The Renown of the Brave is Eternal: The White Rose and Arendt’s Love of the World

TRACEY STARK
ST. JOHN’S SEMINARY
BOSTON, U.S.A.

A short time ago we heard the terrible news that three young Germans, Hans and his sister Sophie Scholl and Christoph Probst, were executed at the end of February...

The ax of the Hitler executioner was raised three times; three times it descended, and three young heads rolled from the block.

Three heroes died, but their spirit, their love and their hate, their struggle for peace and German freedom lives on in the hearts of hundreds of thousands and millions of young Germans...

The renown of the brave is eternal.¹

This excerpt, from a leaflet written by the National Committee for a Free Germany in the summer of 1943, sums up the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl and the other members of the White Rose resistance: “The renown of the brave is eternal.”

Who, or what, was the White Rose? It was a group of young people — Hans and Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst, Willi Graf, and Alexander Schmorell — who, with the assistance of their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber, from 1942 to 1943, wrote, reproduced, and distributed leaflets informing a select group of students, intellectuals, and professionals in and around Munich, of Nazi atrocities, and predicting Hitler’s

¹Text of a leaflet issued by the National Committee for a Free Germany (the purpose of which was to overthrow the Hitler regime by encouraging resistance, sabotage, and rebellion), addressed to the German fighting forces on the eastern front, as quoted in Scholl, Inge, Students Against Tyranny: the Resistance of the White Rose, Munich, 1942-1943. Translated by Arthur R. Schultz. Wesleyan University Press: Middletown, Connecticut, 1970, pp. 154-156.

I wish to thank the following people for advice and support on this paper: James Bernauer, Stephen Lines, Cathy Armer, Matthew Czapinski, and Jerry Weinstein.
defeat. For their activities, they were sentenced to death by decapitation — a sentence that, for Probst and the Scholls, was carried out in February, for Huber and Schmorell, in July, and, for Graf, in October, 1943.

The members of the White Rose carried out their challenge to Nazism on ethical grounds and out of a sense of spiritual protest. One of their leaflets proclaimed their objective: "We will not be silent, we are your bad conscience. The White Rose will give you no rest." Under the circumstances it was a bold claim to make, one for which you paid with your life. Yet all they aimed to do was establish in Germany a more humane society. In the face of Nazi dehumanization, they sought to present an alternative vision of humanity, one grounded in thoughtfulness and a love for the world. "The Scholls and their friends represented the 'other' Germany, the land of poets and thinkers in contrast to the Germany that was reverting to barbarism and trying to take the world with it."² Indeed, they presented the most forceful moral case against German Fascism, and they did so from a position within Germany itself.³ Whereas much of the political opposition to the Nazis was the work of organized groups with utilitarian aims, the White Rose sought simply to challenge the premises and goals of the Nazi government, and to do so in the name of freedom. Christoph Probst explains:

It is our duty by our behavior and by our dedication to demonstrate that man's freedom still exists. Sooner or later the cause of humanity must be upheld, and then one day it will again prevail. We must gamble our "No" against this power which has arrogantly placed itself above the essential human values and which is determined to root out all protest. We must do it for the sake of life itself — no one can absolve us of this responsibility.⁴

Was their struggle successful? If the measure of success was the overthrow of the Nazi government, the answer would have to be no, for they came nowhere close to demolishing the National Socialist state. From the standpoint, however, of less grandiose objectives, such as actualiz-

³Ibid., p. 309.
⁴Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 37.
ing what people can do to help return their country to conditions of civility, it most certainly was. They themselves were not in a position to anticipate the outcome of their struggle in such terms. They could, at best, operate in the hope others would be inspired by it to join in the effort to vindicate “the right and freedom of the individual to choose for himself his manner of life.” But even if, under the circumstances, that was not going to be possible, they were not about to stand idly by while an immoral government carried out the systematic murder of millions and destroyed political freedom. They felt it their duty to expose such atrocities and provide moral support to other resisters. “[W]e may seem, in retrospect, to have been ineffectual,” Hans’ and Sophie’s sister, Inge, tells us, “[b]ut our real purpose, after all, was to let the truth be known, to tell the youth of Germany that it was being misused by the Nazis, and to give hope to the persecuted.” In short, notwithstanding the overwhelming odds against them, they took a stand. “Somebody, after all, had to make a start,” declared Sophie during her trial. Commenting on the spirit of their movement, Kurt Huber said, “surely the most selfless and idealistic that can be imagined, it was a striving for no goal but absolute justice, decency, and veracity in the life of the state.” The members of the White Rose were concerned with the future both of Germany and of humanity in general. They wanted to do the right thing in the present, for the future. Although their work caused them a great deal of distress and pain and exacted from them the price of their lives, it brought them joy as well, through their experience of solidarity with, and of acting in, the world. They “acted in spite of the fact that they could do no more than tear small rifts in the structure” of the Nazi state. Inge Scholl observes: “It is rare that a man is prepared to pay with his life for such a minimal achievement as causing cracks in the edifice of the existing order.”

What must it have felt like to belong to the White Rose? “The young people who revolted against Nazism did so primarily because they

---

5 Ibid., p. 4.
7 Hanser, op. cit., p. 294.
8 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 103.
9 Ibid., p. 103.
regarded it as the antithesis of their ideals of freedom and true comradeship, a Juggernaut which mowed down all of those who refused to be regimented."\(^{10}\) We know from their own written testimony as well as that of others that citizens during the Nazi period were under constant surveillance. They came, as a result, to develop the "German look," \[der deutsche Blick\], which consisted in looking over one’s shoulders and around the corner to ascertain that one was not being watched. They certainly worried over the always imminent prospect of their arrest.

"More and more frequently newspapers ran brief notices of death sentences meted out by the People's Court to isolated individuals who had opposed the demonic tyrants of the people, even if only in their utterances. One day it was a well-known pianist, the next an engineer, a worker, or the head of a factory."\(^{11}\)

For the members of a group that actively sought to undermine the Nazis, there surely were many sleepless nights, many lies that had to be told to friends and loved ones, and a constant heavy, nagging fear. Such fear was not without warrant, as the convictions to which they held fast were ones that overwhelming numbers of their fellow Germans would have thought wrongheaded and seditious. The Nazi government mocked and vilified such people, and encouraged others to do likewise.

"Self-made pariahs, they carried their secret convictions around with them like time bombs which at any moment could explode to public view and do them irreparable damage, destroying their careers, shattering and possibly ending their lives."\(^{12}\)

Despite the danger to which they were exposed by their work, and notwithstanding the fear which was its necessary accompaniment, they felt buoyed up by their sense of being on the side of justice, of being part of some larger whole, of acting for the good of posterity. Sophie confided to artist Wilhelm Geyer: "So many are dying for this regime, it's only right that some should die against it."\(^{13}\) Their solidarity with one another was essential to their work, for acting alone, the isolation might have been more than any of them could bear.

\(^{10}\) Prittie, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 258.
\(^{11}\) Scholl, Inge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 44.
\(^{12}\) Hanser, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 161.
\(^{13}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 181.
Why turn to the White Rose today? What significance for our world does their resistance bear? It is important to pose this question, because once any such event has transpired, there is a likelihood that it will transpire again. The event is replicable and is, in that sense, in the world forever. Nazi fascism, in that exact same sense, is in the world, and with it, the reality of totalitarian government, not to mention what recent events have manifested to us, namely, forms of genocide and "ethnic cleansing" modeled along the lines of the Nazi Holocaust. But so is the White Rose. The White Rose, too, exists in history, with a potential for modeling ethical behavior, and for providing hope and inspiration. To the extent we might sometimes still wonder over the prospects for humanity today, the story it has to tell, the example it has to give, are invaluable.

But to be able to tell the story of the White Rose, we must possess some understanding of why anyone at all would want to sacrifice his or her life for the sake of a freedom so tenuous, and for results so much in doubt. The recourse to philosophy will likely be helpful at this point, especially to one that champions the role of individual actors as opposed to impersonal historical forces. Additionally, we shall take a look at the "ethical biographies" of each of these actors, considering what moral forces shaped their lives. The philosophy I have in mind to help us account for the actions of the members of the White Rose, is that of Hannah Arendt (as explicated primarily in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Human Condition*, but also as shown in *The Life of the Mind*, and *Between Past and Future*). This turn to Arendt is not arbitrary, but significant, because Arendt, as a champion of human freedom and political action, gives us tools for critically evaluating political resistance. To study their actions through the lens of her philosophy should then, at the very least, be enlightening. Arendt herself has singled out the White Rose movement for its honesty, morality, and political convictions. Not only the White Rose, however, but *all* Germans who resisted Nazism. By the example of their lives, and by the energy of their struggle, they were able to show that in face even of extreme evil, humans have the ability still to carry out exceptional deeds of bravery and self-sacrifice:

[The resistance of Germans to Hitler must not be allowed to have been in vain. It could not wipe out the horrors of the Nazi regime; nor could it even compensate for those horrors. But it was
the example of the exceptional in all mankind, and the special sign of hope for the German people. Much that was best in Germany was lost when Hitler's opponents died. But in their example, if it is truly understood, lies the prospect of the renewal of all that has ever been good in the German way of life.\footnote{Prittie, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 266-7.}

In our study of the struggle of the White Rose, we shall have opportunity to rehearse the many themes important in her own work — her emphasis on human freedom, on thoughtfulness as a protection against evil-doing, on political action, and on the role that art and education play in the development of a sense of worldliness. But if there is a theme, dear to Arendt, that the members of the White Rose bodied forth in and through their lives, it would have to be the theme of \textit{Amor Mundi}, love of the world.

\[\sim\]

Arendt divides the active life into three categories: labor, work, and action. Labor is cyclical and associated with biological survival. It includes planting and harvesting crops as well as giving birth to children. Work is linear. It is the sphere where humans fabricate tools and artifacts meant to outlive immediate consumption. Both of these activities, labor and action, can take place in isolation, so neither relates us to other people as such. Action, on the other hand, occurs between people, as interaction. "Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."\footnote{Arendt, Hannah. \textit{The Human Condition}, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1958, p. 7.} Action concerns the founding and preserving political communities. It requires plurality — the recognition that each human is unique and irreplaceable — as well as a public realm of expression. "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 8.} Since it corresponds to the condition of plurality, action relies on speech. What is at
stake is a sharing of words and deeds. Arendt describes it as, "an activity which neither relates a living being to the recurrence of life, nor relates an expert to natural data which are to be worked upon or elaborated or used, but which relates individuals likewise disclosed."  

Arendt argues that it is action which preserves the public realm and the space of appearance. It gives the web of human affairs its meaning. "Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things."  

We need to maintain a space for action in our world.

Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable by virtue of being born, "there is no new thing under the sun"; without speech to materialize and memorialize however tentatively, the "new things" that appear and shine forth, "there is no remembrance"; without the enduring permanence of a human artifact, there cannot "be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."  

Arendt argues that Greek democracy was initially established as the sphere of action but that in the modern world, action recedes into the distance. Today, the political realm has lost its importance and the public aspects of a person's life are replaced by the private concerns of economic and material well-being. As Arendt explains in The Origins of Totalitarianism, "[d]eprived of political rights, the individual, to whom public and official life manifests itself in the guise of necessity, acquires a new and increased interest in his private and personal fate."  

It is partially this concern for private and personal fate in the modern era that allowed Hitler to gain power in Germany: the Nazis progressively became more popular as they brought down inflation and the unemployment rate and improved food supplies. German historian Peter Hoffmann explains this phenomenon in the History of the German

---

18 Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 204.
19 Ibid., p. 204.
Resistance 1933-1945, explaining that in the teeth of severe unemploy-
ment, inflation, and long-term insecurity, the Nazis, “[p]romised work, 
bread and good order.”21 Of course, one wonders what, if anything, 
about post-World War I Germany accounts for the rise to power of the 
Nazis. Other countries were at that time undergoing the same political 
upheaval and experiencing the same economic hardships. So why did 
not all of those other struggling nations became fascist? To account for 
the particular configuration of twists and turns in Germany’s response 
to these hardships, one could cite, of course, the war damage payments 
extacted by the victors from the vanquished, which were particularly 
onerous for Germany. This left many Germans experiencing a defeat 
and emasculation in excess of what perhaps could be reasonably ex-
pected of a vanquished people in the aftermath of a war. Hitler accom-
plished the important work of restoring to the Germans their sense of 
pride. Besides, there were no strong democratic traditions in Germany 
for the democratic Weimar Republic to base any long-term future pros-
pects for itself on. Under the circumstances, Germany was an easy tar-
get for totalitarianism. Also, there was the matter of German anti-
Semitism, and of the role which it played in the racist Nazi party’s rise 
to power. So while political upheaval and economic turmoil were not 
unique to Germany in the pre-Nazi era, the consequences for political 
life were more potentially devastating in Germany than elsewhere. On 
the assumption that it was the nation’s economic revival that they were 
going to broker, the Nazis got swept into power. Once installed in power, 
they proceeded to destroy the public realm with relatively little oppo-
sition.

Of course, there were those who did not view the Nazi program as a 
panacea for all of Germany’s problems. Indeed, many viewed the party 
as anti-Christian and extremist, and decried the steps it had taken to 
curtail both freedom of speech and participation in government. Still, 
most Germans believed that such inconveniences were a small price to 
pay for the economic gains promised, as well as for the psychological 
healing of the wounds of World War I. It did not matter to most of the 
citizens that the trade-off for personal well-being was the establishment 
of a totalitarian government. In fact, Hoffmann finds that after Hitler

took power, "[i]t seemed wise to keep quiet, to allow the new government, like the old, just to carry on, and to look for a job." Germany, like the rest of the world, had become a society of jobholders, concerned only with the private, biological needs of existence. Inge Scholl explains how Hitler was able to exploit the material needs of the people in order to gain a power which destroyed the political realm: "Hitler, so we were told everywhere, wanted to give this homeland greatness, happiness and prosperity ... he wanted to ensure that everyone had work and bread; he would not rest until every German was free and happy in the fatherland."23

Hitler's version of freedom, however, simply meant freedom from material want. According to Arendt, this freedom does not constitute true human emancipation, but reduces us instead to the status of animals. For her, we are humanized only in the sphere of that activity which goes on directly between humans. This corresponds to the human condition of plurality, which is the precondition for democratic politics. It is also what makes us uniquely human: "Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it."24 Since it is action that raises us above the level of animals, there is dehumanization in the loss of the public/political realm, the realm of action. By orchestrating the destruction of this sphere of action, the Nazis in effect reduced humans to mere biological beings. Terence Prittie, an American reporter living in Germany in the 1930s, finds this to have become the case with young people involved in Hitler groups: "In an animal sense [they were] happy, physically fit, tanned by the sun and the wind, secure in their share of the future."25

The Scholls rebelled against the attitude that biological well-being was more important than political freedom. For instance, when asked why he did not like Hitler, despite Germany's great economic successes, Hans and Sophie Scholl's father replied:

[B]ut surely we are not like cattle, satisfied if we have fodder for our bellies. Material security alone will never be enough to make

22 Ibid., p. 5.
us happy. After all, we’re human beings, with free opinions and our own beliefs. A regime which would tamper with these things has lost every spark of respect for man.26

Kurt Huber reiterated this perspective in his final statement before his execution: “We do not want to waste our short lives enslaved and in chains, though they be the golden chains of material abundance and prosperity.”27 One of the White Rose leaflets echoed Huber’s position: “[W]e demand from Adolf Hitler’s state the return of our most precious possession, the personal freedom of which he has basely and treacherously deprived us.”28 The members of the White Rose understood that the expression of full humanity is realized, not in material abundance, but in free participation in the political realm. Sophie awakened to this realization in school, on being confronted with Hitler’s Führerprinzip [leadership principle], which held that the leader of a nation was justified in being unjust and that the good of the state was more important than the rights of citizens. Sophie disagreed, believing in a higher and more humane morality, and maintaining that the reason for the state’s existence was the guarantee it provided for the worth and dignity of the individual.29 Hans held similar beliefs, taking Aquinas’ view that the state existed for the individual, and not the other way around,30 and bannering this view on one of the White Rose leaflets:

Anything may be sacrificed to the good of the state except that end for which the State serves a means. The state is never an end in itself; it is important only as a condition under which the purpose of mankind can be attained, and this purpose is none other than the development of all of man’s powers, his progress and improvement. If a state prevents the development of the capacities which reside in man, if it interferes with the progress of the human spirit, then it is reprehensible and injurious, no matter how excellently devised, how perfect in its own way.31

---

26 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 12.
28 Hanser, op. cit., p.16.
29 Ibid., p. 83.
30 Ibid., 89.
31 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 75.
Hans had composed this message while in his twenties, but even as a much younger person, as an affiliate of a Nazi Youth organization, he had recognized the dangers of the totalitarian state. The organization had insisted on complete conformity at the expense of individuality, and totally disapproved of uncontrolled thought, uncurbed opinion, and unsanctioned emotion. His sister, Inge, recalls to mind Hans’ dependency over the social controls imposed by the Nazis, which effectively destroyed opportunities for authentic human interaction:

The official view demanded discipline and conformity down to the last detail, including personal life, while he [Hans] would have wanted every boy to follow his own bent and give free play to his talents. The individual should enrich the life of the group with his own contribution of imagination and ideas.\(^{32}\)

This example shows that Hans had a notion of the potential for action that was being destroyed by Nazi totalitarianism. At his trial he testified that he believed that it was his duty to remind people of their political obligations, “one of which was to take up the struggle against National Socialism.”\(^{33}\) Professor Huber likewise expressed dissatisfaction over the Nazi practice of preventing people from participating in political activities: “As a German citizen, as a German professor and as a political person, I hold it to be not only my right but also my moral duty to take part in the shaping of our German destiny.”\(^{34}\) Inge Scholl elaborates: “We had no political training, but the political element had entered into the spirit of the group’s resistance. The point was to say what we honestly thought and wanted.”\(^{35}\)

What the members of the White Rose thought and wanted was clear. They thought that a government which denies human plurality (on pain of death for many “outsider” groups) was wrong. They wanted to establish a democracy in which political action could occur. Their moral outrage was directed against the persecution of the Jews and other groups as well as the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany. One leaflet said, “[m]any, perhaps most, of the readers of these leaflets do not see clearly


\(^{35}\) Prittie, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.
how they can practice an effective opposition. They do not see any avenues open to them. We want to try to show them that everyone is in a position to contribute to the overthrow of this system.”36 The leaflet went on to encourage passive resistance as a means of action: “The meaning and the goal of passive resistance is to topple National Socialism, and in this struggle we must not recoil from any course, any action, whatever its nature.”37

It is unbelievable to what extent one must deceive a people in order to rule it.38

—Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf

Arendt insists that in order for people to be able to engage in legitimate political action and discussion, they must first be able to rely on a shared perception of reality, based on the equitable access to factual truth. In her essay, “Truth and Politics,” she describes how the modern quest for power has made factual truth obsolete. Those in power feel no compunction using “lies” whenever they believe it necessary to achieve their political goals. Hitler, certainly, imposed “language rules” designed to deceive and camouflage. In such a world, citizenly access to a shared perception of reality is blocked, and “[t]he chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed; it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever.”39 The Scholls recognized the danger of Nazi lies when they formed their resistance movement. One of their leaflets insisted that “[e]very word that comes from Hitler’s mouth is a lie. When he says peace, he means war, and when he blasphemously uses the name of the Almighty, he means the power of evil, the fallen angel, Satan.”40 The group’s vehement opposition to lies is partly the reason for their choice of the name,”White Rose”; they “preferred a white sheet of paper, not for aesthetic reasons but because it carried no lie, no

36 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 82.
37 Ibid., p. 82.
38 As quoted in a White Rose leaflet, Ibid., p. 77.
40 Scholl, Students Against Tyranny, p. 85.
threadbare assertion.\textsuperscript{41} Hans wrote to a friend in October 28, 1941:

This war (like all major wars) is fundamentally spiritual. I sometimes feel as if my puny brain is the battleground for all these battles. I can’t remain aloof because there’s no happiness for me in so doing, because there’s no happiness without truth — and this was is essentially a war about truth. Every false throne must first crack and splinter, that’s the distressing thing, before the genuine can appear in unadulterated form. I mean that personally and spiritually, not politically. I’ve been presented with the choice.\textsuperscript{42}

Hans was presented with a choice: he could have quietly and unquestioningly accepted what was happening, or he could take action against the Nazis and encourage others to do likewise. He chose to take action.

\begin{center}
\textemdash
\end{center}

The realm of action needs a public space in which to occur. It also requires a private space into which one may retire and satisfy the requirements of biological existence. Something else is a necessary precondition of action, however: thought. Arendt describes thought as a gap “between past and future,” where one escapes from temporality by means of representation and imagination. In this gap we are in dialogue with ourselves; we question and challenge our actions and motives. In order for us to maintain this internal dialogue we must respect ourselves. Arendt diagrams this dynamic with reference to Socrates:

To Socrates, the duality of the two-in-one meant no more than that if you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends. The partner who comes to life when you are alert and alone is the only one from whom you can never get away — except by ceasing to think. It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, because you can remain the friend of the sufferer: who would want to be the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{vinke}

\bibitem{scholl}
\end{thebibliography}
friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even another murderer.43

Its dialogical manner of proceeding provides thought a source of protection against evil. There is “some property inherent in the activity [of thinking] itself, regardless of its objects” which “can prevent men from doing evil.”44 Thought, in other words, can alert us to the moral ramifications of our acts and help to keep us honest. Professor Huber must have been aware of this Socratic insight, for at his trial, when asked why he participated in the White Rose, he responded that, “I have acted as I had to act in response to an inner voice.”45 He then quoted German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte:

And you must act, as if
On you and your actions alone
The fate of the German matter depends,
And the responsibility were yours.46

Writing to a friend, Sophie says, “[j]ust because things are conflicted, man should not himself be in conflict.”47 She recognized as well the importance of being true to one’s own standards: “We carry all our standards within ourselves, only we don’t look for them closely enough. Perhaps because they are the severest standards.”48 How did Sophie Scholl come to this understanding? What was it that led her, and the other members of the White Rose, to see the value of thinking a moral problem through and standing on the side of justice?

Arendt may provide some answers, for she believes that the Nazi state was able to exploit people’s thoughtlessness in order to make them into perfect bureaucrats.49 Adolf Eichmann, in her view, is a case in point.

43 Ibid., pp. 187-88.
46 As quoted in Dumbach, Annette E. and Newborn, Jud, Shattering the German Night, Boston: Little, Brown, 1986.p. 228.
47 Vinke, op. cit., p. 72.
48 Scholl, Hans, op. cit., p. 211.
49 This is not to say that modern states everywhere do not do this, but that the Nazi government was particularly able to exploit the bureaucratic method and use what
He was a "good-citizen" who did his job well. He followed orders, but did not think for himself. At Eichmann's trial, Arendt was struck by the fact that no matter what the format of his expression, spoken or written, and no matter to whom he was speaking, he always said the same thing in the same way. To an almost comical extent, he relied on clichés as opposed to thoughtful speech. Unable to communicate with others in a meaningful way, he was little more than a cog in the Nazi machine. It became apparent to Arendt during her coverage of Eichmann's trial that, as a consequence of his incapacity for meaningful thought, he could be depended on to carry out the grisly work of shipping millions of people to their deaths. On this connection between speech and thought, Arendt writes:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and presence of others, and hence against reality as such.\textsuperscript{50}

The destruction of human freedom in Nazi Germany, including the freedom of thought, was partially accomplished by means of the bastardization of language, since language is what shapes thought. This is not to say that language is not used by other governments for political purposes; only that this is an essential feature of totalitarian governments. As George Orwell illustrates so well in his novel, \textit{1984}, governments typically distort and eliminate elements of language that allows citizens to think dissident thoughts (or, for that matter, to think at all).\textsuperscript{51}

scholars have cited as the particularly German obedience to authority to their advantage.

\textsuperscript{50} Arendt, \textit{Eichmann in Jerusalem}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{51} The lesson that action requires honest and direct speech is still important for us today, as evidenced by the Clinton administration's refusal to refer to the genocide in Rwanda as a genocide. The White House insisted that while "acts of genocide" might be occurring, a full-fledged genocide was certainly not. (Of course, after the fact, world leaders, including Clinton, apologized to the Rwandan Tutsi people for not recognizing the genocide or coming to their aid. This at a time when action was no longer needed). We saw that our government and the UN "played awkward semantic games for the media, trimming the truth about genocide in order not to deal with it" (John Koch, "Rwanda and a World's Indifference," \textit{The Boston Globe}, Jan. 26, 1999).
Eichmann is a case in point of the decimation of thought that governments encourage through the abuse of speech. How did the Nazis manage to establish language control on such a enormous scale? As a first starting point, by subjecting the language of young people to stringent control. Terence Prittie observed some members of the Hitler Youth firsthand, and describes them, uncannily, in the same phraseology Arendt uses to speak about Eichmann. Of the youngsters in these groups, Prittie recalls,

[...]omical in some ways, they were impressive in others. In argument they were quickly and totally lost, and forced to fall back on selected slogans. They were astonishingly ignorant of the world outside Germany, for they were simply not taught about it any longer. They always sought to avoid giving a personal opinion in order to resort to some stock phrase.  

Hans Scholl noticed the danger of the Nazi abuse of language while still in a Hitler Youth group. Concerning a conference he attended with this group in Nuremberg, he writes, “[t]he inane drill, the paramilitary parades, the silly chatter, the vulgar jokes ... From dawn to dusk: Fall in for roll call, listen to speeches, be sure to display enthusiasm. No one had time for a sensible conversation.” In their last leaflet, Hans and his companions in the White Rose expressed their outrage at this Nazi attempt to annihilate thought: “We have grown up in a state where all free expression has been ruthlessly gagged. In the most fertile young years of our lives, Hitler Youth, SA and SS have endeavored to standardize, condition and anesthetize us.” By destroying language, the Nazis were destroying the opportunity for people to grow and filling their minds with confusion and euphemisms. “Philosophical training is the name given to the despicable method by which our budding intellectual development is muffled in a fog of empty phrases.”

In addition to thoughtfulness and meaningful speech, Arendt insists on the importance of “willing” for political action. The will for her

---

52 Prittie, op. cit., p. 154.
53 Vinke, op. cit., p. 41.
54 Ibid., p. 154.
55 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 91.
is the spring of action, "the power of spontaneously beginning a series of successive things or states." Because we are radically free individuals, to deny freedom by insisting on the deterministic context of action is to evade responsibility. Willing, on the other hand, is always a free choice, and leads to action. Political action is a matter, not of renouncing one's will, but of taking responsibility for one's actions. In a diary entry for January 13, 1941, Sophie Scholl wrote:

In the train I longed so much to see a face which would remind me of my brothers and sisters and friends. Does that make sense? Not exactly homesickness, but awareness of being different. Even the young people, and there were lots in the train, weren't young any more, they seemed to think the only purpose of youth is pleasure. But my family and friends — even if they were sometimes clumsy or ignorant, were at least full of goodwill — full of the will to do what is good.  

As a consequence of the incapacity of the great majority of the German population in 1941 to safeguard their freedom by husbanding in themselves the "will to do what is good," the Nazis rose to power on the strength of a myth of progress that effectively reduced the status of the individual to that of a cog in the machine. Historian Annedore Leber writes:

The whole process [Germany’s Nazism] can be made to appear quite inevitable — until one remembers that other nations do not seem to have been so completely at the mercy of events. If they [other nations] were able to attain a happier state of affairs, it was a result of political decisions, taken by resolute men, ready to sacrifice themselves to secure them. They were acts of will. What seems to be missing in German history is the determination to control events, except in certain individuals such as Bismarck and Hitler, who were ready to exploit this failing in the German character.  

The Scholls and other members of the White Rose rebelled against this failure of character on the part of vast numbers of their country-

---

58 Ibid., p. xii.
men. As members of the Hitler Youth, the Scholls had experienced being swept up in something that felt like a great historical process. "We felt we belonged to a large, well-organized body that honored and embraced everyone, from the ten-year-old to the grown man," observes Inge, "[w]e sensed that there was a role for us in a historic process, in a movement that was transforming the masses into a Volk."\(^59\) Eventually, however, they awakened to the realization that the Nazi ideology of German progress, so alluring at first, was a dangerous myth with dehumanizing and murderous consequences for untold numbers of people. They dwell on this point in their first leaflet:

If the German people are already so corrupted and spiritually crushed that they do not raise a hand, frivolously trusting in a questionable faith in lawful order in history; if they surrender man's highest principle, that which raises him above all other God's creatures, his free will; if they abandon the will to take decisive action and turn the wheel of history and thus subject it to their own rational decision; if they are so devoid of all individuality, have already gone so far along the road toward turning into a spiritless and cowardly mass — then, yes, they deserve their downfall.\(^60\)

Not content to sit back as passive spectators, the Scholls chose to act, proving in the process that no hegemonic power on earth, no matter how violently repressive, is capable of dehumanizing everyone. Writes Hans Scholl in a diary entry for August, 1942: "[I]f the spirit is endangered, so, to no avail, is human existence. It isn't enough for a person to ply his trade any old how. Merely doing one's duty is absurd and misleading. Man is born to think,"\(^61\) or, if you will, to face the challenge of posing "the primal questions of life: its meaning its purpose."\(^62\) Not all,

\(^{59}\) Scholl, Scholl, op. cit., p. 7. Arendt conjectures that this, too, is what Eichmann, upon joining the Nazi party, must have felt — an opportunity, finally, to make something of himself: "From a humdrum life without significance and consequence the wind had blown him into History, as understood it, namely, into a Movement that always kept moving." Generally speaking, "[w]hat stuck in the minds of these men who had become murderers was simply the notion of being involved in something historic, grandiose, unique, which must therefore be difficult to bear." (Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, p. 33, 105).

\(^{60}\) Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 73.


\(^{62}\) Hanser, op. cit., p. 196.
of course, saw such "primal questions of life" as questions needing to be posed. They were intent, simply, upon doing their job. Jakob Schmied, for instance, who was responsible for the Scholls' arrest, protested his own innocence on the grounds that he was merely doing his job. "He was convinced that he had done his duty by keeping order at the university. At his trial he declared that he would have arrested the students [for littering] even if all they had tossed out had been sandwich wrappers." Eichmann, similarly, "remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do — to ship millions of men, women and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care." Eichmann had so thoroughlygoingly become a creature of the Nazi party, that he was incapable of formulating his own judgments. From its tenets he had taken to drawing the very standards for his inner conduct. Not only, therefore, were there "no voices from the outside to arouse his conscience," not only "could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution," there were no voices from the inside either. Not even Propst Grüber, a Protestant clergyman who opposed the killings on principle, ever confronted Eichmann on them in the course of their numerous interactions. As a result, writes Arendt, "[Eichmann] would have would have killed his father if he had received an order to that effect."

At the instigation of their parents, professors, and friends, the student-members of the White Rose engaged in the lifelong cultivation of the life of the mind. Inge Scholl recalls how relieved their father upon

---

Vinke, op. cit, p. 162.
Arendt, Eichmann In Jerusalem, p. 25, (my emphasis).
Ibid, p. 126.
Ibid, p. 126.
Ibid, p. 22.

Like the Scholls, Huber was enamored of the "life of the mind" [Geistesleben], or the "life of the spirit" and had a profound love of literature, music, art, and philosophy. He also believed that learning and knowledge had meaning only if they related to the ethical life. Huber had also been born into a cultivated family where books and music were the center of daily life. Both his parents were educators and they encouraged him in that direction.
learning of their disillusionment with the Hitler Youth. "What I want most of all," he told them, "is that you live in uprightness and freedom of spirit, no matter how difficult that proves to be." 70 If they had had the stamina for this, it was because all their lives they had been encouraged to think. In that, precisely, consisted the greatest threat to the Nazi state, as Roland Freisler, presiding judge at the People's Court before which Hans and Sophie had stood trial, so astutely understood, resulting in the issuance of a declaration berating their parents for "tend[ing] to be hostile to the interests of the people and ... fail[ing] to give them the upbringing that would have formed them into decent citizens." 71 For those who thought like Freisler, the Scholl's parents' most serious failing consisted in the encouragement which they had given to their children to think. Arendt reports:

"[t]he Scholl's middle-class parental home was important in that it was a place where books had always been read. Literature and politics had been discussed and debated. The Scholls had a politically-oriented home. Those are pillars which support independent thought." 72

Robert Scholl had stocked the family bookshelves with works from German literature he considered significant, including books that had been banned by the Nazis. Among them were a number of the works of the Jewish author, Stefan Zweig, who "wrote of individuals following their own consciences and the idiosyncratic needs of their own creativity, not in the name of any one tribe or nation, but as expressions of universal accomplishment." 73 Hans was very much influenced by Zweig's work, and this no doubt helped him in his "decision [to] love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable." 74

70 Scholl, op. cit., p. 12.
71 Ibid., p. 121.
72 Vinke, op. cit., p. 20.
73 Dumbach, op. cit., p. 45.
74 Arendt, Between Past and Future, p. 196.
To the extent that the cultivation of such a morally courageous and thoughtful stance towards the world was a function of education, the Nazis took the necessary steps to dominate the educational apparatus. They applied pressure, for instance, on university professors to sign on with the Nazi party. They aggressively censored books and other academic materials.

The swastika flags were hoisted in every classroom and up on the walls went portraits of the Führer, the leader, the guide, the pilot, of the nation. School libraries were cleansed of subversive literature, which meant any book, whether fact or fiction, that expressed a liberal idea or suggested that the people themselves — rather than the leader, guide, or pilot — should have charge of their destiny. Such books were replaced with texts and tracts glorifying nationalism and militarism, with emphasis on the heroic achievement of the National Socialist German Workers Party in rescuing the Fatherland from the abyss into which the Weimar Republic had plunged it.75

Unfortunately, not every professor or teacher in the system was loath to cooperate with the Nazis. Terence Prittie observes: "Teachers, one must always feel and even believe, should be people cast in the image of Gamaliel, dedicated to truth and proof against the cancerous grip of ideology. A pretty thought, but German teachers had fallen far short of it long before Hitler came to power."76 Wilhelm Roepke, a university professor opposed to the Nazis, was less sparing in his characterization of them. Those who played along with the Nazi designation of them as civil servants, and even took their oath of loyalty to Hitler, he accused of replicating "[a] scene of prostitution which had stained the honourable history of German learning."77 University professor Kurt Huber, a member of the White Rose, did not so prostitute himself: "I have set out to arouse the students," he tells us, "not by the establishment of some sort of organization, but by simple words; not by any act of terrorism, but by helping them to gain an insight into the serious deficiencies of our political life. A return to clear moral principles, to

75 Hanser, op. cit., p. 39-40.
76 Prittie, op. cit., p. 157.
77 Ibid., p. 157.
the constitutional state and to mutual trust of man to man — all that, far from being illegal, is simply the restoration of law." 

Long before the integrity of the educational system in Germany had come to be so compromised as to make academics such as Kurt Huber seem an anomaly, the members of the White Rose had cultivated their love of freedom. As children, for example, Hans Scholl and Willi Graf had been members of a reading group or literary organization, called the Jungenschaft, that, prior to the Nazi takeover, existed in various cities in Germany. In the Jungenschaft, books played an important part. From the theme song of the Jungenschaft one gets the impression that it served as a powerful tool not only for educating its members, but also for getting them to think both for themselves and beyond themselves. Listen to this excerpt from the song:

Close eye and ear a while
Against the tumult of the time;
You’ll not still it or find peace
Until your heart is pure.

As you watch and wait
To catch the Eternal in the Everyday;
You freely choose to take your role
In History’s great play.

The hour will come when you are called.
Be then prepared, be ready;
If the fire dies down, leap in;
Again it blazes, steady.

Recognizing the threat to their totalitarian state from the Jungenschaft, the Gestapo disbanded them. Hans and Willi, however, kept the spirit of their Jungenschaft alive, holding sessions together at which they read philosophy and modern literature.

The boys discovered literature and got involved in what was later called degenerate art. They saw coming to terms with basic philosophical issues as their assignment. Friedrich Nietzsche and Stefan

78 Leber, op. cit., p. 44.
George were important subjects. In fact every new book meant new discovery. They would read to each other late into the night, discuss what they had heard, and plan the next reading.  

"The books we were reading," Inge Scholl recalls, "like modern art, turned into bills of indictment against society. They made us confront National Socialism. They mobilized our defiance." This was the case not only with the Scholl siblings, but with the entire membership of the White Rose resistance movement. They organized "reading evenings" at which they took turns reading aloud from their favorite books — poetry, novels, philosophy — discussing the material afterwards. "[T]hese evenings were defensive measures on the part of people under spiritual siege, a way of manning the moral ramparts. It did not damage the enemy directly but it helped sustain the morale of the defenders."  

The friends told one another about books. I daresay these books became the first intimations of resistance. But more than that, the friends began to reach conclusions. They came to grasp that experience arises not from what you read, but from what you do. Books could stimulate, could impart an insight, could light a candle. But all of this would be relevant to your own life, your true self, only when you put into practice what you had determined was right.  

The Nazis were not slow to recognize the danger in these "reading evenings," and of literary groups in general. Reporting on the White Rose, Roland Freisler describes their "reading evenings" as meetings "where political discussions were carried on by these enemies of the people; where they slandered National Socialism and spoke of the necessity of taking action against it. The mere existence of a circle of that kind constitutes a treasonous threat to the Reich." For the member of the White Rose, however, such evenings were not treasonous, but inspiring.

---

80 Vinke, op. cit., pp. 46-47.
81 Vinke, op. cit., p. 61.
82 Hanser, op. cit., p. 127.
83 ibid., p. 62.
84 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 134.
Two young people [Hans and Sophie Scholl] were voicing what thousands of their own kind, mainly older schoolchildren and university students, were thinking. On them, political education and an acquaintance with the liberal counter-forces of art, religion, and scholarship, imposed an obligation to preach resistance, not in the cloud-cuckoo-land of the mind, but in the here and now of everyday life under fascism, and to do so in language whose aesthetic nature was itself expressive of political dissent.\textsuperscript{85}

Hans and Sophie's sister, Inge, was keenly aware of the importance of education for the development of free thought. Following the war, inspired by the courage which Hans and Sophie had demonstrated, she opened a university for adult education in her hometown of Ulm. Of Germany, she writes that, "[u]nless its citizens possess a sound foundation of knowledge, democracy will stand on shaky feet."\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{flushright}
Whenever I hear the word "culture" I take the safety catch off my automatic.
\end{flushright}

Hanns Johst, a popular Nazi author\textsuperscript{87}

In Arendt's view, as crucially important as education was for engendering in human beings a love for the world, it was important as well for fostering in them a capacity for artistic judgment and taste. Now, judgment and taste are political insofar as they propel one into the sphere of the intersubjective, where one takes up a position, learning at the same time to view the world from the position of another. Judgment, however, deals with particulars rather than with universals, and of itself neither possesses nor is capable of producing rules on the basis of which to classify and rank things. It requires, as such, imagination, an attention to plurality, and such an "enlargement" of thought "as to take into account the thoughts of others."\textsuperscript{88} We judge, after all, never as members of some abstract supersensible world, but as members of a community who communicate with one another even as they judge.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} Scholl, Hans, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. vii-viii.
\textsuperscript{86} Scholl, Inge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{87} Quoted in Hanser, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{88} Arendt, \textit{Kant Lectures}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid.}, p.67.
The use of the imagination, however, can have political consequences. One of the reasons most Germans did not protest the persecution of the Jews is that they lacked imagination and, as a consequence, were incapable of empathizing with them.\textsuperscript{90} Understanding the possibilities open to him in this regard, art was one of the areas of national life that, from early on, Hitler took steps to bring under control:

To the outward eye both religious and intellectual life was regimented and controlled; all intellectual utterances were subject to censorship. The object was to concentrate under unified control the press, the cinema, the radio, literature, the theatre, and mass demonstrations; their "centralized employment must be absolutely guaranteed"; declared Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda; propaganda, by which a people could be ruled; all cultural life must now be concentrated in the service of the National-Socialist concept. The control of the minds of the people, essential for total domination, could only be achieved if these were entirely permeated by the thinking of their rulers and purged of everything else. In this they did not eventually succeed — nor has anyone else anywhere.\textsuperscript{91}

Even if it cannot be entirely successful, the political control of the arts constitutes a danger to democracy and to political action. Arendt writes:

Culture and politics, then, belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as to how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it.\textsuperscript{92}

If Hans and Sophie Scholl were capable of making ethical judgments about the activities of the Nazis, and, in particular, of experiencing soli-
darity with the oppressed enemies of the Nazi state, while other young Germans remained mostly unmoved, it was because, having been exposed to culture and art from a very young age, they had developed what could be called imaginative empathy. The fact that they had studied art and enjoyed going to artistic exhibitions prompted in them outrage over Hitler's subjection to censure of some of their favorite artists, on the charge of "degeneracy." The list of "degenerate" artists included such favorites of the Scholls as Franz Marc, Van Gogh, Gauguin. The prohibition on the public display of the works of such masters did not, however, result for the Scholls in a total loss of aesthetic influences, for they maintained actual social contact with a number of such artists. Inge Scholl asserts that Hans' and Sophie's experience of culture from such close quarters contributed to the energy of the resistance which they put up to Nazism:

It was one of the unusual circumstances of the time that a line of relationship could exist between the expressionist painters, modern theology, and political activism. Another decisive factor was that they did not have to live at a second hand. They visited artists in their studios, for they were not otherwise accessible; their paintings were proscribed. They met philosophers and engaged them in discussion; their books were not offered for sale. They were present at the moment when ideas were born, not after they had become articles of consumption. Thus they developed the freedom and progressive cast of thought which ultimately forced them to act.

Many of the Germans who sat by and did nothing, as well as those who actively participated in the Nazi regime, were raised with a love of culture. What made it different for the Scholls was that they made judgments about what they saw and could put themselves in the shoes of others. Sophie Scholl loved music, not because other people told her

---

93 The Nazis condemned as degenerate any art which was cut off from the "blood and soil," of the German nation, especially modern art. Any art which did not fit the propagandizing scheme of the ruling party was considered dangerous because it allowed for a questioning of values and possibly a re-channeling of energy away from feelings of patriotism.


95 Ibid., p. 102.
she ought to love it, but because she had adjudged it as deserving of her esteem. In a draft of a letter from January of 1942, we find her chiding her fellow concert-goers for not really desiring to listen to the music, but for the sake merely of being seen, or, as she herself put it, of satisfying a sense of “propriety” which “demands the possession of some ludicrous crumb of knowledge about every subject.”  

They go to concerts as casually as they show off a new hat. They graciously commend what thousands have commended before them — whatever may be commended with impunity — and coldly condemn anything new to them until it has gained universal approbation. They go home as blinkered as they came. Most of them do, at least. Precisely the same applies when music has given them aesthetic pleasure, however great.  

Quite unlike them, Sophie desired to absorb the music with her whole heart, to be “subjected ... to its beneficent, liberating power.” Here we see the influence of art for Sophie’s spiritual life. We see that art, literature, music, and poetry helped form the moral motivations of the members of the group. And it served to buoy up their spirits once they started to act. The avid interest they took in the fine arts became for them a subtle form of protest.  

To be musical or artistic or literary was to proclaim oneself un-Nazi or non-Nazi with a hint of anti-Nazi, since the true Hitlerite scorned everything intellectual or esthetic as effete and unmanly. To cherish such things was a sign, a signal. In the concert hall one could withdraw into a civilized enclave, unsullied and intact, amid the encroachments of the brown barbarism.  

Writing about the activities carried out by the members of the White Rose, Else Aichinger concludes:  

They knew exactly what their activities would do to their own lives. And they had an inkling of what their activities would do to

---

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Hanser, op. cit., 131.
the future, even if now it does look as if they were wrong. They sensed that they were starting a gust of wind where all had been becalmed. They sensed it more strongly than we do now. In fact they knew it. They gave their lives for others, in nonviolence. That is why I say that the Scholls and their friends, in trying to resist, succeeded, that their resistance carried the day, that perhaps it was the most successful resistance in the Third Reich.100

Now, while in a material sense, the White Rose, despite all of their trouble, and despite the sacrifice of the lives of some in their number, did not bring down the government, did not begin a trend of civil disobedience, did not cause riots to break out in the streets, it would be wrong for us to be contemptuous or dismissive of what they did.

We may question the point and value of the White Rose dissidence, since it didn’t change the course of events or destroy Hitler. We may accuse them of being impractical idealists without clearly defined political objectives. This attitude itself is problematic — a pragmatic payoff shouldn’t be the sole gauge of every endeavor.101

As Terence Prittie puts it: “The human race is full of technical successes and spiritual failure.”102 What is more, the White Rose did have a moral impact, the most convincing testimony concerning which comes from the Nazis themselves. In their furious reaction to the activities of the White Rose, they “acknowledged that they feared the leaflets and saw them as a clear and present danger.”103 As Richard Hanser says, “[t]he leaflets were bold and uncompromising expressions of the free human spirit. As such, they were an intolerable threat to the Nazi system and the concepts on which it was based and without which it could not survive.”104

It might seem that the group was politically naïve in hoping to change the word with their fliers and painted slogans, but they did have an agenda for toppling Hitler. Although they knew that only force could destroy the ruling government, force wasn’t available to them, so they

---

100 Vinke, op. cit., p. 214.
101 Hanser, op. cit., 309.
102 Prittie, op. cit., p. 126.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
chose the path of fostering passive resistance. Their aims were many: inspiring increased public consciousness of “the real nature and actual situation of National Socialism”; creating “the impression that the Führer no longer enjoyed solid support and that there was general ferment” among the people; giving a feeling of solidarity to the isolated individuals of the opposition; and finally, attempting “to win over the hesitant, to move the uncommitted to a decision, to cast doubt in the minds of Nazi followers, to induce questioning in the minds of Nazi enthusiasts.”

Unlike tactics for bringing down a whole government, but a means nevertheless of influencing those who could use force against Hitler and his regime. “Since Hitler’s moods were said to be extraordinarily dependent on the sympathy of the masses, a reversal of feeling among the populace would have been a weapon of considerable force against him, one which would threaten his own self-confidence.” The viability of this scenario is attested to by the fact that “the leaflets of the White Rose were held by the highest levels of the party to constitute one of the greatest political ‘crimes’ against the Third Reich.” So, this call to passive resistance was not a call to activism for its own sake, but held great hope for real success.

It would be wrong to see the action of the students in Munich in the period 1942-1943 as a noble deed in the abstract. It was concrete, and its goal and starting point were concrete. To this extent it would also be wrong to understand their action as symbolic, even though many persons would like to draw support from examples of action such as theirs.

The members of the White Rose believed that by taking responsibility for the world they would save it from ruin; Huber expressed the hopes of the entire group when he ventured that, “[p]erhaps we will succeed at the eleventh hour in shaking off the tyrannical oppressor and using that great moment for building, in concert with the other nations of Europe, a new and more human world.”

---

105 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 95
106 Ibid., p. 96.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 102.
109 Ibid., p. 36.
In addition to the educational, cultural and political factors in the upbringing of these individuals who engaged in active resistance against Hitler, one must add a sense of spiritual connection to something transcendent and greater than themselves.

It is well to bear in mind that Arendt is suspicious of religion from a political perspective. Christianity, she thinks, is anti-political in that it de-emphasizes the importance of political remembrance in favor of the doctrine of everlasting life; it insists that politics is fruitless because of the perishability of the world; and it dismisses the importance of political action, emphasizing instead, “goodness.” What is more, the Christian gospel of everlasting individual life makes “any striving for an earthly immortality futile and unnecessary,” and the Christian principle of worldlessness — based on the idea that the world is doomed and “that every activity in it is undertaken with the proviso quamdiu mundus durat (‘as long as the world lasts’)” — makes political action seem futile.\textsuperscript{110} Whereas in the epochal periods before Christianity, political activity brought people to aspire for worldly immortality, with Christianity it sank to the low level of an activity subject to necessity, destined to remedy the consequences of human sinfulness on one hand and to cater to the legitimate wants and interests of earthly life on the other. Aspiration toward immortality could not only be equated with vainglory; such fame as the world could bestow upon man was an illusion, since the world was even more perishable than man, and a striving for worldly immortality was meaningless, since life itself was immortal.\textsuperscript{111}

Arendt also points out that the Christian conception of “goodness” is anti-political in nature. The reason goodness is politically problematic is that it “harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard.”\textsuperscript{112} Good works are supposed to be performed in private; the moment they are made public they cease to be considered good.

\textsuperscript{110} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 21, 53.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 314.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 75.
Sophie and Hans, on the other hand, were deeply religious people. Indeed, it is their sister, Inge’s, conviction that the rigor of thought which they both manifested “was doubtless closely related to their discovery of Christianity, which in the case of my bother and sister paralleled the development of their independent political stand.”\textsuperscript{113} Hans once told Inge “[i]t is high time that Christians...start doing something. When we are asked at the end of the war ‘What did you do? shall we stand there empty-handed?’"\textsuperscript{114} Indeed, both Hans and Sophie, and other members of the group, were fascinated by existentialist-inspired theology. It would make sense that they would chose a theology that emphasizes the role of the authentic individual in light of the fact that the German Christian churches had compromised themselves and had failed for the most part to stand up to the Nazis. Although most of the white Rose members were not Catholic, or at least not seriously practicing ones, “the intellectual and emotional currents of protest against the Nazis associated with Catholicism played a significant role in the shaping of their resistance.”\textsuperscript{115} Vinke makes an observation regarding the importance to the Scholls of religious faith:

Their Christian faith constituted a significant motivation for what they were doing. As existentialism was the philosophy of French resistance, we had a Christian existentialism strongly influenced by Søren Kierkegaard and Theodor Haecker. The church hierarchy had been compromised by its initial alliance with National Socialism, and it kept quiet during those years. But countless Christians had gone underground, some of them into the resistance. Carl Muth and Theodor Haecker offered access to a liberating Christianity. As for the rational element of this existentialism, our view was: “Only when reasoning is at its wit’s end, only then may we believe. Faith starts where reason had reached its limit.”\textsuperscript{116}

The Scholls put their religious beliefs to practice in active resistance to Hitler. One of the ways was with a newsletter, Windlicht [Hurricane

\textsuperscript{113} Scholl, Inge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{114} Vinke, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{115} Dumbach, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{116} Vinke, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 110.
Lamp], which the Scholls published before beginning to write directly political pieces. This journal was largely spiritual, containing many religious or theological discussions. This made their paper seem more nonpolitical than it really was. Hans and Sophie’s sister Inge remembers the motives behind the amateur periodical (to which many of her siblings contributed):

As far as I can recall, we launched this circular letter, which we christened Windlicht, sometime in the summer of 1941 ... Our circle, which ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-three consisted mainly of friends from Ulm who were striving, like my brothers and sisters, to base their attitude on a firm spiritual foundation and shield their questions and problems from the tempest of spiritual terrorism raging in the soul-destroying environment of the political system.\(^{117}\)

For the members of the White Rose “the study and practice of Christianity were themselves forms of protest, since the Christian ideal was at the furthest possible remove from National Socialism. To immerse oneself in Christian doctrine and belief was a way of putting distance between oneself and Nazism....”\(^{118}\)

\(~\)

Their actions made them enduring symbols of the struggle, universal and timeless, for the freedom of the human spirit wherever and whenever it is threatened.\(^{119}\)

Were the members of the White Rose trying to achieve immortality? They may or may not have cared whether they would be remembered as individuals, but they certainly wanted their ideas and values to endure. In the process of actualizing their ideals, they carved out a place for themselves in history. They received recognition for their great deeds, and this, according to Arendt, is the only way humans can truly become immortal. “Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world.”\(^{120}\) Arendt asserts that immortality

\(^{117}\) Scholl, Hans, op. cit., p. 299.

\(^{118}\) Hanser, op. cit., p. 113.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 310.

\(^{120}\) Arendt, Hannah, The Human Condition. p. 18.
is a type of "deathless life." This is opposed to mortality, which, "[l]ies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life."\textsuperscript{121} Hence, mortality consists of moving, "[a]long a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order."\textsuperscript{122} Because humans are mortals, biologically speaking, they seek immortality in terms of creating and enacting things which will outlive them.

The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things — works and deeds and words — which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except for themselves.\textsuperscript{123}

When people perform heroic deeds, they have a chance to transcend their mortality in remembrance. The Scholls and the other members of the White Rose exhibited this ability, because in taking a stand against Hitler and the Nazis, they were hoping to leave a gift of freedom; for this they were willing to risk everything. That is not to say that the members of the White Rose had immortality on their minds, but that their idealism was based on a hope for a better future. For instance, recounting her brother’s actions, Inge Scholl remembers, "[h]e had removed himself from the last zone of security into the realm of risk; he stood at the edge of existence, in that awesome place where inch by inch new ground is gained for mankind through struggle, heroic deeds and suffering."\textsuperscript{124}

Kurt Huber made a similar appeal to history in and through the last words he spoke publicly: "[t]he inner dignity of the university teacher, of the frank, courageous protester of his philosophical and political views — no trial for treason can rob me of that. My actions and my intentions will be justified in the inevitable course of history: such is my firm faith."\textsuperscript{125} He continues:

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{124} Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 61.
[t]here is an ultimate boundary beyond which all external legality becomes false and immoral — namely, when it becomes the cloak of cowardice of a lack of courage to take action against notorious breaches of justice. A state that strangles all free expression of opinion and that brands any morally justified criticism, any suggestion for betterment, as a “preliminary to high treason,” subject to the severest penalties, breaks an unwritten law that has always been alive in “sound popular understanding” and must remain alive.126

What else could Hans and Sophie Scholl’s father been making reference to than the justice of historical remembrance in his words to Hans just before his execution: “[y]ou will go down in history — there is such a thing as justice in spite of all this.”127 Hans then wrote this phrase on his cell wall: “Allen Gewalt zum Trotz sich erhalten” (“Uphold yourself in face of every pressure”).128 While in prison awaiting execution, Sophie and Hans wrote brief letters to their parents expressing love and gratitude and asking forgiveness for the pain their deaths would certainly cause. They also said that they could not have acted otherwise than they did. “They, Hans and Sophie, were sure that the future would justify them and that what was now condemned by many would one day be approved by all.”129

This seems to be the case. On February 22, 1953, then-President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Theodor Heuss, addressed the Students of Berlin and Munich on the occasion of the Memorial Ceremony for the executed members of the White Rose. “This cry of the German soul will echo through history,” he said. “Death cannot now, nor could it then, compel this outcry to silence. Their words, sent fluttering on sheets of paper through the hall of the University of Munich, were and have remained a beacon.”130

By an ironic coincidence, ten years earlier, while Sophie and Hans were being interrogated, Minister of Propaganda Goebbels was whipping a crowd into a frenzy in Berlin, shouting “[d]o you want total war?

126 Gollwitzer, op. cit., p. 160.
127 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 61.
128 Prittie, op. cit., p. 171.
129 Hanser, op. cit., 269.
130 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 160.
If necessary, do you want war more total and radical than we are even capable of imagining?” and even more ominously, “[d]o you agree that anyone who goes against the war effort in any way should pay for it with his head?” It was meant to be a warning, but it was too late for the Scholls.

Goebbels and his ilk may have been hoping that by destroying Hans and Sophie they were destroying all traces of dissent, but this wasn’t true. According to Arendt one of the most pernicious effects of Nazi totalitarianism was its attempt to establish “holes of oblivion,” making the remembrance of outstanding deeds — both good and evil — impossible. However, thanks to human imperfection, this did not occur. Arendt writes: “just as the Nazis’ feverish attempts ... to erase all traces of the massacres ... were doomed to failure, so all efforts to let their opponents ‘disappear in silent anonymity’ were in vain.”\(^\text{131}\) She wishes we could tell more stories such as that of the White Rose:

For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody’s grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that “it could happen” in most places but it did not happen everywhere. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.\(^\text{132}\)

We memorialize the White Rose — from the plazas at the university of Munich named after Hans and Sophie Scholl and Professor Huber, to the carved marble white rose in the university courtyard engraved with the names of the members who were executed for their actions.\(^\text{133}\) As exiled German novelist Thomas Mann said: “Good, splendid young people... you shall not be forgotten.”\(^\text{134}\)

The fact that we can tell the story of the White Rose is essential if we are to maintain hope for humanity. Once totalitarian techniques are used once, they will certainly be used again. When we look at Nazi Ger-
many, we saw how easy it was to turn people into thoughtless automats or even evil sadists, but we also saw a great display of integrity and moral courage.

The members of the White Rose died amidst uncertainty regarding the question of whether they were heroes or not. Certainly, they did not fight for any great idea or grandiose aim; they merely wanted a return to civility and humanity in a world turned upside down. In this quest, there was no general enthusiasm or support for them. The members of the White Rose stood alone, shunned by the majority of their fellow-citizens, who maligned them as traitors to the state. They risked their lives in lonely isolation.135 This makes their deeds all the more remarkable. "Perhaps genuine heroism lies in deciding stubbornly to defend the everyday things, the trivial and the immediate, after having been bombarded with so much oratory about great deeds."136

Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen kept a journal (later to be known as Diary of a Man in Despair), during the darkest moments of World War II. In it he describes his emotions when hearing of the arrest and execution of Hans and Sophie Scholl. "I never saw these two young people," he writes.

In my rural isolation I got only bits and pieces of the whole story of what they were doing, but the significance of what I heard was such that I could hardly believe it. The Scholls are the first in Germany to have had the courage to witness for the truth. The movement they have left at their death will go on ...

They died in all radiance of their courage and readiness for sacrifice, and thereby attained the pinnacle in lives well lived ... We will all of us, some day, have to make a pilgrimage to their graves and stand before them, ashamed.137

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to draw attention to a dream that Sophie had the night before she was executed. In this dream, she "was carrying a child in a white dress to be baptized at the altar. She had to climb a steep hill to the church with the babe in her arms. Suddenly

135 Scholl, Inge, op. cit., p. 4.
136 Ibid., p. 5.
137 Hanser, op. cit., p. 310.
there was a great chasm yawning in front of her and she had only time to thrust the child back to safety. Then she dropped into bottomless darkness ...”\textsuperscript{138}

Sophie's interpretation of this dream was that the child was freedom, which she would save for the world through her death. To the extent that the story of the White Rose still inspires political action today, Sophie and the other members of this group succeeded not only in saving the idea of freedom, but also in entering the realm of immortality as heroes. \textsuperscript{\equiv}

\textsuperscript{138} Prittie, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 172.
Erratum

Regrettably, all footnotes after footnote number 10, in Prof. James Bernauer’s very fine article are off by one. With apologies to Prof. Bernauer, and to remedy this error, please cancel the number 11 at the end of the sentence, “Has Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann turned us away from a scrutiny of our passions, especially our erotic ones, by leaving the more consoling message that it is our reluctance to think which will lead us into disaster,” on p. 153, and beginning with the number 12 at the end of the sentence, “She goes on to say that the ‘smiling reminiscences of the defendants . . . and their unusually high spirits through-out . . . reflects the sweet remembrance of great sexual pleasure, as well as indicating blatant insolence’” on p. 153, to the number 57 at the end of the sentence, “Sartre brilliantly captures this dimension of the anti-Semite” on p. 168, drop the face value of each number by one (so “12” becomes “11”, etc.), and then add a new “57” after the words “moral and metaphysical” on p. 168, while leaving the footnotes themselves, together with their present assigned numbers unaltered.