When they start talking about courage it is time to emigrate.
Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, “The Two Faces of Courage”

I. Courage and Cowardice:

◊ “I rather hold that the fearless and the courageous are not the same thing. In my opinion very few people are endowed with courage and forethought, while rashness, boldness, and fearlessness, with no forethought to guide it, are found in a great number of men, women, children, and animals. So you see, the acts that you and most people call courageous, I call rash, and it is the prudent acts which I speak of that are courageous.” Plato, Laches (197b).

◊ “The courageous man then is he that endures or fears the right things and for the right purpose and in the right manner and at the right time, and who shows confidence in a similar way.” Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (1115b18-20).

II. Heroism and Moral Cowardice:

◊ “The man who has not the courage to shoulder responsibility for his actions is not fitted to be a leader. Only a man of heroic mould can have the vocation for such a task.” Hitler, Mein Kampf, Ch. XII.
“We did nothing. Anyone who had seriously protested or done anything against the killing unit would have been arrested within twenty-four hours and would have disappeared. It belongs among the refinements of totalitarian governments in our century that they don’t permit their opponents to die a great, dramatic, martyr’s death for their convictions. A good many of us might have accepted such a death. The totalitarian state lets its opponents disappear in silent anonymity. It is certain that anyone who had dared to suffer death rather than silently tolerate the crime would have sacrificed his life in vain. This is not to say that such a sacrifice would have been morally meaningless. It would only have been practically useless. None of us had a conviction so deeply rooted that we could have taken upon ourselves a practically useless sacrifice for the sake of a higher moral meaning.”

III. Pressure and Moral Frailty:

A. Milgram Experiments, 1974

“Upon the command of the experimenter, each of the 40 subjects went beyond the expected breakoff point. No subject stopped prior to administering Shock Level 20. (At this level—300 volts—the victim kicks on the wall and no longer provides answers to the teacher’s multiple-choice questions.) Of the 40 subjects, 5 refused to obey the experimental commands beyond the 300-volt level. Four more subjects administered one further shock, and then refused to go on. Two broke off at the 330-volt level, and 1 each at 345, 360, and 375 volts. Thus a total of 14 subjects defied the experimenter.”

B. Princeton experiments, 1973

“A person not in a hurry may stop and offer help to a person in distress. A person in a hurry is likely to keep going. Ironically, he is likely to keep going even if he is hurrying to speak on the parable of the Good Samaritan, thus inadvertently confirming the point of the parable. (Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way!) Although the degree to which a person was in a hurry had a clearly significant effect on his likelihood of offering the victim help, whether he was going to give a sermon on the parable or on possible vocational roles of ministers did not.”

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IV  Moral Courage:

◊ “Among the themes one consistently finds in the Danish literature on the remarkable rescue of the Jews in 1943, perhaps the most salient is the tone with which the story is told, especially by the rescuers themselves. The tone is one of modesty. Whether one reads the formal historical accounts or the more anecdotal ones, the insistence on shrugging off the attribution of heroism or special courage, unusual level of morality or altruism, is unmistakably present.”

◊ “We are somehow determined to view these benefactors as heroes: hence the search for underlying motives. The Righteous persons, however, consider themselves as anything but heroes, and regard their behavior during the Holocaust as quite normal. How to resolve this enigma?”

◊ “Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done—nothing more complicated. It was not decided from one day to the next what we would have to do. There were many people in the village who needed help. How could we refuse them? A person doesn’t sit down and say I’m going to do this and this and that. We had no time to think. When a problem came, we had to solve it immediately. Sometimes people ask me, ‘How did you make a decision?’ There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? The let us try to help! It was not something extraordinary.”

◊ “It is important, too, to know that we were a bunch of people together. This is not a handicap, but a help. If you have to fight it alone, it is more difficult. But we had the support of people we knew, people who understood without knowing precisely all they were doing or would be called to do. None of us thought we were heroes. We were just people trying to do our best.”

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7 Magda Trocmé, in Different Voices, p.316.