THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ASKED

THE RESCUE OF JEWS IN NAZI EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

A common phenomenon in social life is that some individuals help others and a few even risk their lives to benefit others, as in the case of those who helped Jews escape persecution in Nazi Europe. A few scholars single out motivations as the prime explanation of these rescue activities, yet concede that material opportunities, information, and other situational factors might have played a role. Their work, however, stops short of offering an account of the nature and importance of these factors. In this article, we focus on the importance of opportunities and situational factors, with specific reference to the rescue of Jews from persecution during World War II. Following a secondary analysis of data on those who did and did not rescue Jews during the Nazi occupation of Europe, we show that a direct request for help substantially increased the likelihood of being rescued. We also explore the other side of the situation, namely whom were the Jews likely to ask for help? Jews were likely to ask people they knew and people they trusted to act as mediators. Finally, we show that few of those who were asked to help did not help. This finding suggests the existence of a selection mechanism: rescuers signalled their disposition to help and were subsequently asked. We conclude that opportunities and situational factors are crucial in accounting for the observed acts of helping.

KEY WORDS • altruism • asking • Holocaust • rescue of Jews • situational factors

If I am not for myself, who is for me?
And when I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?

(Rabbi Hillel, The Mishnah, Avot 1:14)[1]

1. Introduction

A common phenomenon in social life is that some people help others and show an interest in their well-being. Donations to charities,

responses to appeals for famine relief in the Third World, organ dona-
tions and voluntary contributions for the provision of public goods – all
are examples of altruistic behaviour. Some people are even willing to
risk their lives to benefit others, as in the case of the individuals who
helped Jews escape Nazi persecution in Europe during World War II.[2]
Why did people risk their lives to benefit others? A handful of scholars
have singled out motivations as the prime explanation of these rescue
activities (Friedman 1980; Tec 1986; Stein 1988; Oliner and Oliner
1988; Bejski 1989; Fleischner 1989; Monroe et al. 1990; Monroe 1991;
Geras 1995; Monroe 1996). Notwithstanding their emphasis on motiva-
tions, these scholars acknowledged that material opportunities, infor-
mation, and other situational factors might have played a role in
explaining rescue activity (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 271–2; Monroe
et al. 1990: 108). However, their work stops short of offering an account
of the nature and importance of these factors.

In this article, we turn that argument on its head. We accept that moti-
vations play a role in rescue activity, but we focus on the role of situa-
tional factors in rescue activity, with specific reference to saving Jews
from persecution during World War II.

Following secondary analysis of data on people who rescued Jews
(rescuers) and people who did not rescue Jews (nonrescuers) during the
Nazi occupation of Europe, we conclude that *being asked* is a sig-
nificant predictor of helping behaviour. Our answer to the third ques-
tion of Rabbi Hillel ('If not now, when?') would then be, 'One is more
likely to help when one is asked to do so'. We also explore the other
side of the situation, namely 'Whom were the Jews more likely to ask
for help?' Jews were more likely to ask individuals known to them,
such as friends and family members. However, when this was not pos-
sible, they turned to trusted individuals who acted as mediators. Media-
tors would then act on behalf of the Jews (rescuees) and approach
individuals they knew. A request for help from a trusted mediator
increased the likelihood that Jews who had no friends and family would
be rescued.

Finally, our data show that very few (4%) of those who were asked to
help did *not* help. This finding points to the existence of a selection
mechanism. Rescuers who were asked to help, either directly or by a
mediator, were selected on the basis of signals they had given. Rescuers
signalled their disposition to help and were subsequently asked. In con-
clusion, motivations may be a necessary but not sufficient condition in
explaining altruistic behaviour. To put it in other words, situational fac-
tors mediate between motivation and action.

The article is organized as follows: the next section reviews the literature on rescue activity, with an emphasis on studies that are relevant to the problem of helping Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. A discussion of analytical techniques and a presentation of the data and the variables in the study follow. Section 4 looks at rescue activities from the point of view of the helper, and section 5 examines the point of view of those who were in need. Section 6 concludes the article.

2. Motivational Factors: A Critical Review

Influential authors invoke the 'motivational' explanation for the rescue of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Europe in World War II. This section provides a critical examination of this view.

The altruistic behaviour of the French citizens of Le Chambon provides the background for a motivational explanation from Jon Elster (1989). In this small village in southern France, a Protestant pastor, André Trocmé, inspired the villagers to provide asylum for a large number of German Jews at great risk to themselves and under constant surveillance by the Vichy government and, later, the German army. In Elster's view, rescuers did not consider the consequences of their actions. Rather, they acted because they were motivated by a moral principle: 'Never turn away anyone who needs help' (Elster 1989: 193).[3] What mattered for them was the universal good, not the practical difficulties or the conceivable impact of their contribution to attain that good (Elster 1989: 193; see also 1990).

Other authors argue – with specific reference to helping Jews during the Nazi occupation of Europe – that rescuers might have helped as a consequence of a particular set of personal traits, which form the 'altruistic personality', or out of a sense of duty to uphold particular moral principles.

Oliner and Oliner (1988) use the label 'altruist personality' in their extensive study of rescuers in Nazi Europe. They interviewed 231 gentiles (non-Jews) who saved Jews and 126 nonrescuers who matched the rescuers in age, sex, education, and geographic location during the war. Oliner and Oliner link a variety of psychosocial conditions to the 'altruist personality' and conclude that rescuers had a capacity for 'extensive relationships', defined as a 'stronger sense of attachment to others and their feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others, including those outside their immediate familial or communal circle' (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 249).

Monroe et al. (1990) base their study on a sample of 13 rescuers of Jews, an unidentified number of entrepreneurs, and five ordinary Europeans who lived in Nazi-occupied Europe but did not participate in rescuing Jews. They describe the altruism of rescuers in terms of 'self-identity', by which individuals perceive themselves 'as one with all humankind', an identity which reaches beyond group affiliation, mere empathy, and calculation of expected utility. For rescuers, the concept of a cost-benefit calculus was 'meaningless'. On the contrary, they were motivated by the 'shared perception of a common humanity' (Monroe et al. 1990: 117; see also Monroe 1991, 1996).

Geras (1995), the author of a philosophical critique of Richard Rorty, discusses the 'Righteous among the Nations'. In a detailed review of the existing literature on the rescue of Jews in Nazi Europe, he examines whether rescuing behaviour was associated with gender, class status, political affiliation, religion, and other personal characteristics, as well as prior acquaintance with Jews. Geras concludes from this review that none of those sociological factors were good predictors of altruistic behaviour toward Jews in Nazi Europe. On the contrary, he argues that people were moved by a sense of belonging to 'human kind'. A 'universalistic moral outlook' motivated helping behaviour (Geras 1995: 36).[4]

Although those scholars embrace the motivational explanation for altruistic behaviour, they do not turn a blind eye to situational factors. Thus, for example, they acknowledge that rescuers were aware of the costs, or at least the risk, involved in helping Jews.[5] However, this awareness did not impinge on their decision to rescue; it simply made rescuers more cautious (see Monroe et al. 1990: 108; Oliner and Oliner 1988: 126–7). This being the case, motivations to act are seen as a sufficient condition for actions to occur. Monroe et al., for example, argue that 'identity and self-recognizing role' offer an 'explanation of rescue activity' (Monroe et al. 1990: 104), and Geras stresses 'sympathy for the need or suffering of another being' (Geras 1995: 21). In our view, the shortcoming of the motivational explanation is that it does not question the link between motivations and action. Oliner and Oliner address this issue as follows:

> [Our] analyses cannot identify the particular situational or personality factors influencing any one individual's decision to rescue or not to rescue. Each individual act must be regarded as a unique event shaped by many discrete factors. An individual may have possessed all the personality and attitudinal characteristics we find correlated with acts of rescue, and yet, because of high risk or lack of resources, did not carry out a rescue. In another situation an act of rescue might have been easily accomplished because of little or no risk and many resources, but was not attempted because of an individual's particular values or personality char-

> acteristics. Each identified contributing factor makes a rescue action more likely, but we cannot specify the exact combination necessary or sufficient to precipitate one on the part of a particular individual in a particular set of circumstances. (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 271–2)

Oliner and Oliner recognize that material opportunities, information, and other factors outside the scope of the individual rescuer played a role in explaining rescue activity, but their work stops short of offering an account of the nature and importance of such factors.

A major leap toward a fuller explanation of altruistic behaviour, which links motivations to action, is provided by Gross (1997). He focuses on the collective rescue of Jews in Le Chambon, several small villages in the Cevennes region in southern France, and Niewlande, Holland. The study is based on historical records and memoirs and a survey of 175 French and Dutch rescuers. Gross, an advocate of rational choice theory, argues that 'from a rational perspective, moral motivations must be considered in conjunction with non-moral motivations, situational factors, and mobilization contexts' (Gross 1997: 129). Gross stresses the presence of 'social and organizational networks, authoritative leadership, and resources' as crucial to having enabled rescuers to organize successful *collective* rescue operations (Gross 1997: 133). He contrasts the presence of both motivational and situational factors with instances where situational factors were missing, such as the case of the Japanese-Americans who were deported during World War II in the USA (Gross 1997: 129; see also Gross 1993).

Although Gross's treatment of the rescue of Jews is a major step forward, he focuses only on cases of collective help, thereby failing to offer insights on individual acts of helping. Instances of individual acts of rescue occurred alongside collective efforts. Even within Gross's sample of rescuers, mainly drawn from individuals involved in collective rescue activities, instances of individual acts of rescue are a significant number: 21 percent of the French respondents said that 'no one' had organized their rescue activities (Gross 1997: 140). Another shortcoming of Gross's data is that they lack variation in the dependent variable. This weakness is due to the well-known danger of sampling on the dependent variable.[6] It may well be that some Europeans with similar characteristics to the 175 individuals in Gross's sample did *not* help Jews in those dark days. Can we then claim a relation of *causality* between any of these characteristics and rescue activity?

A fully developed 'situational' approach must try to account for individual acts of helping and consider at least the element of information in risky situations. Contrary to what occurs in other social situations (such

as a marketplace), there is not a place where all rescuers and rescuees meet at a designated time, and where goodwill and need can be matched. There are of course markets where most participants never meet or even see one another. However, in these cases, trading takes place in virtual meeting places, such as the Stock Exchange (Frank 1991: 29). In the example of helping in a risky situation, actors can neither take part in an auction nor trade on the Stock Exchange, nor can they choose whom to help from a range of listed options. A potential rescuer has imperfect information about who is in need of help: potential rescuees are not readily available. In ordinary situations, people in need follow strategies intended to advertise their need. For instance, beggars advertise themselves to potential helpers by sitting on street pavements. A direct request from the person in need is another strategy followed in these settings. Evidence from donations to charity point to the fact that individuals are more inclined to contribute money *when asked* (Freedman 1993). Simmons et al. (1977, quoted in Piliavin and Charng 1990: 35) found that kidney donors were more likely to have been informed in person of a need for a donor than were nondonors (80% versus 58%). The most common reason given for failure to donate to charities, give blood, or volunteer time to worthwhile causes is *not* having been asked (Piliavin and Charng 1990: 35).[7] Risky situations pose constraints on the actors' strategies. In the case we examine, Jews could not advertise themselves openly and ask at random. The 'wrong' person might see them and turn them in. For the same reason, potential helpers could not freely advertise their willingness to help.[8]

To summarize, people in need are not easily matched with individuals willing to help, and this is even more so in situations of high risk. Nonetheless, it is an empirical fact that some Jews were helped in Nazi Europe. The aim of this article is to explore the strategies that enabled rescuers and rescuees to match. The next section is devoted to the presentation of the data we use.

3. Data and Methodology

Our study is based on two types of data. The first is published narratives by rescuers and rescuees reported in a wide range of memoirs and interviews. Historical narratives offer a vivid picture of the situation these individuals were facing and their motivations and opportunities; we use them for illustrative purposes. We also carry out a secondary analysis of data collected by the Altruistic Personality and Prosocial Behaviour

Institute (APPBI), which were first analysed by Oliner and Oliner (1988). The data we received from APPBI contained a sample of 346 identified Jewish rescuers[9] and a sample of 164 individuals who lived in Nazi Europe during World War II but were not identified as Jewish rescuers ($n = 510$; see Oliner and Oliner 1988: Appendix A). The data we received were slightly different from the set used by Oliner and Oliner (1988: Appendix B), and we were unable to reconstruct their analyses with accuracy. In what follows, we refer to the data as we received them from APPBI in October 1996. In this section we present the data, their sampling designs, the variables, and the technique employed in the analysis.

Studying the rescuers of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Europe is best seen as the study of rare events, since the dependent variable (rescuing Jews) would not be easily identified in a random sample of men and women who lived in Europe during the period. A solution to this problem can be achieved by the use of *retrospective* samples – known also as *case-control* samples (Manski and Lerman 1977; Xie and Manski 1989; Agresti 1990; Manski 1995; Agresti 1996; Lacy 1997). In the collection of the APPBI data, Oliner and Oliner (1988) followed this sampling method.

The Oliners' first task was to identify a sample of *altruist* individuals who helped Jews during the War period, i.e. the *case*. For Oliner and Oliner, behaviour is characterized as altruistic when '(1) it is directed toward helping another; (2) it involves a high risk or sacrifice to the actor; (3) it is accompanied by no external reward; (4) it is voluntary' (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 6). The majority of rescuers (95%) were sampled from the Yad Vashem list of 'Righteous among the Nations', which included at the time of the collection of the data approximately 5500 rescuers.[10] However, individuals were not randomly sampled from that list; they were selected so that the entire sample would be as diverse as possible in terms of age, socioeconomic class, country of origin, as well as other factors (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 263). The other 5 percent in this category consisted of individuals whose names were obtained from rescuees interviewed by the project (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 262). The APPBI data we analyse include 346 individuals who meet these criteria of altruistic behaviour.

The second task was to identify a sample of individuals who did not help Jews during the War period, i.e. the *control*. Oliner and Oliner defined a nonrescuer as 'a person neither on the Yad Vashem list nor verified by our project as a rescuer living in Nazi occupied Europe during the War' (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 263). Again, these individuals

Table 1. The variables in the analysis, their values and construction

Variables in the analysis	A measure of:	Values	Construct from:[a]
Depended variable			
Altruist	Rescue activity during WWII	1 = rescuer 0 = nonrescuer	RESCUE = 1 & E9a = 1 RESCUE ≠ 1 & E9a ≠ 1
Independent variables			
Asked		1 = were asked 0 = were not asked	For altruist = 1, E27 For altruist = 0, E40
Demographic variables			
Age	Age in 1940		Age
Qualifications	Type of school R attended	1 = elementary school 2 = gymnasium 3 = appartnership 4 = university	C1 C4 C6 C7a
Religiosity	Religiosity before the War	1 = very 2 = somewhat 3 = not very 4 = not at all	D14
Gender		1 = male 0 = female	Gender
Opportunity variables			
Economic	Economic condition during WWII	1 = very well off 2 = quite well off 3 = neither rich or poor 4 = very poor	E70
Rooms	How many rooms in R home		E66
Attic	Did R have attic in home	1 = yes 2 = no	E68
Cellar	Did R have cellar in home	1 = yes 2 = no	E67
House	Type of residence	1 = house 0 = other	E65
City	Type of locality of residence	1 = city 2 = other	E62
Neighbours	Did R have many neighbours	1 = yes 0 = no	E64

Table 1. The variables in the analysis, their values and construction

Variables in the analysis	A measure of:	Values	Construct from:[a]
Jneigh	Did Jews live in R neighbourhood	1 = yes 0 = no	E4
Risk indicators			
Resistance	Was R in Resistance group	1 = yes 0 = no	E15
Chances	Did R take chances in childhood	1 = very much 2 = some 3 = not very 4 = not at all	C18e

Note: see Oliner and Oliner (1988, Appendix C).

were not randomly sampled from the entire universe of nonrescuers. Furthermore, the case and the control samples did not share the property of *matched* case-control samples (cf. Agresti 1990, 1996). Instead, non-rescuers were selected so that no statistically significant differences between the rescuers and the nonrescuers existed in relation to age, sex, education, and geographical location during the War period (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 263).[11] The data we analyse include 164 nonrescuers. However, when the nonrescuers were interviewed, it became apparent that they were not homogeneous on the dependent variable; that is, with respect to helping behaviour. Some 40 percent of these 'nonrescuers' claimed to 'have done something out of the ordinary to help people during the War period'.

The APPBI data we analyse (*n* = 510), then, are made up of two samples that consist of three subpopulations: (i) identified rescuers (*n* = 346), (ii) self-reported rescuers (*n* = 67), and (iii) nonrescuers (*n* = 97). Oliner and Oliner approached these data by analysing the three subpopulations separately (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 264). In our analysis, our *case* sample includes both the identified rescuers and the self-reported rescuers (*n* = 346 + 67 = 413), but the *control* sample includes only those who did not help anyone during the war (*n* = 97). The only appreciable difference between the two populations is that self-reported rescuers were not – in 1988 – certified by the Yad Vashem authority (a number were certified later). We decided to keep the two subpopulations together in our analyses for two reasons. First, we have no reason to

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the analysis

Variable	Categories	Frequency	%	n
Altruist	Yes	413	81.0	
	No	97	19.0	510
Asked	Yes	247	54.9	
	No	203	45.1	450
Qualification	Elementary	207	41.3	
	Gymnasium	106	21.2	
	Apprenticeship	79	15.8	
	University	109	21.8	501
Religiosity	Very	106	27.0	
	Somewhat	149	37.9	
	Not very	85	21.6	
	Not at all	53	13.5	393
Gender	Men	247	48.4	
	Women	263	51.6	510
Economic condition	Very well off	95	19.8	
	Quite well off	67	14.0	
	Neither r/p	194	40.5	
	Quite poor	76	15.9	
	Poor	47	9.8	479
Attic at home	Have	337	77.3	
	Have not	99	22.7	436
Caller at home	Have	341	77.0	
	Have not	102	23.0	443
Lived in a house	Yes	227	48.0	
	No	246	52.0	473
Lived in a city	Yes	372	78.5	
	No	102	21.5	474
Have many neighbours	Yes	301	83.6	
	No	59	16.4	360
Jewish neighbours	Have	320	67.9	
	Have not	151	32.1	471
Belonged to Resistance	Yes	181	36.3	
	No	317	63.7	498

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the analysis

Variable	Categories	Frequency	%	n
Took chances in life	Very	133	34.5	
	Some	127	32.9	
	Not very	61	15.8	
	Not at all	65	16.8	386
Asker	Friend	71	40.1	
	Family	32	18.1	
	Known	50	28.2	
	Stranger	24	13.6	
	Rescued	54	12.0	203
Rescued	Friend/family	99	43.2	
	Stranger	130	56.8	229
	Mean	*SE*	*N*	
Age in 1940	27.03	8.00	510	
Number of rooms	4.64	2.59	451	

doubt the claim of self-reported rescuers.[12] Second, consolidating the two subpopulations has the advantage of increasing the total *n* in our analysis.

As mentioned above, the most appropriate method to adopt in the analysis of these data is the *case-control* samples. This method requires us to apply logistic regression to the analysis of these data, which is based on odds ratios, in order to estimate the retrospective effects of the independent variables on the response variable. Since we do not have information on the true marginal distribution of the response variable in the population, we are unable to weight the data. This would cause problems in interpreting the intercept in our models. However, the coefficients for the effects of the independent variables are interpretable. That is to say, we lose the predictive power of the models, but we can learn about the effects of different variables on the outcome we are interested in.

A description of the variables we use in the analysis and the way we have constructed them is presented in Table 1. In Table 2 we present a description of the distribution of the variables. The dependent, or response, variable *Altruist* corresponds to the *case* and the *control* samples, as we have explained earlier. The variable *Asked* distinguishes between those who were asked to help (*Asked* = 1), and those who were

not asked to help (*Asked* = 0). Since it is a very important variable, we shall explain its values and the way we constructed it next. This variable is constructed separately for the *case* and the *control* samples. Those who did behave altruistically during the War (*case*) were asked to report, 'How did you become involved in this first activity? Did you initiate it yourself or did someone ask for your help?' Those who did not behave altruistically during the war (*control*) were asked, 'Was there ever a time during the war that you were asked to help somebody and had to say no?'[13]

In addition to the variables presented in Table 1, we created two variables that provide us with information on subgroups in the population. First, the variable *Asker* was constructed for those who were asked to help only. This variable corresponds to the following open-ended questions (E27a for *Altruist* = 1, and E46 for *Altruist* = 0): 'Who asked you to give help?' The information from this question was then pulled into five categories of the variable *Asker*: 1 = friend; 2 = family; 3 = stranger; 4 = known person in the community (e.g. priest); 5 = rescued person. The first four categories also correspond to the use of a mediator, and the fifth category corresponds to a direct request by the rescued person. Second, the variable *Rescued* was constructed for those who did behave altruistically only (i.e. *Altruist* = 1). This variable corresponds to the following open-ended question (E26): 'Who were the people you helped your first time?' We then collapsed the information from this question to two categories: 1 = friends and family (including neighbours), and 2 = strangers.

4. Whom Should I Help? The Importance of Being Asked

Jean Kowalyk Berger lived in a Ukrainian village where the Germans had set up a labour camp, and she 'saw the cruelty … day after day'. She added, 'When I saw people being molested, my religious heart whispered to me, "Do not kill. Love others as you love yourself"'. And yet she did not volunteer to help. She needed a trigger to stimulate her helping behaviour, as it emerges from the detailed narrative of her first encounter with a rescuee. She and her family agreed to help a Jewish doctor (whom she knew) when he arrived one night at their door 'begging for help'. After the first act of help, a snowball effect was set in motion: 'Then more and more people came during that night …' (Block and Drucker 1992: 237–40, quoted in Geras 1995: 30–1). In the arid jargon of the social sciences, the subsequent helping behaviour can be

Table 3. Cross tabulation of the variables asked by altruist ($n = 450$)

	Altruist		
Asked	Yes	No	Total
Yes	237	10	247
No	122	81	203
Total	359	91	450

accounted for by a path-dependent process. Being asked, however, triggered her first act of rescue.

The importance of being asked emerges from other stories. A Dutch rescuer in France recalled that '[m]ost of the Jews did not know me at first. They simply approached me for help' (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 132). Margot, a German-Dutch rescuer, told her interviewer: 'You help whoever you can when you are asked'. Bert, a Dutch upholsterer, recalled coming home to find Henny (the first Jew he saved) at his house. He added: 'Suddenly I know why she comes. "She stays", I say'; both instances are reported in Monroe et al. (1990: 118). A Jew approached Ivan Vranetic, a rescuer operating in Yugoslavia: 'He had no shoes, nothing, and when he started to tell me his story I had to help him' (Block and Druker 1992: 226, quoted in Geras 1995: 26). Ursula Meissner, a young actress who lived alone in a large apartment in Berlin, welcomed the Lattes, a Jewish family in hiding sent by a common acquaintance. When asked why she helped, she replied: 'What else could I do?' (Schneider 2000: 7). In Le Chambon, rescue activity started the night a refugee knocked on the door of the presbytery and asked if she could come in. Magda Trocmé, the pastor's wife, answered, 'Naturally, come in, come in' (Hallie 1979: 120, quoted in Badhwar 1993: 97).[14] In the sample analysed by Gross, 80 percent of the French and 72 percent of the Dutch rescuers were asked to rescue (Gross 1997: 140).

The importance of being asked also emerges in the APPBI data. A cross tabulation of the variables *Asked* by *Altruist* is presented in Table 3. It shows that two-thirds ($237/359 = 66\%$) of the rescuers were asked to help, and only one third initiated their action. Moreover, *nearly all* of those who were asked to help Jews did so ($237/247 = 96\%$), and a request to give help increased the likelihood of helping others by a factor of two compared with help that was initiated without a request ($237/122 = 1.94$). These figures show that being asked might be a fundamental trigger for altruistic behaviour in this context.

We turn next to test this proposition in a more robust way. Table 4 presents two logistic regression models on the dependent variable: helping vis-à-vis not helping. Model I assesses the log-odds effects of demographic, opportunity, and risk variables on helping behaviour in the APPBI data. As expected, the different levels of educational qualification do not have statistically significant effects on helping behaviour, but age does: the older the respondents, the more likely they were to help.[15] It also shows that women were more likely to help Jews during World War II than men. Finally, the less religious the respondents, the more likely they were to help.

Women's propensity to help may be attributable to factors specific to their upbringing and patterns of socialization. Studies on women's employment behaviour, for example, have shown that women are heavily concentrated in jobs that are characterized by a '"dealing with people" temperament' (Bielby and Baron 1986: 773). This example from the labour market might imply that women have a higher capacity for caring for others than men have. It is not surprising, then, that women were more likely to be more receptive to the needs of persecuted Jews in Europe. In this sense, women's propensity to help might be seen as a proxy for motivations, however determined. Another plausible explanation may be that women were 'available' to help, while men might have been in the Army or at work in factories or in the fields – and therefore less available to help. As we shall see below, most rescue activities were initiated by a request for help. Therefore, availability to be approached is crucial; if women were more likely than men to stay at home, a stranger knocking on a door was more likely to be encountered by women.

Religiosity might also be seen as a proxy for motivations: one would expect religiosity and altruistic behaviour to go hand in hand. The memoirs cited earlier provide the background for this expectation. Recall what Jean Kowalyk Berger said: 'When I saw people being molested, *my religious heart whispered to me*, "Do not kill. Love others as you love yourself"' (Block and Drucker 1992: 237–40, quoted in Geras 1995: 30–1). However, our results show that religiosity and altruism are negatively related; the less religious one is, the more likely she is to rescue. A plausible explanation for this negative effect is that a very religious person might be more receptive to anti-Semitism.

Among the opportunity variables, only *number of rooms* has a statistically significant effect on helping behaviour; each additional room in the house increases the likelihood of helping by one-and-a-third times ($e^{0.295} = 1.34$).

Table 4. Logistic regression on the variable altruist (SE)

	Model I	Model II
Independent variables	*Effect*	*Effect*
Constant	0.691 (1.701)	–1.007 (1.942)
Age in 1940	0.078 (0.028)**	0.109 (0.032)**
Gender	–0.959 (0.442)**	–1.089 (0.515)**
Qualification		
Elementary	–0.056 (0.397)	0.171 (0.691)
Gymnasium	–0.196 (0.432)	0.229 (0.736)
Apprenticeship	0.628 (0.443)	0.919 (0.802)
Religiosity	0.468 (0.229)**	0.501 (0.262)*
Have many neighbours	–0.890 (0.650)	–1.153 (0.782)
Jewish neighbours	–0.150 (0.452)	–0.113 (0.523)
Economic condition	–0.327 (0.244)	–0.363 (0.276)
Attic at home	–0.629 (0.532)	–0.628 (0.593)
Caller at home	–0.723 (0.569)	–0.061 (0.746)
Lived in a house	0.311 (0.481)	0.083 (0.584)
Lived in a city	–1.087 (0.649)*	–0.979 (0.769)
Belonged to Resistance	10.203 (17.092)	11.378 (26.373)
Number of rooms	0.295 (0.099)**	0.261 (0.113)**
Took chances in life	–0.092 (0.201)	–0.278 (0.244)
Asked		2.847 (0.604)**
–2 Log likelihood	150.61	119.48
d.f.	16	17
n	239	239

*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$.

When we include the variable *Asked* (see model II), these results remain unchanged. In addition, model II shows that asking for help is positively and statistically significantly associated with helping behaviour. Respondents who were asked to help were more than 17 times more likely to help ($e^{2.847} = 17.23$) than respondents who were not asked. By far the most important trigger of helping during World War II identified by model II is being asked to help.[16]

Even if individuals are inclined to help, they may find themselves facing a dilemma: *Whom should I help?* Being asked to help, then, may partially solve this dilemma. Given that somebody is willing to help, being asked provides them with the *opportunity* to help. To what extent might asking for help be a subtle way of inducing the receiver of the request to say 'yes'? One may argue that in a situation like the Nazi occupation of Europe, when open communication with other people was difficult and dangerous, it would have been possible for individuals to rationalize their own decision not to help while retaining the sense of not acting cowardly. This is because everyone else was doing the same.[17] However, when one person received a request for help, it would have been much harder to maintain that rationalization.[18] Nevertheless, it is difficult to evaluate the significance of the 'shame effect' outlined here. Its role may be exaggerated by an *ex post* rationalization, based on the widely accepted view (after the war) that helping Jews in need was a good act. Furthermore, even those who did not support Nazi policy regarding the genocide of Jews might still have been bound by a competing norm; namely, the norm of protecting their own families. In these circumstances, people might have felt no shame in saying 'no' to a request for help that would put their family in extreme danger. Only those individuals who believed they should help – without actually wanting to help – would have felt ashamed. In light of the above, being asked for help provides individuals with the opportunity to put to test their disposition to help.[19] The APPBI data show that it does pay to ask for help. Even when agents are willing to help, they may be paralysed by uncertainty over whom to help. Such a dilemma is likely to be solved by being asked and is consistent with altruistic behaviour in other domains, such as donations to charities and blood and organ donations.[20]

As we have mentioned earlier, the *Whom should I help?* dilemma is only partially solved by being asked to help. Further analysis of the APPBI data reveals another complementary and related solution to this dilemma. A cross tabulation of the variable *asked* by the variable *rescued* (Table 5) shows that a request for help is more important when the

Table 5. Cross tabulation of the variable asked by rescued ($n = 280$)

Asked	Rescued		
	Friends and family	*Stranger*	*Total*
Yes	42	98	140
No	51	27	78
Total	93	125	218

rescuee is a stranger to the rescuer. Thus, when the rescuers initiate the act of helping, they are nearly twice as likely to help a friend or a family member rather than a stranger ($51/27 = 1.9$). The reverse is also the case: when rescuers did not initiate help but provided help on request, they were more likely to do so for strangers than friends and family ($98/42 = 2.33$). When we multiply these ratios, we get an odds ratio of 4.4. In other words, offering help to friends and family (as opposed to offering help to strangers) is more than four times more likely than responding to a request from friends and family (as opposed to responding to a request from strangers). This finding may support the view that helping emerges in the context of long-term reciprocal exchange.[21] However, it should be noted that helping friends and family enables the rescuers to solve the dilemma *Whom should I help?* without having to wait for a request. Initiating help to strangers could be very dangerous (compared with helping friends and family) unless the rescuer is *sure* that the person s/he is about to help is not a faker. That is, helping friends and family does not give rise to the same uncertainties and risks faced by people inclined to help strangers in extremely hazardous situations. It does follow that helping friends and family solves the practical dilemmas involved in helping, as it were, more readily. Similarly, the relatively low proportion of friends and family who asked for help (19.3%) would suggest that most rescuers did not wait to be asked by their friends and family: had the rescuees given their friends and family rescuers more time, they might not have needed to ask for help.

5. Whom Should I Ask? The Identity of the Rescuer

Jews in hiding, even though they might have not been fully aware of the consequences of being caught, were surely facing a risk situation. The

risk was coming not only from special SS forces, but also from inform-
ants, neighbours, other Jews, and ordinary police battalions that in some
cases operated with the full support of the population. Browning (1993)
and Goldhagen (1996) have drawn attention to the 'search-and-destroy
missions' to capture Jews undertaken by police battalions with the aid of
the local population. A member of Police Battalion 101 recalls one such
operation carried out in Poland:

> The residential district was searched again. In many cases, with the aid of Poles,
> numerous Jews were found hiding in blockaded rooms and alcoves. I remember a
> Pole drew my attention to a so-called dead space between two walls of adjoining
> rooms. In another case, a Pole drew my attention to a subterranean hideout.
> (Goldhagen 1996: 216, see also 234–8, 395–6)

Individuals in need would have been very cautious in their search for
help. This section asks, Who would have been most likely to say 'yes'
or, if unable to help, less likely to inform the police? The following
story offers some clues. A German woman had come to know of the
atrocities committed by the Nazis. She felt distressed by this but all she
could do was to attend sermons by a priest who seemed critical of the
regime. When he asked her to help some hidden Jews, she agreed
(Oliner and Oliner 1988: 134). Attending sermons by a priest critical of
the regime was a signal to others of her hostility to the Nazi regime. It
was indeed a strong signal: in a situation where many people were eager
to signal the opposite, namely support for the regime, this German res-
cuer had made a strong statement against the Nazis by simply going to a
certain service.[22] Asking her would have greatly reduced the risk of
being reported to the authorities and increased the probability that she
would say 'yes'. This example points to the existence of a selection
mechanism; people advertised their willingness to help in social con-
texts that might be receptive.

The following analysis looks into this selection mechanism. Its aim is
to identify what best predicts 'being asked' to help. The logistic regres-
sion presented in Table 6 examines the existence of (intentional and
unintentional) signals of willingness to help (or more precisely, to be
asked to help, which then increases the likelihood of helping) given by
potential rescuers. These signals, in turn, might have been interpreted by
rescuees and helped them select the people they would ask.

Table 6 shows that the more rooms the potential rescuers had, the
more likely they were to be asked for help. Having many rooms pro-
vided the opportunity for potential rescuers to hide Jews. This opportu-
nity was recognized by the rescuees, as we have already seen in Table 4.
More important in our view, however, is the positive and statistically

Table 6. Logistic regression on the variable asked (SE)

Independent variable	Effect
Constant	–1.575 (1.111)
Age in 1940	0.003 (0.018)
Gender	–0.258 (0.296)
Qualification	
Elementary	0.174 (0.235)
Gymnasium	–0.186 (0.241)
Apprenticeship	0.111 (0.251)
Religiosity	0.043 (0.150)
Have many neighbours	–0.214 (0.410)
Jewish neighbours	–0.070 (0.314)
Economic condition	–0.235 (0.167)
Attic at home	–0.161 (0.346)
Caller at home	–0.368 (0.354)
Lived in a house	0.323 (0.329)
Lived in a city	–0.241 (0.378)
Belonged to Resistance	0.846 (0.327)**
Number of rooms	0.125 (0.063)**
Took chances in life	0.326 (0.139)**
–2 Log likelihood	304.03
d.f.	16
n	239

**$p < 0.05$.

significant effect of the variable *belonging to Resistance*. It indicates that those who were involved in Resistance activities were more than twice as likely to be asked for help by Jews than those who were not

involved in Resistance activities. This is a reliable signal of the disposition of Resistance members to helping others.[23]

The other statistically significant variable that increases the likelihood of being asked is *chances*. This is a *subjective* evaluation, on an inverse five-point scale, of an individual's willingness to take risks when they were young. We would expect to find that those who took more chances in their childhood would be more likely to signal their willingness to engage in rescue activities.[24] We find the opposite, however. The *less* risk they took as a child, the higher the likelihood they would be asked to help Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. A plausible explanation of this result is that risk-averse people overestimated the risks attached to their actions.[25]

To recapitulate, Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe would have been very cautious in their search for help. Jews could not advertise themselves openly since the 'wrong' person might notice them and turn them in. The previous analysis suggests that potential rescuers were *selected* on the basis of signals they had given. Potential rescuers signalled their disposition to be asked and subsequently to help, and thus they were asked.

A further question is, *Who interprets the signal?* This aspect is more critical when the rescuers and the rescuees do not know each other (when the two know each other, the potential rescuers are more likely to initiate helping behaviour, as we have shown earlier). Potential rescuers could not advertise their willingness to help openly, enabling strangers to respond to a signal. One did not want to help the 'wrong' person and, symmetrically, one did not want to be 'helped' by the wrong person. This last point indicates that an asymmetric information problem existed. That is, rescuers had to be sure they helped genuine Jews and not fakers, while the Jews had to be sure the people they approached would not turn them in, at the very least. So how did potential rescuers and Jews (who were unrelated to each other) meet?

One German rescuer recalled: 'One evening, the curate from another village asked me if I would take some Jews for a while. I said, "Yes, they may come"' (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 135). The data presented by Gross show that 49 percent of French rescuers were asked by the clergy and 32 percent by members of the Resistance. Some individuals, then, became the focal point both for Jews in need and for potential rescuers. This in particular was the case of priests, such as pastor Trocmé and Harald Poelchau, the chaplain for Tegel Prison (Berlin) and one of the most active saviours of Jews: a not surprising fact, given the public trust that is associated with the priesthood. But the list of people who asked on behalf of Jews is diverse: 'A high school teacher came to see us one

Table 7. Logistic regression on the variable rescued (SE)

Independent variable	Effect
Constant	–0.636 (0.238)**
Direct	1.042 (0.442)**
Mediator	1.603 (0.238)**
–2 Log likelihood	256.38
d.f.	2
n	206

**p < 0.05.

day. He said he had a German Jewish student who needed help', recalled a French rescuer. Other rescuers had been asked by relatives, friends, Jewish acquaintances acting on behalf of other Jews, Resistance network contacts, and government officials (see Oliner and Oliner 1988: 135–6; Gross 1997: 140).

We use the APPBI data to illustrate the importance of mediators. We concentrate only on those who helped. We contrast those who helped friends and family with those who helped strangers to highlight the asymmetric information problem, which applies to the latter. Nearly two-thirds of those who helped strangers were matched by a mediator (71/117 = 61%).[26] By contrast, less than a third of those who helped friends and family were matched by a mediator (27/90 = 30%). A more elaborate analysis of these data is presented in Table 7, where we apply a logistic regression on the variable *Rescued* (friends–family = 0, stranger = 1). The independent variables are three dummies that we construct from the variables *Asker* and *Asked* (mediator, direct, and initiate). This analysis shows that a direct request for help by a stranger increased the likelihood of being helped by nearly three times ($e^{1.042} = 2.8$) compared with friends and family, who were helped without asking for it.[27] Even more important is the use of mediator, which increased the likelihood of being helped by a factor of five ($e^{1.603} = 4.9$).

This suggests that mediators (the majority of whom were priests, teachers, and other known members of a community) served as a focal point for Jews with *no* social networks in the community of their rescuers. Mediators, moreover, solved the problem of asymmetric information, since the mediators were more likely to be trusted by both the rescuers and the rescuees.

6. Conclusion

Rescuers of persecuted minorities – such as the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe – face at least two dilemmas. First, they might be willing to help but uncertain how to go about rescuing. Second, they might be unsure about the nature of the request to help. To help the wrong person could be very costly. Research on this topic has traditionally concentrated on motivations to help, implying that motivations suffice to explain the act of helping. On its own, this view appears tautological, implying that individuals behaved altruistically because they were altruists. Notwithstanding the importance of motivations, the focus on motivations alone obfuscates the practical dilemmas involved in helping. Situational factors, which most previous research has ignored altogether, provide a most important link between motivations and behaviour.

We have singled out *being asked* as the most significant factor in explaining helping behaviour. The request for help provides individuals with the opportunity to act according to their motivations. This, in turn, solves the first dilemma we mentioned earlier. Being asked to help may also be seen as a *trigger* for such action. It may induce a bystander to act. It is, however, beyond the scope of this article to test the validity of this presumption.

Regarding the second dilemma, we have shown that responding to a request is more likely when a known and reliable person makes it. Symmetrically, people in need of help try to minimize risk by asking individuals who have signalled their disposition to help. Our analysis of the rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe shows that some rescuers helped friends and family members. By so doing, they solved the dilemma *Whom should I help?* and reduced the risk of helping. These dilemmas were also solved by recourse to trusted mediators, who matched rescuers and rescuees.

This article is about the good in society. It explores the mechanisms under which those with good will and those in need are matched. This matching process, however, is far from optimal. Thus, a more general conclusion may be drawn from our analysis: the observed acts of rescue do not account for the potential acts of altruism human beings are capable of. Finally, our work raises the issue of desert: if those who ask have a much higher probability of being rescued, does it follow that they are those who most deserve to be helped? Some members of persecuted minorities or a disadvantaged social group may be in dire need of help and yet not even be able to ask. It does not follow that they do not deserve to be helped.

NOTES

1. Translated by J. Neusner (1988: 674).
2. Estimates of the number of individuals who rescued Jews in the holocaust vary from as low as 50,000 to as high as 1 million, depending on the definition of the term 'rescue'. The low estimate, for example, only considers those who risked their lives without monetary compensation as rescuers (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 2).
3. Similarly, the actions of the Danes who saved Jews have been described as deriving from 'clear convictions […] in accord with the inner truth of man's own rational nature, as well as in accordance with the fundamental law of God: "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"' (Merton 1971: 167, quoted in Gross 1997: 128).
4. As far as motivations are the focus of the analysis, the position of Richard Rorty (1989) does not differ fundamentally from that of Geras (1995). They differ only in the unit of reference. Rorty argues that helpers were moved by feelings of psychological attachment to members of smaller groups, such as 'comrade in the movement', 'fellow Bocce player', or 'fellow Milanese', rather than a sense of belonging to humanity.
5. Opp (1997) highlights the perception of risk. Applying a rational choice perspective to the rescue of Jews in World War II, Opp argues that rescuers of persecuted Jews did not fully perceive the risk they were facing. He draws attention to factors that affect one's motivations for helping and reduce the perceived cost of acting. However, even if rescuers did not fully perceive the risk they were about to take, as indicated by Opp, and were therefore inclined to help, they still faced the practical dilemma we explore in this article.
6. See McAdam and Paulsen's (1993) discussion of this problem in relation to studies on joining voluntary movements.
7. Similarly, a direct request to vote significantly increases voter turnout, as shown by a field experiment carried out by Gerber and Green (1999).
8. Punishment for rescuing Jews varied across countries and across time. In Poland, the German authorities announced on 15 October 1941 that Poles hiding Jews or abetting their concealment would be put to death (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 28). Even the children of people caught helping Jews might be persecuted (see Tec 1986: 63–8, quoted in Geras 1995: 44). It was also rather risky to help in other countries. In the Netherlands, for example, although there was no mandatory death penalty for helping Jews, the authorities executed 1100 helpers of Jews for their activities (Oliner and Oliner 1988: 37).
9. The Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem undertook the identification process. The Yad Vashem is an Israeli agency established in 1953, seeking to identify and give due recognition to rescuers of Jews during Nazi rule in Europe, the 'Righteous Among the

Nations'. It should be noted that the number of Yad Vashem rescuers per country does not correspond to the number of Jews rescued per country.

10. Today, the Yad Vashem list of 'Righteous among the Nations' includes 16,542 identified rescuers (http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/righteous/index.html).

11. In the nonrescuer sample the mean average age is four years lower than in the rescuer sample.

12. We have nevertheless repeated our analyses without the 'self-reported altruist' and found that the pool of self-reported rescuers did not alter the final result we report; that is, our decision to put together self-reported and 'identified' rescuers has not affected our results. We are willing to supply the relevant analysis to those who might be interested.

13. As in every survey, the issue of the validity of the answers applies here. This issue is even more significant in the case of individuals who might be unwilling to admit having being asked and refused to help fellow human beings in danger. The question asked by Oliner and Oliner (*Was there ever a time during the war that you were asked to help somebody and had to say no?* (Oliner and Oliner 1988: Appendix C) enables the respondent to admit not having helped with the minimal loss of face. As we see, the survey was able to establish that most people had to be asked in order to help Jews. In other words, rescuers did not offer their help spontaneously, an admission which might also be unwelcome. Moreover, the survey was able to identify a number of people who were both asked and replied in the negative. Set aside the general question surrounding the reliability of survey data, the validity of the results presented seems to us to be worth taking seriously.

14. Magda Trocme told Hallie: 'I do not hunt around to find people to help. But I never close my door, never refuse to help somebody who comes to me and asks for something. This I think is my kind of religion' (Hallie 1979: 153).

15. This result is expected since the data were collected in such a way that no significant differences would be found between rescuers and nonrescuers with respect to educational qualification, gender, and place of residence during the War, while rescuers are on average four years older than nonrescuers (see Oliner and Oliner 1988: 263–4).

16. In the course of our data analysis, we have included in model II an interaction term for *religiosity* and *Ask* to examine whether or not a request to more religious individuals affected the response. In light of our discussion on women's role in the rescue of persecuted Jews, we also included, in a separate model, an interaction term for *Gender* and *Ask*. We found each of these interaction terms to be non-significant statistically; and their inclusion in the analysis does not alter the final result we report. We are willing to supply the relevant analysis to those who might be interested.

17. Shaw et al. (1994) have devised a psychological experiment in order to study people that avoid placing themselves in a position where they might be asked for help. They observe 'empathy avoidance' when, before exposure to a person in need, subjects are aware that they will be asked to help and helping will be costly.

18. We are grateful to Robert Sugden for pointing this out to us. Offer (1997) has interpreted this mechanism as the 'satisfaction of regard'.

19. The importance of being asked might also shed light on the so-called 'bystander effect' (see Darley and Latané 1968; Latané et al. 1981; Sober and Wilson 1998: 255). A bystander's probability of helping a person in need decreases as the number of bystanders increases. Psychologists have explained this behaviour as due to a 'diffusion of perceived responsibility'. We would predict that if one bystander is singled out by the person in need and asked to help, she is very likely to act.

20. The content of the request, rather than just the act of asking, surely matters. Studies of social movements have linked identity, content of the request and participation in high-risk movement. McAdam and Paulsen (1993) make use of Stryker's notion of *identity salience* in their discussion of individuals' participation in high-risk movement activity. For Stryker (1981: 23–4; cited in McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 646), 'identities are conceptualized as being organized into a hierarchy of salience defined by the probability of the various identities being invoked in a given situation […]'. A crucial factor in the process is that 'the individual must be the object of a recruitment appeal … that succeeds in creating a positive association between the movement and a highly salient identity' (McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 647).

21. There is little reason to believe that helping family and friends is *not* a form of altruistic behaviour. Studies in biology, for example, have shown that *kin selection altruism* (Hamilton 1963) and *reciprocal altruism* (Trivers 1971) are beneficial to the 'altruistic' gene. Nevertheless, we did an additional test purging the variable *Altruist* from its family and friends values from our previous analysis (see Table 4). We wanted to check the possibility that a long-term reciprocity norm may explain a large part of the 'altruistic behaviour' of this category of individuals. Refitting model II in Table 4 without family and friends rescuers did not change our result significantly. In fact, this analysis provided a clearer picture as to the importance of situational factors in the rescue of persecuted Jews, with economic condition and living out of a city now being statistically significant and positive, while the effect of ask increased substantially.

22. We are grateful to Diego Gambetta for pointing this out to us.

23. Given the APPBI data, it is impossible to establish which activity came first – Resistance or rescue. Moreover, we cannot rule out the possibility that rescuing was part of the Resistance activities.

24. It also requires that risk aversion has not changed across the population.

25. We are grateful to Cecilia Garcia-Peñalosa for pointing this out to us.

26. This mediator, moreover, was not a stranger to the rescuers in four out of five cases. This points out that trust was not a problem of the potential rescuers only. Mediators also faced a severe penalty if captured, so they had to have confidence in the people they approached. This issue is beyond the scope of this article.

27. As we have shown earlier, family and friends did not even have to ask for help; in most cases the rescuers directly approached them.

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