

# A Passing Thought in the Age of Terror

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Global Research, May 10, 2018

Featured image: *Sophie Scholl*

*“Those with no sides and no causes. Those who won’t take measure of their own strength, for fear of antagonizing their own weakness. Those who don’t like to make waves - or enemies. Those for whom freedom, honor, truth, and principles are only literature. Those who live small, mate small, die small. It’s the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you’ll keep it under control. If you don’t make any noise, the bogeyman won’t find you. But it’s all an illusion, because they die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe? From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does. I choose my own way to burn.”*

- **Sophie Scholl**, 21 years old, a member of the German White Rose resistance group, convicted of high treason for handing out anti-war literature at the University of Munich in Nazi Germany. She was executed by guillotine on February 22, 1943

One day, perhaps over morning coffee  
As you drag yourself awake  
Slowly, ruminating at the kitchen table  
About nothing in particular, it appears  
And cuts your breath: you know it can  
Be different, life is yours to choose  
Freely, if you wish, you can own  
This disappearing act of yours  
Before you vanish from yourself and those  
For whom you say you live it.

But you feel it slipping past you,  
Trickling out in trivial deeds  
Repeated daily, the pillars of a normal life.  
Sickening thought, this normalcy that grips you  
By your throat and wrings you dry and dead.  
Now in this quiet breath of solitude  
Before the world arises into walking sleep  
You are paralyzed by possibilities, nothing  
Clear, just images that weave like dancing girls  
Concealing and revealing wisps of dreams.

That is your burden now and hope  
For tomorrow and the next day after that.

Begin with the smallest thing that owns you:  
The need you have to think about another  
Upon whom you can thrust your deepest doubts;  
The stifling of a true response to a question.  
Forget for once to blame your lie on love  
For the other's sensibilities. Admit your faith  
In lies which you have deftly built your life upon  
And which will fall in time into a heap of hurts.

It is always best to begin with truth,  
If you can find it and the trust enough  
To let it come and smash your normalcy  
To bits. It will. It hurts, at first. Few  
Like it, or you speaking it for that matter.  
But it does matter greatly, it will burden you  
With nothing much, the aperture to nothing more  
Than everything that you can see as possible.  
It's tough to choose the terror of the truth  
When trivia tranquilizes with such a soothing smile.

Then they are gone, the coffee and disturbing thoughts  
As clocks alarm the others from their shady lives  
To greet you, stunned and staring stupidly  
Through space.

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