INTRODUCTION

Lawrence A. Blum

In Plato's Republic, Thrasymachus argues that self-interest motivates all our behavior, even behavior that appears to show consideration for the interests of others. Plato rejects Thrasymachus's view, but the controversy is still with us. The papers in this section address three questions within this controversy: (1) What is an adequate and workable definition for "altruism"? (2) What are the basic types of and motives for altruism? (3) How is altruism related to morality more generally? How well do our inherited traditions of moral thought illuminate the phenomenon of altruism?

Krzysztof Konarzewski, a Polish psychologist, dismisses most ordinary forms of prosocial behavior as not real altruism. Konarzewski suggests two quite distinct motives for rescue: (1) "Empathy" is a direct concern for the rescuee as a vicarious self. It involves an inclusiveness that breaks through the boundaries of social categories (such as "Jew"). (2) "Protest" involves aiding the rescuee as a way of attacking or protesting against the regime or social order (or one's position in it).

Konarzewski emphasizes the sense of individual independence necessary for protest-inspired rescue—an independence from the values of the social order and its leaders, nurtured by encouragement to reflect critically on the validity of what one has been taught. Konarzewski suggests that empathy and protest are difficult to combine in one individual, for empathic people are more dependent on and sensitive to the situations and opinions of others, thus tending to lack the independence necessary for protest motivation.

Lawrence Blum, an American philosopher, explores distinct as-
pects of the moral accomplishment of rescuers. He distinguishes between altruism as the concern for another person’s welfare as such, and resistance to evil (including resistance to persecution, racism, and genocide). This distinction is very much like Konarzewski’s but with two important differences. Blum thinks it unlikely that a rescuer would engage in rescue purely from the motive of protest or resistance to evil, since he/she would not be likely to see the regime as evil unless he/she also had some altruistic concern for its victims.

Second, Blum does not see protest or resistance to evil strictly as a form of altruism at all, but rather as a distinct moral principle involved in rescue activity. Saving a Jewish life was not just like saving a victim of an accident or natural disaster (an act prompted solely by altruism), but implicitly involved resistance to the evil of Nazism. Thus, according to Blum rescue cannot serve as a paradigm for theories of altruistic personality per se, for rescue (of the persecuted) requires an appreciation of other distinct values as well.

Victor Seidler, an English philosopher and social theorist, offers a wide-ranging discussion of the traditions of thought that he sees as making it difficult to acknowledge the human possibilities of altruism. Seidler especially criticizes Kantianism—as an expression of Enlightenment thought—for its overvaluing of reason and duty and its neglect or denigration of emotion-based motivation like compassion, without which altruism is impossible (the emotion-grounded nature of altruism is presupposed in Konarzewski’s notion of empathy and Blum’s of altruism). Seidler sees both reason and duty as having the potentiality for diverting the individual from his/her deepest impulses—including impulses to care for others—toward an abstract, rigid, and rule-bound morality.

Seidler also questions the customary posing of the issue of altruism as a choice or opposition between altruism and egoism. Seidler argues that the true altruist is not a self-sacrificer. While Seidler is not denying that rescue activities involve risk, he follows the Oliners’ findings that the source of specific acts of rescue lie in a structure of personality; and Seidler wants to emphasize that in choosing to engage in this, as in other, altruistic activities, “altruistic personalities” are acting from their own deepest sense of value and identity.

Seidler’s rejection of the dichotomies of egoism/altruism and
duty/inclination dovetail with his rejection of the idea that rescuers have superior moral merit. He cites the Oliners' book as well as Philip Hallie's account of the villagers of Le Chambon (in *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*), where rescuers almost uniformly rejected a view of themselves as especially meritorious. They regarded themselves as doing what simply needed to be done. In this sense Seidler questions the sharp distinction drawn by Konarzewski between everyday prosocial behavior (not counted as truly altruistic by Konarzewski) and altruism in extreme circumstances. For Seidler, this behavior should all be seen as founded in human concern and care. Conferring special merit on rescuers lets bystanders off the hook morally, allowing them not to take responsibility for the human concern that the situation calls for.

Finally, Seidler criticizes the ignoring of cultural identity in Kantian and Enlightenment thought, where only what is common or universal to all humanity is emphasized as the basis of morality. Seidler points out that such an outlook encouraged Jews (especially in Germany) to downplay their cultural heritage and distinctness, and thus in a sense to betray themselves. Blum relates this issue of cultural identity to morality in another way. He claims that the preservation of any distinct people, such as the Jews, is a separate value over and above altruistic concern for individual members of that group; but that most rescuers were not in touch with this value, and expressed their motivation to rescue in purely universal terms. As Konarzewski says, the rescuers saw past all the social categorizations dividing persons from one another. But Seidler and Blum point out that as high an ideal as this may be, it does neglect what ought also to be taken as a value in its own right, namely, respect for specific cultural identity, in oneself and in others.