathetic identification than does taking that risk for a fellow Milanese, bocce player or whatever. In a book he published two years later, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, Philip **Friedman** told the story of another Maria, a Mother Maria. A Russian woman (born Elizabeth Pilenko) who had settled in France and become a nun in the Russian Orthodox church, during the Nazi occupation she was at the centre of a clandestine organization rescuing Jews, amongst them many children. She was eventually captured and interrogated by the Gestapo. Her interrogator at one point put it to Mother Maria's mother, who was with her, that she had educated her daughter stupidly; the daughter only helped Jews. 'This is not true,' the old woman is said to have responded. 'She is a Christian who helps those in need. She would even help you, if you were in trouble.' Mother Maria died at **Ravensbruck**.⁷

I have no way of knowing, naturally, how well Mother Maria's mother understood her daughter's heart. But the story as told may suggest a counter-hypothesis to Rorty's. Children are only young humans. They are for a greater or lesser time dependent on adults, often vulnerable, a repository of hope and of much else. Can they not stand as a token in this context of the other routes to protective empathy there may be within the shared experience of human beings than just belonging to some smaller, exclusive community, whether concretized by locale and language, or functionally, or by political or religious belief? If the route may go via a child's vulnerability or its hope, or via the hope on its behalf, then so, surely, may it go via any person's anguish or desperate need; via any qualities indeed that transcend particular communities by being just common modes, so to say, of the human condition. But I may seem, now, to speculate in my own turn.

In neither his essay nor his book did **Friedman** give much in the way of direct quotation from rescuers themselves as to why they acted as they did. But his judgements were clearly based on a wide familiarity with actual

cases throughout Europe and the sources of this familiarity were documented by him. On the other hand, what Rorty says on the subject gives every appearance of being only a casual example. There are reasons all the same, of both a general and a historically more specific kind, why his thesis may be seen by many as a plausible one. Generally, the theme of limited human altruism has a long pedigree already and there is enough evidence, goodness knows, of the realities which have inspired it. It has not just been confected out of thin air. Then, too, the taking of risks and making of sacrifices on behalf of other people plainly is often based on bonds of emotional or social contiguity. More specific to the cultural context in which we presently move is the fact that universalist viewpoints now sometimes get rather short shrift. Rorty demurs at having his ideas **identified** lock, stock and barrel with post-modernist thought: but there is no doubt that what he has to say on this matter chimes in with **anti**-universalist philosophical attitudes which post-modernism has lately made fashionable. These seem to me to be good enough grounds for **looking** at his hypothesis in a serious way, mere casual example or not.

There is another reason for doing so. It concerns just what it was the rescuers did, what they are an example of. Although they tend in their own explanation to make little of what they did, treating it as the most obvious or natural thing, a simple duty and so on, the fact is that all around them others were acting otherwise. The rescuers present an example of uncommon generosity and moral courage in a murderous time, and it is not surprising if they assume for many writers the figure of heroes, a source of some redeeming optimism in a context yielding not very much of that.

Something should be said, as well, about the specific quality of their heroism, given the word's close association with military and, as it were, dragon-slaying exploits. While the stories of Jewish rescue do certainly include much that was extraordinary and dramatic, they also attest to a more mundane, resilient **kind** of heroism: drawn out and trying, burdened with the minutiae and costs of domestic life, a caring-for heroism, though not any less dangerous for that. It involved, over long periods, the getting and preparing of additional food, coping with extra laundry, having to carry away waste buckets ~~from~~ the hiding places to which those being sheltered were sometimes **confined**. And it involved just being, daily, at close quarters with them, attempting to maintain harmony under pressure. While strong affective ties between rescuers and rescued were often nurtured through the experiences they shared, people hidden could, like anybody else, turn out to be difficult **or worse** than difficult. In the words of one rescuer, 'Just because you have risked your life for somebody doesn't mean that that person is **decent**.'" For well-known reasons, and as male rescuers themselves emphasize, these burdens tended to fall more heavily on women, with men away from the house at work or otherwise out in the public domain, sometimes engaged in rescue and resistance activity

elsewhere. They were burdens carried by individuals and families within an existence, as one Dutch scholar has put it, 'that was threatened every day, every hour, every **minute**.'¹⁰ The penalties for sheltering Jews were extreme, often final. In Poland even the children of people caught doing so might not be spared."

It seems at least incautious to draw advantage from this sort of moral example on the basis of no more than a 'surely'. Co-opting it willy-nilly to the side of one's argument is the less important aspect of the thing. The more important aspect is what that argument might then suggest about those who endured such risks on behalf of others. I don't want to get too heavy about this, but directly preceding Rorty's thesis on the rescuers and their reasons, a distinction is explicated by him (between 'us' and 'them') in terms of a notion of 'the wrong sort of human beings'. There are, of course, contexts where notions like that – 'another class of people', 'not my kind of **folk**' and so on – can be uttered more or less harmlessly or in a humanly understandable way. But Rorty's immediate context has to do with what reasons rescuers might have had for feeling that people in danger 'deserved to be saved'. If it is indeed true that most rescuers were moved by **anti-universalist** impulses, then this is something we need properly to register. The real sources of their behaviour are certainly worth trying to understand, unobstructed by myth or mere phrases. On the other hand, unless it is true that they were moved by such impulses, Rorty's suggestion may unintentionally dishonour them.

II

Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, has sought for more than three decades now, by a law of 1953 of the Israeli parliament, to identify and give due recognition to these people – under the honorific, 'Righteous Among the Nations'. This title is awarded on the basis of survivor testimony and other documentation, and each of those so recognized may plant a tree bearing his or her name on an avenue commemorating them all at Yad Vashem. The criteria which have evolved to cover the award are that it is for the carrying out of, or extending of aid in, an act of rescue; which was at personal risk; and without monetary **reward**.¹² To date more than nine thousand people have been recognized as 'Righteous Among the Nations', that figure not including the honour bestowed, exceptionally, on the Danish nation as a whole for its collective rescue of the Jews of Denmark." Scholarly and more general interest in the recipients and in others like them (some of whom have declined to be honoured, disavowing any special virtue) has been slower to emerge. But there is now something of a literature on the subject. On several issues this literature – or such of it as I am familiar with, anyway

– is inconclusive or not very illuminating. It can be reviewed, nevertheless, for what it does reveal.

There has been an interest in how far, if at all, rescuer behaviour can be related to differences of social position, gender, religious and political affiliation, family background, personal character and moral belief. To start with a local point, of the eleven hundred or so Jews who survived the war in hiding in Berlin, most, according to Yehuda Bauer, found refuge in the working class sections of the city. Moshe **Bejski**, who was a member of the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous, formed the more general impression from his years of work on it that, though rescuers came from all sectors of the population, the majority of them were from 'the lower **classes**'.¹⁴ But there are also studies, on the other hand, including the two most thorough of recent works on this subject, that indicate a fairly even spread in terms of class and professional status. From her research on Polish rescuers, reported in her book *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, the sociologist Nechama **Tec** concluded that class was 'a weak predictor of Jewish rescue'. She found the numbers of both middle class and working class rescuers to be approximately par for the proportions of these two categories in the overall population; whilst, relative to their numbers, intellectuals were somewhat more, and peasants somewhat less, apt to give Jews shelter. Similarly, in *The Altruistic Personality*, a study of rescuers from several European countries, S. P. and P. M. Oliner report a quite even distribution in terms of occupational status. They suggest in this connection that 'economic resources. . . were not a critical factor influencing the decision to **rescue**.'¹⁵

In the essay I have already cited, Philip **Friedman** says that women, more easily moved emotionally than men, played an important role in rescue activity; and another author tells us that '[i]t was often women who were faced with the initial all-important decisions as to whether or not to take a stranger into their kitchens and into their homes. . . .' The story of Maria Langthaler may come back to mind here. However, there are also studies of aid to German Jews from which it seems that fewer women than men may have been involved in it. In general there appears not to have been, as yet, enough detailed investigation of the gender aspects of this issue to enable any firm conclusions to be **drawn**.¹⁶

So it continues. According to Yehuda Bauer again, left-wing groups were on the whole inclined to help Jewish victims of Nazism. This is confirmed in some sort by **Tec** for the case of Polish rescuers: amongst those who were politically involved, most of the rescuers in her study were communists and socialists. On the other hand, the politically involved were themselves a minority relative to rescuers of no political affiliation – a pattern reported also by the Oliners from their wider study. And **Tec** records non-leftists as well, albeit a minority, amongst her politically affiliated rescuers. The Oliners' categorization is different here but implies

a smaller proportion (amongst the 'political' rescuers) specifically of the left: of the minority of rescuers in their study who were politically affiliated (21 per cent), the majority belonged to democratic parties, not distinguished as between left and other, but only a minority of them to parties described as of the 'economic left'."

As for religion, the research all points towards the same broad picture. Many rescuers were religious, and many rescuers were not. They were devout Christians of all denominations, people of a more general, less attached kind of faith, humanists, atheists. Because of long-standing traditions of anti-semitism within it, Christianity could dispose its adherents against helping Jews – though a few anti-semites did help, their prejudices notwithstanding – and, through its ethical teachings, it could also dispose them towards helping Jews. There is some consensus, in fact, amongst researchers that it was the moral content of religious teaching that was primary with most of the rescuers who do cite their religion as a central motivating impulse.¹⁸

An interim observation may perhaps be made before we proceed further. The findings so far summarized confirm an impression gained from more **general**, popular accounts of rescue activity. In one sense, obviously, there were too few rescuers. They made up a very small proportion of the European populations to which they belonged. However, there were enough of them in each of the categories we have been considering – enough women and men, enough workers, peasants, middle-class people and intellectuals, enough believers and non-believers, enough communists and liberals – and there were, a fortiori, enough **non-rescuers** as well within the same categories, for the question under discussion here to be pertinent across all the categories. What were the reasons of those (men, women, intellectuals, Christians, etc.) who risked their **lives**?¹⁹

The existing research has also concerned itself with other, broadly characterological, kinds of indicator. It has sought to discover if there might be clues to the rescuers' conduct in the temperaments, types of personality or childhood influences discernible amongst them. An early study, not completed owing to lack of funds, has been influential in directing subsequent researchers towards certain questions. In an essay published in 1970, Perry London reported three impressions derived from his unfinished study: a significant sense amongst the rescuers interviewed of being socially marginal, of standing at odds with or apart from the surrounding community in some way; then, a spirit of adventurousness, evident from the lives of many of them even prior to their rescue activity; finally, an intense identification with a parental model of moral conduct – with no apparent pattern, here, relating to **gender**.²⁰ Later work, by Douglas Huneke, and by Samuel Oliner (as relayed by him in articles preceding the Altruistic Personality study aforementioned), supported

London on the finding of social marginality; as did Nechama **Tec's** book, though under the description she preferred of 'separateness' or 'individuality', in which she merged London's categories of social marginality and adventurousness." Others too (Huneke, Samuel Oliner, Coopersmith) have fallen in with London's impressions on adventurousness – or at any rate 'confidence' – as they have on the strong parental moral influence well."

However, there are contrary indications once again, most strongly with regard to social marginality. In a study of Dutch rescuers, Lawrence Baron did not find a high proportion of socially marginal individuals; and this result is repeated across several countries by the latest and most comprehensive Oliner study, which thereby contradicts his own earlier suggestions on the point. The finding of *The Altruistic Personality* is that 'the overwhelming majority of rescuers (80 percent) had a sense of belonging to their community', a proportion which was almost identical to that found in the comparative sample of non-rescuers."

As to London's other two tentative impressions, although there is no precise or detailed data to set against them so far as I am aware, there are certainly counter-impressions – and from writers as well placed in terms of their knowledge of actual cases. **Tec**, whose other findings, as we have seen, agree with London's, demurs over just how general **among** rescuers was the identification with parental values. The family could, but also need not, be the reference point. Rescuers' values sometimes originated independently, from religious or political sources. And Mordecai Paldiell at Yad Vashem, who is sceptical of these correlations in their entirety, puts in question both the generalization about parental identification and that about adventurousness and the like. For each generalization, as for most such, he argues, there are counter-examples aplenty to go with the many **examples**.²⁴ With respect to these two generalizations, in any case, it seems appropriate to ask what we would have discovered even were they to be confirmed. It could hardly be surprising if people who took great risks on behalf of others did score higher on 'adventurousness' or 'confidence' than people at large. (It should be registered though, at the same time, that most rescuers do not present themselves as fearless or inordinately bold. From what they say, they had just the sort of feelings you and I can imagine having in a situation of grave risk.) Equally, since one important source of moral education clearly is parental influence, it should not be too startling if a fair to good proportion of the Righteous do profess something like the identification reported by Perry London. The same, I think, goes for the finding of Douglas Huneke that rescuers in his study came out well on 'hospitality'.

How common was it for rescuers to be acquainted – as friends, lovers, neighbours, colleagues – with the Jews they helped? I have not found a precise answer to this question and it is unlikely anybody knows it.

Because people do often go out of their way for those they like or love, cherish, and so on, one would expect there to have been such cases in significant number, and there were. They are emphasized in some of this literature. In his earlier articles, Samuel Oliner focuses on them, both in summarizing Coopersmith's uncompleted work and on his own behalf. He estimates that perhaps as many as 75 per cent of those rescued were previously known to their rescuers or belonged to the same social network as they did. Reporting this estimate Lawrence Baron, too, encourages the inference that prior relationship may have been the more typical case. But Baron himself cites a study (by **Wolfson**) according to which, in a group of Germans who **helped** Jews between 1938 and 1945, only a few had been friends with **those** they **saved**.²⁶ And in general the **notion** that prior relationship was the most frequent case seems to have been formed impressionistically. Where there are specific data – and from studies involving hundreds of both rescuers and rescued – the picture comes out different.

In Nechama Tec's Polish study, a minority of the Jews rescued reported having been helped by friends. More than half were protected by strangers: 51 per cent, as compared with 19 and 30 per cent, respectively, by friends and acquaintances. Similarly, a minority of her rescuers helped only friends; an 'overwhelming majority' helped total strangers or mere acquaintances, the distribution strongly tilted towards the former. The Oliners' *Altruistic Personality* project reveals the same thing: 'More than half had no pre-war acquaintance with any of the Jews they helped. Almost 90 per cent helped at least one Jewish stranger.'" Even in terms of more general familiarity and contact, these two studies indicate large numbers of rescuers without previous ties with Jews. According to the Oliners, more than 40 per cent of their rescuers had no Jewish friends, and more than 65 per cent no Jewish co-workers. Of Tec's rescuers 20 per cent had no ties of any kind with **Jews**.²⁸ It is not perhaps surprising in the light of all this that **Tec** should say about the attitude prevailing amongst them, 'Anyone in need qualified for **help**.'²⁹

Or is it surprising? For we are brought back by this to the hypothesis with which we began. Richard Rorty, we saw, reckons on the likelihood of parochial identifications and commitments having been more typical than universalist ones amongst people who risked **their** lives on behalf of Jews. Others may well reckon otherwise. They may reckon that universalist commitments are exactly what you would expect to find amongst them. However this may be, here finally we do come upon something on which there is near unanimity in the literature under review. In an area of research where, as I have tried to show, the findings are very various, at odds with one another, inconclusive; or else are just indicative of a diversity of rescuer belief, as on religion – in this area the commentators speak with respect to one point in practically one voice. It is a universalist voice.

Moshe **Bejski** believes 'the humanitarian motivation which dictates a charitable attitude toward one's fellow man' to have been dominant amongst the numerous considerations that moved rescuers. **André Stein** concludes his book about Dutch rescuers, 'what [they] seem to have in common is a direct link with their fellow humans, regardless of who those humans are. They see the suffering, and . . . they take action.' From a study of French Catholics who aided Jews, Eva Fleischner could isolate no single common motive other than 'the conviction, shared by all, that Jews must be helped because they were victims – fellow human beings in need'. Kristen Monroe and her co-authors found amongst the rescuers they interviewed a 'perception of themselves as one with all humankind', 'part of a shared humanity'. In connection with parental models of moral conduct, Douglas Huneke refers to the religious teachings and 'humanistic perspectives' imparted to the rescuers he interviewed. 'They had been taught,' he says, 'to value other human beings.' Or they knew, as he also says, how to contain their prejudices, and he gives a sort of limit case of this, of a rescuer who believed that the Jews may have brought their suffering upon themselves: by declining to forsake Judaism for Christianity; because they had crucified the Christ; and so forth. Shocked by the suggestion that her views might be seen as a justification for Nazi aims, this woman went on to say, 'But the Jews are human beings. No one has the right to kill people because of what they **believe**.'³³

Samuel Oliner, even in the earlier articles highlighting cases of people with a prior social link to those they helped, does not neglect to pick out as one of several key motives amongst rescuers, 'their love of humanity'. He speaks of them, also, as having been reared in an environment emphasizing 'a universal sense of justice'. Subsequently, he and Pearl Oliner report the finding of their *Altruistic Personality* study, that a large majority of rescuers emphasized the ethical meaning for them of the help they gave: some of these in terms of the value of equity or fairness; more of them in terms of the value of care; but in any case with a sense of responsibility common amongst them that was 'broadly inclusive in character, extending to all human beings.' In fact, the **Oliners'** figures give half of all rescuers as owing to 'a universalistic view of their ethical obligations' – this as compared with 15 per cent moved by a desire to assist friends. Nechama **Tec**, for her part, gives as many as 95 per cent of rescuers from her study as ascribing their decision to help to simple 'compassion for Jewish suffering' (against 36 per cent to bonds of friendship and 27 per cent to religious convictions). They displayed, she says, a 'universalistic perception of the needy'. And Mordecai Paldiell postulates an innate human altruism which, weakened by societal influences of one kind and another, can be suddenly activated 'in order to uphold the principle of the sanctity of life'."

I now propose two more – although competing – hypotheses. I shall call them the 'naïve' hypothesis and the 'sceptical' hypothesis. Each responds

differently to the question of what one is to make of the broad consensus just documented. The naive hypothesis, which is mine, is this. If so many who are familiar with actual rescuers concur on this one point regarding the motives prevalent amongst them, it is likely to be because a 'universalistic attitude' was indeed general, contrary to Rorty's speculation. The commentators' judgements, so to say, mirror the explanations of the people about whom those judgements are made. The sceptical hypothesis, on the other hand, I construct merely by anticipation, and it is as follows. Well, of course, this is just what the commentators would say – in an intellectual culture saturated by universalist grand narratives, essentialist concepts of 'human nature' and the like."

We need perhaps, then, to give some attention to the voice of the rescuers themselves. That is what I next undertake.

III

I have not, it should at once be said, interviewed any of the people about to make an appearance here. I have only read of them. Nevertheless, if from the literature I have managed to consult one leaves aside a certain volume of quotation not attributed to specific individuals, a sample of several dozen rescuers can be assembled, all of them identified by name, who tell something of their stories and something of their reasons." Obviously, this assembly is not governed by any scientific sampling method. I tread, possibly, on thin ice. But I venture to say all the same that, unless by a freak chance an altogether odd collection of rescuers has been thrown before me, the naive hypothesis looks pretty good. I will go further. It is not very easy to find people – from some eighty of them – who say the sort of thing, or at any rate just the sort of thing, that **Rorty** surmises rescuers usually said.

Here are Arnold Douwes and Seine Otten, two close friends interviewed together. They were part of a network of people in the town of Nieuwlande in the Netherlands, who provided shelter to hundreds of Jews. Otten recalls his wife's saying, 'we should try to save as many as we can.' In fact, she and he hid fifty Jews in all during the period of the Nazi occupation. Douwes, though not himself Jewish, was arrested early on for wearing the yellow star. His role in rescue activity came to include attending to the many needs of Jews in hiding – for food, money, false papers and so on – and searching the countryside to find people willing to take them in. 'It wasn't a question', he says, 'of why we acted. The question is why things weren't done by others. You could do nothing else; it's as simple as that. It was obvious. When you see injustice done you do something against it. When you see people being persecuted, and I didn't care whether they were Jews or Eskimos or Catholics or whatever, they were persecuted people and you had to help them.'"

Here is John Weidner. A Dutch businessman **working** in France during the war, he helped escort hundreds of Jews to safety in Switzerland, travelling on **skis** across the mountains. Involved in the same rescue organization, his sister was caught and killed by the Nazis. Weidner himself was tortured, suffering a permanent impairment of his speech. On one occasion, at the station in Lyon, he witnessed an SS officer crushing the head of a Jewish infant under his boot. Weidner says that what the Nazis did went against everything he was taught to believe; they 'had no respect for [the] human dignity' of the Jews. A Seventh-Day Adventist, he speaks of 'his concept of love and compassion', of the need 'to have a heart open to the suffering of others.' He says: 'I hope God will know I did the best I could to help people.'³⁵

Such sentiments are not unusual in my quasi-sample of rescuers, they are typical. Eva Anielska, a Polish woman, a socialist and member of Zegota – the underground Council of Aid to Jews that was active in Poland from late **1942** on – helped save many people, most of them strangers. 'One saw the Jew,' she says, 'not as a Jew, but as a persecuted human being, desperately struggling for life and in need of help . . . a persecuted, humiliated human being . . .' Jorgen Kieler was a member of the Danish Resistance Movement. Ascribing to the Danish people 'a traditional humanistic attitude to life', he says: 'National independence and democracy were our common goals, but the persecution of the Jews added a new and overwhelming dimension to the fight against Hitler: human rights. Our responsibility toward and our respect for the individual human being became the primary goals of the struggle.' Kieler mentions also the German official, Georg Duckwitz. Duckwitz was at the time shipping attache at the German legation in Copenhagen. He warned his Danish contacts when the deportation of the Jews was about to begin, so making a decisive contribution to the collective rescue that followed. When the risk he had taken was later pointed out to him, he responded, 'Everyone should see himself in the situation in which he, too, like his fellow man, might find **himself**.'³⁶

Bill and Margaret Bouwma sheltered on their farm in turn a woman, a teenage girl who was murdered by Dutch Nazis when she was out one day on her own, and then another girl. Induced by a question from the woman to ponder just why he was doing what he was, Bill Bouwma answered: because he was brought up always to help the weak; because he knew what it felt like to be the underdog; because his faith taught him to open his door to the homeless, the refugee – and, more simply, because a voice inside him said he had to do it, otherwise he would no longer be himself. Margaret Bouwma told one of the girls, 'It's not that we are friends of the Jews or their enemies. It is our human duty to open our home . . . and our hearts to anyone who suffers.' Another Dutch couple, Rudy and Betty de Vries, hid a family of three not previously known to them and then others as well in the home above their butcher shop; and Rudy was involved more

generally in underground and rescue activity. Betty felt at times overwhelmed by the extra work, but convinced herself 'that it was a very small price to pay for saving three lives.' Rudy reports a sympathetic encounter with a German soldier in the shop. He says that many 'failed to see the man in their enemy', but 'Jews or Germans – it made no difference to me, as long as I could see them as human beings.' When first approached to shelter people, he hesitated only a moment; he had been taught as a child to distinguish between justice and injustice. 'My faith', he says, 'commands . . . me to love my fellow man, without exclusions.'¹⁷

One repeatedly comes across instances, in fact, of Perry London's sort of rescuer: people who cite a strong parental influence in speaking about the help they gave. A German engineer, Hermann Graebe – known also for some terrible, heart-breaking testimony concerning an episode he witnessed during the mass shooting of the Jews of **Dubno** – saved the lives of dozens of Jews working under his management in eastern Poland. 'I believe that my mother's influence on me when I was a child has a lot to do with it. . . . She told me . . . that I should not take advantage of other people's vulnerability. . . . She said, "Take people as they come – not by profession, not by religion, but by what they are as persons."' **Mihael Mihaelov**, a Bulgarian, tells that both his parents were of very generous disposition. Mihaelov hid property for many Jews and brought food to them in the labour camps. He had seen Germans beating Jews and breaking their bones. 'I don't know exactly why I helped. It's just the kind of person I am. When I see someone who needs help I help them, and my whole family is like that.' In the town of Topusko on the Bosnian border in Yugoslavia, Ivan Vranetic helped and hid many Jews fleeing from the Nazis. The first of them was a man who approached him in desperate straits: 'He had no shoes, nothing, and when he started to tell me his story I had to help him. I think it must be in my upbringing. . . .' Vranetic says that his father 'liked people no matter what religion they were' and his mother was a good woman; 'we were brought up to love **humankind**.'¹⁸

I interject now a **first** sceptical question on behalf of anyone who is wary vis-a-vis my naive hypothesis. The question might go like this: as what is here documented so far are the explanations put forward by rescuers many years after the events to which their explanations relate, how good a guide can these be to their motives at the time? How indicative is what they say now of what they felt, what really moved them, then? There are a number of things one can offer in response to this question. First, since what I report these rescuers as saying is what rescuers seem to say, not just here or there, but quite generally and consistently, is it not likely to tell us something about what they actually felt at the time? Or must we rather suppose on the part of all these people a systematic – a common – misconstrual of their own reasons? Second, what they now say quite generally and consistently seems likely on the face of it to be as good a

guide to their reasons as anything imputed to them on the basis merely of a current philosophical commitment. Third, one can try also to discover what was said by such people then. The evidence I have been able to gather about this suggests it might not have been all that different from what they say now.

A young French Catholic, Germaine Ribiere, in the period before anyone in the Church hierarchy in France had spoken out against the persecution of the Jews there, committed her feelings about this to the diary she kept. 'I ache for them in my whole being, I ache for my Jewish brothers and sisters,' she writes when seven thousand Polish Jews are rounded up in Paris; and then, after she has visited two internment camps, 'Total contempt for the human being.' She speaks to a rabbi, saying she will help in any way she can. Another entry by her reads, 'Humanity is the body of Christ. One part of that humanity is being tortured. . . . and we look on in silence as the crime is being perpetrated.' (Today, incidentally, Ribiere tells her interviewer also, 'My mother raised us to have respect for life.') When finally a small number of bishops do break their silence, what do they say? They speak the same sort of language as Germaine **Ribière**. The Archbishop of Toulouse, Jules **Gérard Saliège**, writes in a letter of August 1942, 'it has been destined for us to witness the dreadful spectacle of children, women and old men being treated like vile beasts. . . . The Jews are our brethren. They belong to mankind.' A few days later in a letter to be read within his diocese, the Bishop of Montauban, Pierre-Marie **Théas**, similarly proclaims, 'all men . . . are brothers, because they are created by the same God . . . all, whatever their race or religion, are entitled to respect. . . . The current **anti-semitic** measures are in contempt of human dignity.'"

That was then. When therefore, now, another woman, Marie-Rose **Gineste**, who spent four days on her bicycle delivering Monsignor **Théas's** letter and then took charge at his request of the hiding of the Jews of Montauban, says, 'It was all about human justice . . .', how plausible actually is it to suppose she would have expressed herself very differently at the time?" Or we may take the example of Pieter **Miedema**. He was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in Friesland; as he has been incapacitated by a stroke, his wife, Joyce, now speaks for him. The **Miedemas** hid Jews in their own home, and he, the minister, was also active in finding hiding places for them elsewhere in the area. He had to go on the run at one point in order to avoid arrest or worse. Pieter **Miedema** has declined to be honoured by Yad Vashem, having done only 'what everyone should have done'. Joyce **Miedema** now construes his thinking so: 'if you opt against opening your home and heart to an innocent fugitive, you have no place in the community of the just'; you choose 'the worst solitude a man can discover: his own exclusion from the family of man.' One might be tempted to take this for a merely second-hand sentiment – except that it

was part of a sermon given by **Miedema** at the time, which his wife says will stay in her mind always, 'word for word'."

Or, again, there is the example of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka. A Catholic author and right-wing nationalist, she wrote a leaflet protesting against the murder of the Jews of Poland and helped to found Zegota, the organization for aiding them. She was caught and sent to Auschwitz where she spent nearly a year. On her release, she became active in the rescue of Jewish children. Szczucka's writings of the period give expression both to some **anti-semitic** convictions and to an energetic appeal on behalf of the Polish Jews. In one piece, she writes that after the war they will be told, 'Go and settle somewhere else.' But now they 'are the victims of unjust murderous persecutions' and 'Christ stands behind every human being. . . . He stretches His hand to us through a runaway Jew from the ghetto the same way as He does through our brothers.' In the protest leaflet, Jews are described by her as the 'enemies of Poland'; but also as 'condemned people' and 'defenceless people', 'insane from grief and horror'. Their present plight Szczucka calls 'your fellow man's calamity'."

That also was then. Today, another Polish Catholic writer and **anti-semite**, Marek **Dunski**, explains himself as follows. His motivation arose from his religious convictions. 'One could not simply allow a person to die.' In wartime, he says, evidently generalizing from his own case, people recur to more basic things: 'They tend to see a person as a human being. This is what happened with the Jews. They were not seen as Jews but as human beings.' Or the individual Jew was seen simply as 'a hurt, suffering being'. **Dunski** speaks as well, in connection with the aid he brought to a threatened Russian soldier, of not having 'any special fondness for Russians', yet of feeling 'that a human being ought to be saved at any price.' Marek **Dunski** had a part in the rescue of several hundred Jewish children. His reasons as given do not strike me as any less to be relied on for having been articulated later than Szczucka's similar ones."

Some readers may be starting to wonder, secondly, why the material I have cited does not reflect (what we know to be the case from the review of literature in the previous section) that there were rescuers who helped their friends. It does not reflect it yet. Only because I have not got there yet. I was coming to them. Here is one category of such rescuers.

Bert Bochove and his first wife Annie (now deceased) hid a friend of Annie's when she came and asked for help. They then also hid thirty-six other people. Bochove says, 'it was easy to do because it was your duty', 'I got such satisfaction . . . from keeping people safe' and 'You help people because you are human and you see that there is a need.'" Tina Strobos's family, Social Democrats and atheists, hid Tina's best friend who was Jewish. The family had a tradition of helping others – refugees, miners' children. During the war they hid about a hundred people, though never more than five at a time: 'Some we knew, some we didn't.' Strobos says she

believes in 'the sacredness of life'; today she gives talks to schoolchildren and tells them 'we have to be careful not to hurt others who don't belong to our little group.'"

Zofia Baniecka for her part would like children to know that there were people in Poland like Tina Strobos. Baniecka herself and her mother hid or found hiding places for Jews escaping from the Warsaw ghetto. One of these was a school friend - 'so of course I didn't turn her away.' But, as Baniecka also says, 'We hid at least fifty Jews during the war - friends, strangers, acquaintances, or someone who heard about me from someone else. Anyone was taken in.' Baniecka says she 'believe[s] in human beings'.⁴⁴ And then Jan Elewski. A Polish officer and leftist who protected his best friend from anti-semitic persecution before the war, he also saved seven strangers during the war by moving them to a more secure hiding place and supplying them with food there. He speaks of a 'feeling of duty' by contrast with the self-centredness of others who did not help; and of the thought that his family would have disowned him for 'not helping people who were being destroyed.' And Roman Sadowski also. He was a member of Zegota. He tried desperately to contact Jewish friends in the Warsaw ghetto when the deportations to the death camps began, but he failed and they perished. He then gave aid mostly to strangers: 'whoever turned to me, and whomever I could find.' Why? 'Their being Jewish did not play a part at all. Regardless of who they were, needing help was the criteria [sic] . . . Human life was at stake.'⁴⁵

And Jean Kowalyk Berger. And Ada Celka. In the Ukrainian village in which the former lived, the Germans set up a labour camp and she saw there 'the cruelty . . . day after day.' She and her family agreed to hide a Jewish doctor who had earlier helped her. He arrived one night at their door, begging to be taken in. 'Then more people came during that night. . . . If you could have seen my house. . . . Everything was so difficult.' She describes how difficult. When she is asked why she helped, she says, 'When I saw people being molested, my religious heart whispered to me, "Don't kill. Love others as you love yourself."' Ada Celka, deeply religious as well, living in poverty in a one-room apartment with her sister and disabled father, took in the daughter of a Jewish friend. Herself a Pole, she also sheltered Russian partisans. 'What I did was everybody's duty. Saving the one whose life is in jeopardy is a simple human duty. One has to help another regardless of who this human being is as long as he is in need, that is all that counts.'⁴⁶

It seems not uncommon amongst the Righteous: people who help friends or acquaintances and who help people other than friends or acquaintances, help people who are strangers to them; and who give universalizing reasons for doing what they do. About people like them it would seem safe to conclude that those reasons are not then merely rhetorical superstructures or rationalizing derivations from friendship -

as the putative 'real' cause (or essence) of rescuer behaviour. What, however, of rescuers whose help was just for friends? Or just for friends and the relations of friends? Or whose help was primarily such? Here at least, it might seem clear, we would have come upon the Rorty sort of rescuer. I suggest, on the contrary, that that is not so clear. Let us consider first in this connection the story of Irene Opdyke.

Opdyke was a student nurse at the time of the invasion of Poland. She speaks of her mother as a strong influence – 'she never turned away anyone from her doorstep', 'always knew how to help' – and speaks of her own vocation to be a nurse likewise in terms of helping people. Opdyke was beaten and raped by Russian soldiers and later impressed into labour by the Nazis. Running an errand one day in the nearby ghetto she witnessed scenes of great brutality. 'Most of all, I remember the children', she says. Opdyke decided that 'if the opportunity arrived I would help these people.' She subsequently befriended twelve Jews employed in the laundry at her place of work. As she puts it, 'I didn't have a family. They were persecuted. It was a human bond.' When she then learned of a move impending to liquidate the ghetto, she managed to hide and finally save these friends, at a not insignificant personal cost to herself. She says 'that we belong all together. That no matter what a person's colour, race, religion, or language, we are created by one God'; and that 'all human beings belong to one . . . family.'¹⁸

Did Irene Opdyke save her friends only because they were her friends? Or did she save them because of the moral commitments she tried to live by, of the kind of person she was? Or: what was the balance between her feelings of friendship and her more general values or moral impulses, in moving her to act on behalf of people threatened? This question, actually, does not seem all that interesting in relation to Opdyke herself. She plainly had enough reasons, and good ones, to act as she did; and since she herself lays emphasis upon reasons of both kinds, who else could presume to say exactly what the balance was between them? But the question of the balance, of the interrelationship between different sorts of reason, does not closely depend, as it happens, on the chronology or details of Opdyke's particular story. It is of much broader applicability. For it would seem to be the case with those rescuers who came to the aid of friends, acquaintances and other such connected folk, that they also will generally explain themselves in the way we have begun to be familiar with, giving expression to universalist commitments. They – also – say the kind of thing that Rorty suggests rescuers would not usually have said.

Hela Horsa, a doctor's wife, who hid the young son of one of her husband's patients and eventually thirteen other members of his family as well, says: 'All my life I worked for social causes. . . . It did not matter who it was if someone needed help I had to give it. . . . I helped because a human being ought to help another.' Albert and Wilma Dijkstra sheltered

people Albert knew from his home town. The Dijkstras speak in terms of hiding 'Jewish friends . . . in danger' – and also of their belief 'that life is sacred', of their 'concern [having] always been with human life and not to whom it belongs', of not 'distinguishing [in this regard] between Christian and Jew, German and Dutch'. Gitta Bauer, who hid a family friend, says it was not a big decision: 'She was a friend and she needed help.' Bauer also says that her father had taught her, 'Jews are people like you and me only with a different religion. And that's it.' She has always been 'concerned about racism of any kind'. **Libuse** Fries brought aid to a workmate (her husband-to-be) in The Wresienstadt, and she helped his sister also and was imprisoned for doing so. Fries was brought up, she tells, 'to love nature and all human beings'; she 'thought it was inhuman to take young people from their families for no reason.' Germaine Belline and Liliane **Gaffney**, a mother and daughter, helped many Jewish friends: two brothers, their sister, her children, a niece, 'cousins of cousins'. They say: it felt 'natural' because these were friends; and '[t]he one thing I could never stand as a child is injustice'; and 'if you didn't live for others . . . it wasn't worth living. To be human we need each other.'⁵⁰

And one '**Stanislaus**' who had Jewish friends in the Warsaw ghetto nearby, and who together with his mother gave out much help, to friends and others – soup, shelter, finding hideouts. His reasons: 'Human compassion.' And Louise Steenstra who lost her husband, killed in their home by German soldiers for hiding a Jewish friend. She and her husband could not be 'insensitive', she remembers, to the fate looming over the various friends they helped: 'we felt so sorry for those Jewish people with their kids screaming when the Nazis came in the night to pick them up'; '[w]hen you are the mother of one child, you are mother to them all.'⁵¹ And Gustav Mikulai who, '**see[ing]** poverty and injustice all around [him]', became a Social Democrat in his youth, and who all his life has 'had three passions: music, women and Jews' – one of whom he married. He hid his wife and in-laws, and indeed together with a friend 'all the Jews we **could**'. He was 'sort of drunk with [his] rebellion against the horrible injustice' to them. 'It was a terrible time for humanity.' And **Orest** Zahajkewycz and Helena Melnyczuk, brother and sister, who hid friends in their home and whose father 'was always trying to help somebody', and who have tried to teach their own children 'to be human' and do the same. They also recall that period, by contrast, in terms of its 'horror – that one human being could do this to **another**.'⁵²

And then, to finish with this grouping in my quasi-sample of rescuers, there is Stefania Podgorska Burzminski. She gave refuge in her apartment to the son of a Jewish woman she worked for, and later to his brother and his sister-in-law; in all, to thirteen people and 'for two winters'. Pivotal to her story as she tells it is this:

Before the war everyone shopped and talked together and everything was fine. But then there was the segregation and the mark of the Jewish star, and that was confusing for me. One day I saw a Jewish boy on the street, about nine years old, and another boy came up to him and said, 'You are a Jew!' and he hit him. A man, just an ordinary worker, saw it and said, 'Why would you do that? He's a boy just like you. Look at his hands, his face. There's no difference. We have enemies now from another country who say there's a difference, but there isn't. So the boy who hit the Jewish boy looked sad and said, 'Oh, all right, I'm sorry.' I listened to him and I came home and I looked at my hands and I said, 'No, there is no difference.' So, you see, I listened and I learned.

Learned just about helping fellow denizens of Poland perhaps? Today, Podgorska voices a concern with the need to 'teach people **humanity**'.²⁹

Now, it might be suggested that with rescuers whose aid was (or was primarily) to people more or less closely connected to them, the articulation of universalist motives and humanist principles can be discounted. They helped whom they knew, you see, and everything else would be at best well-meaning sentiment. But for my own part I do not see how this could possibly be asserted with any confidence, much less explanatory authority. That someone is a friend is in itself, of course, a perfectly good reason for helping them. On the other hand, the pertinent context here is one in which an inestimably large number of people precisely did not help friends, neighbours and other acquaintances. They stood by, looked on or turned away, whether in fear or shame or merely with indifference, as the Jews they knew were taken away or fled. In that sense, as a matter of **ethico-sociological generalization**, friendship or familiarity plainly is not a sufficient condition of one person's coming to the aid of another in serious jeopardy. If against this background so many of the rescuers who gave help to people close to them tell universalizing stories about what they did and who they are, as well as or sometimes rather than citing friendship and the like, on what basis can it be claimed that their universalizing stories vouchsafe us nothing of what 'really' impelled them?

It might now in turn be said, though, that this reasoning can be reversed against me. How many people also, it will be pointed out, professing similar moral viewpoints to all these rescuers, did not bring aid to Jews in danger. It is, again, an inestimably large number. The argument does not discomit me, however, nor is the case so reversed genuinely symmetrical with the one it supposedly reverses. For I do not seek to belittle or minimize the part which might have been played by friendship and other particularist loyalties in contributing to individuals' motives for rescue. I simply meet here the effort to belittle or minimize the part played by universalist moral attachments, setting down what I have found. Nor does setting it down imply any claim that, as a matter of **ethico-sociological generalization**, universal moral attachments might on their part be a sufficient condition of rescue. The point is only that it is a complicated question just what combination of reasons, motives and other factors – temperamental, situational and so on – does, and just what combination does not, move people to act under risk for other people; a question to

which no one, so far as I know, has the answer, if indeed there is an answer. All I do is report that a universalist moral outlook appears to have had a very significant part in motivating Jewish rescue. Many rescuers give voice to it and few do not. At the same time, no rescuer I have come across overtly repudiates it. To be sure, there were such people about also, at that time. They seem not to have been heavily involved in helping Jews in all. We know what some of them were doing.

A third and last query on behalf of the sceptical: Are there, then, no rescuers within my sample who are of that sort who say 'fellow Milanese . . . fellow Jutlander'? In fact, only one case I have been able to discover perhaps fits here. It is a Dane, unnamed in the source in which I find him, who says, 'The main reason I did it was because I didn't want anybody to hurt my friends, my neighbours, my fellow countrymen, without cause.' Even he makes some additional remarks as well, of seemingly broader scope, but ambiguously so. I mark him down as one for Richard Rorty anyway. This Dane is (if he is) a rare figure in the present company.*

It is another case, rather, that captures what seems to be the more general situation with rescuers who refer to their communities. Aart and Johtje Vos gave shelter in their home near Amsterdam to many who needed it, at one time hiding more than thirty Jews as well as a few other people. She, Johtje, says: 'We never talked about Jews [in Holland]. They were all just Dutch, that's all.' And he, Aart, says: 'Holland was like a family and part of that family was in danger. In this case, the Jewish part. The Germans were threatening our family.' This seems clear enough. But there is more. Aart Vos also recounts how one day after a bombing he found a wounded German soldier and helped him back to his camp. Asked by friends how he could bring himself to 'save a German', he replied, 'My wife and I were brought up to have respect for life.' Johtje Vos, relating the same incident elsewhere, puts it that their friends reproached Aart with helping the enemy and that his response to them was, 'No, the moment the man was badly wounded, he was not an enemy any more but simply a human being in need.'

And, this episode aside, Aart and Johtje Vos, looking beyond themselves and their children, that is, beyond their own family to a wider Dutch 'family', patently look further still. Johtje says that both she and Aart were brought up not to be prejudiced on grounds of 'race, colour, creed, nationality, or whatever . . . so it came very naturally to us to consider Jews just like us. We thought of them as human beings, just as we were.' Your response in that situation, she also says, depends on 'the results of your upbringing, your character, on your general love for people. . . .' Again: 'We helped people who were in need. Who they were was absolutely immaterial to us. It wasn't that we were especially fond of Jewish people. We felt we wanted to help everybody who was in trouble.' During the war, Aart says, he 'thought it wasn't possible that on this little planet people could do [the sort of things they did] to each other.'"

Just as friendship, as we have seen, need not be the only reason of someone who goes to the aid of a friend, so a commitment to compatriots, fellow citizens or other locally specific communities does not have to exclude more general humanitarian concern. With the rescuers the common pattern would seem to be that it did not. And is this so surprising? Mutual loyalty or solidarity within such communities can, it is true, be of an exclusionary sort; or it may sometimes simply relate to matters in which a more extensive identification would not be – for those matters – appropriate. It is also the case, however, that a person who says 'Dutch, just like us', 'fellow Dane' and so forth, may be appealing to a notion of civic equality and reciprocal obligation closely tied, as a matter of historical and cultural fact, to wider egalitarian, humanistic, universalist values. Especially when what is at stake is a matter of life, death or grave suffering, to think, 'Dutch like the rest of us', may only be to think, 'Another person in the Dutch community'. It need not be very different from thinking, 'Fellow human being.'

Such, at any rate, commonly was the case with the rescuers. Like Aart and **Johtje** Vos, those of them who allude to the specificities of community invariably point beyond these as well. Marion Pritchard who had a part in saving more than a hundred Jews says, 'In Holland, the Jews were considered Dutch like everyone else.' She learned tolerance from her father, 'more accepting of all people and their differences than my mother', and was imbued early on 'with a strong conviction that we are our brothers' keepers'. Decisive for Pritchard was the experience of happening to witness Nazis loading, throwing – 'by an arm, a leg, the hair' – young children, taken from a Jewish children's home, on to trucks. 'To watch grown men treat small children that way . . . I found myself literally crying with rage.' Pritchard's words do not, to me, encourage the inference that it was the 'Dutchness' of these victims that was for her the key thing.⁸⁶

In turn, a certain 'Johan' explains himself so: 'The main reason was because I was a patriot. I was for my country.' He continues: 'The Germans robbed people of their freedom. And when they started taking the Jewish people, that really lit my fire. . . . I really became full of hate because they took innocent people – especially when they took little kids. That was the worst.' This same 'Johan' says he learned from his parents that 'Jews were just people'. His mother would never 'look down' on anyone. 'She would always appreciate what people were worth.' And then John and Bertha **Datema** recall some of their wartime reactions. John: that 'those people are Dutch, Jewish or not, they are Dutch'; and that 'I had witnessed more human suffering than I could cope with.' And Bertha: 'Every wasted life is another nail in Christ's body. When a child is destroyed, all of us become orphans.' And Helene Jacobs, a German rescuer for whom 'A community which destroys a part of itself on purpose, out of hatred, gives itself up. It degenerates. This happened in our country.' Jacobs explains her own

rescue work like this: 'They were people who were in danger and I wanted to help them. It was as simple as that.' And like this: 'I always knew how dangerous it was, but I did it for humanity, and because I was a patriot.'"

Who here, once again, can claim to know the exact balance of these rescuers' reasons: between community, country or patriotism on the one hand; and humanity; children; people in danger or trouble or need, on the other?

I have now given, in any event, some account of rather more than half of the rescuers in my sample. Considerations **both** of space and for the patience of the reader deter me from relating, even in the truncated and reduced forms I have had to adopt for the stories I have told, the other stories remaining. But the stories left untold tell just the same story as the stories told. I let the subjects of them, of the ones I cannot tell, pass here finally in brief, anonymous parade.

There are the rescuers who speak of parents. 'My mother was always concerned about everyone else.' 'I remember my mother being a person who always wanted to give from her heart.' 'My mother always reached out to others and she taught all of us to do that, too. . . . I think it's in our blood.'" And there are the rescuers who helped save children: one who says, 'I believe in people', and who felt (at the age of forty-two), 'My life is past, but the children . . . have their life before them'; one who did what she did because 'All men are equal' and for 'no other' reason; one who 'cried when [he] went into the ghetto and . . . children clamoured after [him] . . . for help'; one who reflects that 'there are a lot of people who have no faith in human kind . . . they're only afraid for their own kin and not for yours or his or hers'; one who 'understood what it meant to be a Jew' when a six-year old fugitive girl said what her family name had been and what it was now; and one who remembers, similarly, the anguish of the child 'who does not know why she cannot use her real name' - and who speaks as well of the preoccupation with justice and injustice that has guided her, the rescuer, all her life."

Then there are those who talk about persecution: like the woman who gives as the reason for her actions that 'they [the Jews] were persecuted not because of what they did but because of the way they were born'; and the woman who says, 'that he was a hunted man was all I needed to know'; and the man brought up in the belief 'that it was inadmissible to persecute people because of their race or religion'; and the man for whom the Holocaust started 'in the hearts' of people, for '[as] soon as you go and say "That Jew!" or whatever, that's where it starts. . . . As soon as you put one race higher than another one . . .'. This last man says also, 'if the moment's there and there's somebody in need, you go help, that's all.' He touches a pervasive theme. The rescuers speak like this: 'to give help to those who are in need'; and 'one has to help all that need it'; and 'I just had to help people who needed help and that was that. I was always ready to

help the needy, always.'" And the rescuers speak like this: 'the worst off were the Jews. So one had to give help where people were most helpless. . . .'; and 'I had to help. After all, the Jews were the most helpless people'; and 'anyone who needed help had to get it. Jews were in a specially dangerous situation. . . . they had to be helped the most'; and 'My home is open to anyone in **danger**.'⁶³

Such are the things rescuers say. They talk of their 'feeling of justice'; of learning early 'to fight for . . . justice' and early about 'helping others'; of growing up without anyone making 'a distinction between people of other **religions**'.⁶⁴ They say: 'There is no greater love than sacrificing your own soul for another's soul', and 'I was an old pacifist', and 'I would have helped **anyone**'.⁶⁴ One man says, 'I cannot stand violence.' He says, 'As a child I was taught an individual has human dignity. . . .' Another man says that what he did just had to be done – 'They suffered so much.' One woman says her mother was such an unjust person that she, the daughter, developed a strong sense of justice by reaction. She says, 'I didn't help only Jews. I helped everyone who was being oppressed because of their politics or ideas'. She says, 'all my life I've been for the peaceful coexistence of all people, of all colours and **religions**'.⁶⁵

It could be that these rescuers are, all of them, mistaken; that they are really wrong about their reasons. Or it could be, on the other hand, that Richard Rorty is wrong about the Righteous.

IV

In setting out **Rorty's** view at the beginning of this essay, I reported the claim he makes that it is a 'weak' explanation of a generous action to say 'because she is a human being'. It turns out that this is itself only a weak version of his claim. For he goes on in the same place to suggest that, so far as identifying with humanity goes, in fact 'no one . . . **can** make *that* identification'; to him it seems an 'impossible' **one**.⁶⁶ Yet, the rescuers here, to say nothing of anyone else, appear to think they **can** make that identification – via notions of plain need and suffering; of human dignity and vulnerability; of equality, or justice, or a belief that we are all the children of one God. One man, indeed, finds it possible to explain himself in terms of a still wider sort of identification. This is Stefan **Raczynski** (the very last story to be told), whose 'father loved his fellow man' and who with the father sheltered on their farm some forty Jews, people escaping from a **killing** site in the nearby Polish forest. **Raczynski** says: 'It was a natural thing to do, like when you see a cat on the street, hungry, you give it food. When the Jews started coming from the forests and they were hungry, we gave them food. . . .'⁶⁷

Now, there is a certain irony to be noted about all this. For not only is sympathy for the need or suffering of another being – human or sometimes

'even' animal—a perfectly well-known impulse after all, and also motive or reason for action. But Rorty himself, as anyone familiar with his work will be aware, rather makes something of the fact that human beings share a common capacity for suffering. Sharing this, they are able, evidently many of them, to reach beyond fellow townsfolk and fellow bocce players. So how does it happen, then, that Rorty should deliver himself of the speculation he does about the rescuers? Let it suffice to say here that two voices contend for the ear and soul of Richard Rorty. One of these is the voice of a good, old-fashioned liberalism, of which he is an impressive and eloquent spokesman. It enjoins us to be sensitive to the susceptibility of others to pain and humiliation. It tells us, following Judith Shklar, that cruelty is the worst thing we do. But these themes push Rorty, willy-nilly, towards a notion he would shun, the notion, namely, of a common human nature. The second voice that calls to him cannot stand for that. It is the voice, this one, of 'anti-essentialism'; and of 'anti-foundationalism'; and also, it would seem, of anti-universalism—from which, however, the first voice, speaking of plain, never-ending human suffering, continues to beckon him away. This is a pervasive tension in **Rorty's** thought. I take up its story elsewhere.

Referring, in another essay from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, to the work of Michael Oakeshott, Rorty commends to us the suggestion that morality be thought of 'as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language.' If we see it so, he says, it will be impossible then to think 'that there is something which stands to my community as my community stands to me, some larger community called "humanity" which has an intrinsic nature.'¹⁰ But I say: on the contrary. It is a triumph of our species, one of its most luminous achievements, to have found its way to this thought and the universalist moral principles which harmonize with it; and those like these Righteous among the Nations who managed to live by such principles under terrifying pressure are the glory of humankind. While one should not make too much perhaps of the influence of high philosophical discussion on the wider social and political culture, one can only wonder nevertheless whether what anyone really needs right now is the effort and the energy being poured out, by philosophers, theorists of language and culture, would-be radicals, feminists, breathless messengers of the end of nearly everything, to impugn such ways of thought — as weak; impossible; or sometimes even just malign, discourse of domination and what have you.

V

I cannot forbear to tell here, **finally**, of a curious coincidence; or so at any rate it was for me. At a late stage in the work for this foregoing essay I came upon a reference to an old article about Father Marie **Benoit**: yet one more

rescuer, of some renown, so-called Ambassador of the Jews. This reference interested me not only because of the subject of the article but **also because** of its author: one James Rorty. I just had to pursue it, didn't I? James Rorty turns out to have been Richard **Rorty's** father.

This is what he wrote about the attitude of rescuers: 'Men and women of every class and creed, in all the occupied countries, consciously risked death and torture simply because they were revolted by the ugly cruelty of the Nazis. . . . Instinctively they rejected what seemed and was a betrayal of our common humanity. . . .' That seems to capture well the authentic voice of the people now called **Righteous**.⁶⁸

NOTES

1. The story is from Gordon J. **Horwitz**, *In the Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen*, London 1991, pp. 124–43. Regarding conditions at Mauthausen, see also Robert H. **Abzug**, *Inside the Vicious Heart*, New York 1985, p. 106.
2. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [henceforth **CIS**], Cambridge 1989, pp. 189–91.
3. For another response to these passages in Rorty (and a good laugh), see Terry **Eagleton**, 'Defending the Free World', in *Socialist Register* 1990, pp. 85–6.
4. For a discussion of the issues, see Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, London 1989, pp. 55–107. Elsewhere Marrus and his co-author write: 'Generalizations break apart on the stubborn particularity of each of our countries.' See Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. **Paxton**, 'The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe, 1940–1944', *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982), p. 713. For comparative figures on Jewish losses, see Israel **Gutman** (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust* [henceforth *Encyclopaedia*], 4 vols, London 1990, volume 4, pp. 1797–1802.
5. Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, New York 1980, pp. 411–14.
6. Rorty, **CIS**, p. 191.
7. Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, New York 1978, pp. 30–32.
8. See, for example, Richard **Rorty**, *Essays on Heidegger and others*, Cambridge 1991, p. 1; 'Thugs and Theorists', *Political Theory* 15 (1987), pp. 564, 572, 578 n. 23; and 'Feminism and Pragmatism', *Radical Philosophy* 59 (Autumn 1991), pp. 5, 12 n. 18.
9. Andre Stein, *Quiet Heroes: True Stories of the Rescue of Jews by Christians in Nazi-occupied Holland* [henceforth **Stein**], Toronto 1988, p. 93.
10. Louis de Jong, 'Help to People in Hiding', in Michael R. Marrus. (ed.), *The Nazi Holocaust 5: Public Opinion and Relations to the Jews in Nazi Europe*, 2 vols, Westport (Connecticut) 1989, volume 2, p. 639. Regarding the burdens on women, see: Stein, pp. 7, 47, 188, 191–4; Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* [henceforth **AP**], New York 1992, pp. 83–4; and Gay Block and Malcka Drucker, *Rescuers. Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust* [henceforth **Block**], New York 1992, pp. 63, 82.
11. For some accounts of such cases, see Nechama **Tec**, *When Light Pierced the Darkness* [henceforth **Tec**], Oxford 1986, pp. 63–8.
12. See Moshe Bejski, 'The "Righteous among the Nations" and Their Part in the Rescue of Jews' [henceforth **Bejski**], in Michael R. Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust 5 . . .*, volume 2, pp. 452–3; and *Encyclopaedia*, volume 3, pp. 1280–81.
13. Block, p. 252.
14. Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, Seattle 1978, p. 77; Bejski, p. 461.
15. **Tec**, pp. 115–9, 127–8; Oliners, **AP**, pp. 127–9. See also the results of a study by Manfred **Wolfson** reported in Lawrence Baron, 'The Holocaust and Human Decency: A Review of Research on the Rescue of Jews in Nazi Occupied Europe' [henceforth **Baron**], *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 13 (1985/86), pp. 239–40.

16. Friedman, *Roadsto Extinction*, p. 414; Pierre Sauvage, in Carol Rittner and Sondra Myers (eds.), *The Courage to Care: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* [henceforth Rittner], New York 1986, p. 137; Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the Jewish Question*, Princeton 1984, pp. 218–21; and Baron, pp. 239–40.
17. Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, p. 76; **Tec**, pp. 127–8; Oliners, AP, pp. 159–60; and Baron, pp. 239–40.
18. **Tec**, pp. 137–9, 145–9; Oliners, AP, pp. 155–7; Baron, pp. 239–40; P. M. Oliner and S. P. Oliner, 'Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust' [henceforth RJ], in Yehuda Bauer and others (eds.), *Remembering for the Future* [henceforth RFTF], 3 vols., Oxford 1989, I, pp. 510–13; Mordecai Paldiell, 'The Altruism of the Righteous Gentiles' [henceforth Paldiell, RFTF, I, p. 520.
19. Cf. the remarks of Paldiell, pp. 520–1.
20. Perry London, 'The Rescuers: Motivational Hypotheses about Christians Who Saved Jews from the Nazis', in J. Macaulay and L. Berkowitz (eds.), *Altruism and Helping Behaviour*, New York 1970, pp. 241–50.
21. Douglas Huneke, 'Glimpses of Light in a Vast Darkness', RFTF, I, pp. 489–90, and 'A Study of Christians Who Rescued Jews During the Nazi Era', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 9 (1981/82), p. 146 [henceforth, respectively, GL and SC]; Samuel P. Oliner, 'The Need to Recognize the Heroes of the Nazi Era', in Michael R. Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust 5 . . .*, volume 2, p. 482, and 'The Unsung Heroes in Nazi Occupied Europe', *Nationalities Papers* 12 (1984), p. 135 [henceforth NR and UH]; and **Tec**, pp. 152, 154.
22. Huneke, GL, p. 489, and SC, p. 146; Oliner, UH, p. 135, and NR, p. 479. **And cf.** Oliners, AP, p. 142, and RJ, p. 509.
23. Baron, pp. 243–4; Oliners, AP, p. 176.
24. **Tec**, p. 181; Paldiell, p. 520.
25. Huneke, GL, p. 491, and SC, p. 146.
26. Oliner, NR, pp. 480, 482, and UH, pp. 134–5; Baron, pp. 245, 239–40.
27. **Tec**, pp. 129 (and 227), 178 (and 233); Oliners, AP, p. 81.
28. Oliners, AP, p. 115; **Tec**, p. 227.
29. **Tec**, p. 178.
30. Bejski, pp. 460–61; Stein, p. 310; Eva Fleischner, 'Can the Few Become the Many? Some Catholics in France Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust' [henceforth Fleischner], RFTF, I, pp. 241, 243; Kristen R. Monroe and others, 'Altruism and the Theory of Rational Action: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe' [henceforth Monroe], *Ethics* 101 (1990), pp. 117–18, 122; Huneke, SC, pp. 146, 7, and GL, p. 491.
31. Oliner, UH, pp. 134–5, and NR, p. 482; Oliners, RJ, pp. 507–9, and AP, pp. 163–70, 287; **Tec**, pp. 132, 145, 154; Paldiell, pp. 522–3.
32. Cf. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Hemel Hempstead 1982, pp. xxix–xxx.
33. Though rescuers are mostly identified by their real names, in some of the sources I draw upon they are given fictitious ones to preserve confidentiality. As the sources themselves make it clear which practice is being followed, I simply use the names given, real or fictitious as the case may be.
34. Their story, like many here, is told in the wonderful book of Gay Block and Malcka Drucker, *Rescuers*, pp. 62–7. For Douwes, see also *Encyclopaedia*, volume 1, pp. 401–2.
35. Block, pp. 52, 57; Rittner, pp. 59, 65.
36. **Tec**, pp. 134–5, 139–40, 1774; Rittner, p. 89; Bejski, pp. 468–70. For **Duckwitz**, see also *Encyclopaedia*, volume 1, p. 409.
37. Stein, pp. 18–20, 32; and pp. 183–5, 187, 191.
38. Rittner, p. 43; Block, pp. 232, 226. For Graebe, see also *Encyclopaedia*, volume 2, pp. 599–600, and Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy*, London 1987, pp. 476–8.
39. Fleischner, pp. 234–7; Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, pp. 49–50.
40. Block, pp. 128–31.
41. Block, pp. 68–71; Stein, pp. 58–9.
42. **Tec**, pp. 1074, 1111–12.
43. **Tec**, pp. 1014, 175.
44. Block, pp. 42–46; Monroe, pp. 107, 118.

NORMAN GERAS

45. Block, pp. 84-9.
46. Block, pp. 163-5.
47. **Tec**, pp. 133-4, 160-1, 177.
48. Block, pp. **237-40**; **Tec**, pp. 145, 165 (original punctuation).
49. Block, pp. **192-6**; Rittner, pp. 44-51; Monroe, pp. 107, 119.
50. **Tec**, pp. 70-71, **165-6**; Stein, pp. 2224, 245; Block, pp. 136-41; 208-11; and **94-7**.
51. Oliners, AP, pp. 193-9; Block, pp. 58-61, and Stein, pp. 102, 134. Steenstra's story is given under a fictitious name in Stein. I have felt free to use her real name here because it is given in Block, presumably with her agreement.
52. Block, pp. 220-3; pp. 241-5.
53. Block, pp. **180-5**.
54. Oliners, AP, pp. **203-4**.
55. Block, pp. **78-83**; Rittner, pp. 24-7; Oliners, AP, pp. 215-20, 228. See my remarks at n. 51 above. They apply here too, to **Johtje Vos**.
56. Block, pp. 33-41; Rittner, pp. 28-33.
57. Oliners, AP, pp. **142-4**; Stein, pp. 141, 144, 166; Block, pp. 149-52.
58. Block, pp. 166, 176, 215.
59. Block, pp. 204-7; Oliners, AP, p. 213; Block, pp. **188, 26, 48**, 102-5.
60. Block, p. 77; Fleischner, p. 239; Block, pp. **114, 27**.
61. Block, p. 32; Rittner, p. 107; **Tec**, pp. 170, 167.
62. **Tec**, pp. 176, 177, 177; Stein, p. 266.
63. Block, pp. 124, 118, 142.
64. Block, pp. 249, 146; **Tec**, p. 176.
65. Block, p. 172; Fleischner, p. 238; Block, pp. **153-7**.
66. CIS p. 198; emphases in the original.
67. Block, pp. 197-201.
68. CIS p. 59. Compare the words of Maria Langthaler quoted at the beginning of this essay.
69. James Rorty, 'Father **Benoit**: "Ambassador of the Jews". An Untold Chapter of the Underground', *Commentary* 2 (December **1946**), pp. 507-13, at p. 513. On James Rorty, see Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, Chapel Hill (N. Carolina) and London 1987, pp. 54-5 and passim.