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# What is conservative and revolutionary about the “conservative revolution”?

## Argument-level evidence from three thinkers

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This article reassesses the concept of “conservative revolution” by textual and argumentative analysis of the work of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Ernst Jünger, and Hans Freyer – three prominent thinkers of the “conservative revolution” in interwar Germany. Rather than problematically conflating conservative and revolutionary elements into abstract ideological positions, which produces the “paradox” of conservative revolution observed by several scholars, I propose we must take seriously the argumentative context. What, exactly, did they mean by the apparently contradictory idea? This, I posit, can only be comprehended by analyzing the elements of conservatism and revolution in the original sources and with regard to the broader argumentative framework in which the notion of “conservative revolution” emerged. First, the article analyzes the three thinkers’ idea of a future-oriented, politically creative, and genuinely historical conservatism in opposition to mere backward-looking unhistorical reactionism. Second, it addresses the question of revolution as a destructive political means for conservative ends and shows how Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer linguistically constructed a continuity between the failed revolution of 1918 and the anticipated conservative revolution. The three authors spoke of continuous movement, the conservation of energy, and volcanic forces to argue for a seamless continuity between the two revolutions, thereby using the proximity of the ideologically opposing revolt for their own argumentative ends. This situatedness gives rise to doubts about the generalizability of the conservative revolution idea beyond its context of emergence: although similar ideas emerged elsewhere in the era and have been revived lately among the New Right, the particular historical dynamics of the concept of conservative revolution hinders its applicability and popular appeal in later settings that lack comparable widely shared experiences of revolutionary events.

## KEYWORDS

conservative revolution, radical conservatism, reaction, political theory, Germany, interwar period

## Introduction

The term “conservative revolution” designates German conservative thinkers who after the WW1 promoted a radical rupture vis-à-vis the prevailing liberal democracy and parliamentarianism to the extent of promoting a right-wing revolution. This essay reassesses the notion of a “conservative revolution” in its original textual construction by focusing on Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Ernst Jünger, and Hans Freyer – three prominent thinkers of this strand.

The idea and term of conservative revolution is remarkably tension-ridden. In Stern’s (1989, p. xvi) formulation, the conservative revolutionaries of that era were “disinherited conservatives, who had nothing to conserve.” Scruton (1980, p. 21) aptly asked: “How... can one be a conservative, when there is nothing to conserve but ruins?” These formulations are modern, but they capture the gist of the problem of German radical conservatives in the 1920s and 1930s. The first world war had been lost, and the old imperial Germany lay in ruins; the harsh conditions of the Versailles Peace Treaty and the foreign occupation of large industrial areas symbolized the defeat. In wake of the largely traumatic November revolution, the country had been transformed into a liberal parliamentary democracy, and social democrats were in power. The economy was ruined, unemployment rates soared, and inflation was higher than ever before or since in Europe. The long tradition of German culture and nationalism appeared subjugated to Western values and internationalism.

This situation gave rise to the classical formulation of radical conservatism, encapsulated in Moeller’s (1919, p. 56) proposition that “one must create things worth saving,” or, in another formulation, “create things that could serve as a new basis.” The starting point of radical conservatives differed significantly from traditional conservatism. The novel order of the society Moeller and others were after would be in harmony with the basic conservative values and it would emphasize unity and wholeness, communality, authority, strong domestic institutions, as well as power and militarism toward the outside. Yet the situation essentially differed from that of Burke and other classical conservatives who sought to keep a revolution from happening, because in the German conservatives’ perception the society had already been revolutionized in a failed socialist coup eventually triggering the erection of a liberal and republican polity. To return to the *status quo ex ante*, another revolution was required, and this, importantly, implied that conservatism had to abandon its core idea of maintaining things and rather turn radical and revolutionary. Paul de Lagarde (Muller, 1997, p. 28) had earlier characterized himself as being “too conservative not to be radical,” and Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 186) now set the goal of “achieving conservative aims by revolutionary means.”

When conservatism gets radical, however, it starts to resemble its main enemies, the liberal reforms of the society or the left-wing socialist revolutions. This is not only a variant of

the habitual *les extrêmes se touchent* diagnosis from the outside, but an experience shared by interbellum radical conservatives themselves. For instance Mann (2004, p. 339) observed already in 1919 that “there is only a short step from extreme radicalism to extreme conservatism.” Jünger (2001, p. 59, 216) noted in 1925 that in terms of its combative methods the national movement was closer to revolutionary communism than to democracy and anticipated the “the reactionaries of the past” to become “the revolutionaries of the future.”

Additionally, many thinkers of the conservative revolution sought to learn from the earlier left-wing revolution and utilize its ideological momentum for their own nationalistic ends, as will be discussed below. However, the close relation of conservatism and revolution also emerges from the opposite perspective: as Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 121, 176) observed, a revolution seldom remains revolutionary for long, but rather tends to become conservative, and in the contemporary situation, it was difficult to differentiate between revolutionary and reactionary elements once and for all. The possibility of combining both trains of thought had always characterized particularly German thought (Moeller van den Bruck, 1932, p. 88). For these thinkers, the very principles of revolution and conservatism were thus intrinsically linked, and the corresponding weights of each principle in concrete historical situations determined the political course of the country.

The term “conservative revolution” is often traced to Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Thomas Mann before him, or even Karl Marx, but as a self-standing concept and a description of a group of thinkers it arguably emerged in Armin Mohler’s work after the second world war (Koselleck, 1984, p. 784–785; Mohler, 1989; Kroll, 2004, p. 229–230; Dethloff, 2018). Although the term stems from Mohler’s problematically approving review of the movement in the 1950s,<sup>1</sup> no normative meaning is attached to it in this analytical usage; it is a purely descriptive category in intellectual history. In this capacity, the term has been criticized for not capturing a coherent ideology (Breuer, 1993; Kroll, 2004). One particularly prominent problem with the category of “conservative revolution” is its loose application also to thinkers like Carl Schmitt or Martin Heidegger, whose revolutionary proposals are less salient. Such usage risks turning the category over-stretched and vague, and consequently some scholars, like Muller (1987), prefer the term “radical conservative.”<sup>2</sup>

However, Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer, all explicitly anticipated or called for a right-wing revolution under conservative signs, and as regards their mode of thinking,

1 On Mohler’s role in constructing “the myth of the ‘conservative revolution,’ see Weiß, 2017, p. 39–48 (citation on page 40).

2 As Henning Ottmann (2010, p. 143–144) has, however, pointed out, the same disunity goes for other dominant labels like “liberalism”, and there are also good grounds to read the conservative revolution as a single tradition of thought.

the label “conservative revolution” is analytically valid.<sup>3</sup> Sticking with the term “conservative revolution” also opens the possibility of dissecting the interrelations between the conservative and revolutionary elements in this tradition of thought. This, I propose, is of particular relevance, given our contemporary perspective to the conservative revolution as a school of thought: the sustained scholarly interest in this school of thought can be largely explained with reference to the apparent combination of mutually exclusive ideas. Many scholars have noted the “paradox” inherent in the very term of “conservative revolution” (Mohler, 1989, p. 11; Bracher, 1971, p. 142). Stern (1989, xvi) concluded that the term is apt because of “its very illogicality” and in capturing the “paradox” this movement embodied. Bullivant (1985, p. 47) notes “the apparent contradiction inherent in the very term,” while in Greiffenhagen (1977, p. 243–244) formulation, that concept represents “the last phase of a specifically German conservatism in its inescapable absurdity.”<sup>4</sup>

Rather than settling for the paradoxical nature of the “conservative revolution” notion, the present essay addresses its two constituents—conservatism and revolution—first independently to better comprehend how the conservative revolutionaries ended up with such a paradoxical formulation in the first place. The thought and formation of this group has been studied extensively in general (Sontheimer, 1978; Mohler, 1989; Breuer, 1993; Siefertle, 1995; Woods, 1996), together with recent emphasis on such previously neglected aspects as foreign politics and global political order (Drolet and Williams, 2018; Pankakoski, 2018; Nedzynski, 2022). Although the paradoxical

nature and questionable applicability of the term “conservative revolution” has been discussed, the scholarship still lacks a closer examination of how, exactly, these thinkers linked the conservative and revolutionary aspects of their thought and how that link was constructed on the level of language.

These questions lie at the focus of my article. In reassessing the term “conservative revolution,” Dietz (2017, p. 44–45) has correctly called for “conceptual sensitivity toward and awareness of its specific conceptual history” and noted how the term’s analytical validity hinges upon it being traceable to the original primary sources and harmonizing with radical conservatives’ self-understanding. Correspondingly, I propose we should not primarily address the idea of a conservative revolution from the viewpoint of what conservatism and revolutionary ideology typically entail in political theory or the history of political thought; rather we should ask how the original conservative revolutionaries understood conservatism and revolution and rhetorically constructed the linkages between these elements. This approach relies on perspectives derived from contextualism and conceptual history: asking for original authors’ context-bound intentions as well as for the concrete experiences and expectations that were condensed into their concepts and arguments (Skinner, 2002; Koselleck, 2006).

I focus on Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Ernst Jünger, and Hans Freyer—arguably the three most representative thinkers of the idea of a conservative revolution, all classifiable as conservative revolutionaries in a strict sense of the term given their explicitly conservative, authoritarian, and nationalistic agendas and their anticipation of a coming revolution to put that agenda into effect. Moeller van den Bruck (2006) promoted an authoritarian Third Reich in an infamous 1923 volume and Jünger (2001) sought to mobilize trench warriors to a nationalistic revolution in his political writings from 1919 to 1932, whereas Freyer (1931) anticipated a “revolution from the right” in an agitating booklet of the same name.

My article reconstructs the original meaning of the “conservative revolution.” I begin by addressing how the three thinkers framed conservatism in a particular active, politically productive, and future-oriented sense and as opposed to mere “reaction” or restoration of the *status quo ex ante*. The next section analyzes their understanding of “revolution” and being revolutionary as a pure political means and their ways of transposing ideas from the November revolution onto the anticipated conservative revolution. In the final section, I assess the supporting imagery these authors mobilized to link the conservative and the revolutionary aspects of their thinking on the level of argumentation.

A closer examination brings to the fore the specific historical dynamics these authors constructed by combining the 1918 revolt with their called-for rightist revolution. The analysis suggests the context-bound nature of conservative-revolutionary ideas and the difficulty in abstracting from the unique historical situation in which these ideas originally

<sup>3</sup> My article does not aim at assessing whether all authors typically subsumed under the umbrella term of “conservative revolution” in fact conceptualized conservatism and revolution similarly and whether Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer are representative of the entire movement conceived as a group of thinkers. Further scholarship is needed to analyze to what extent (other) Young Conservatives like Edgar Julius Jung, National Bolsheviks like Ernst Niekisch, or Oswald Spengler as a philosophical advocate of Prussian Socialism fall into the scheme proposed here. However, the three authors addressed in this article are representative of the tension-ridden *idea* of a conservative revolution and among its paradigmatic formulators.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars have also identified further paradoxes to supplement that in the name of this group. Jeffrey Herf (1984, p. 1–3, 21–22, and *passim*.) famously addressed as “reactionary modernism” the inherent paradox of rejecting Enlightenment ideas while simultaneously affirming modern technology as their prominent outcome and read the conservative revolution as a key manifestation of this combination. Already Mohler (1989, p. 19) identified also the paradox of “intellectual anti-intellectualism,” and recent scholarship has further analyzed the tension between the conservative revolutionaries’ mistrust of concepts and language, on the one hand, and their own engagement in voluminous writing, on the other (see Bures, 2021).

emerged. It is not implied that ideas in general would be exclusively confined to their contexts of birth and could not be revived – this in fact often happens, and the New Right has been extensively benefiting from the argumentative repertoire of interwar conservative revolutionaries (see [Weiß, 2017](#); [Fücks and Becker, 2020](#)). The context-bound nature of arguments, however, warrants some misgivings as to certain arguments' consistency and persuasiveness when transferred from one concrete situation to another. By relying on Koselleck's ideas of temporal structures within concepts, I address the specific temporal dimensions in the original notion of a conservative revolution and its debt to the experiences of 1918 for its proper political effectiveness.

## From reactionism to future-oriented conservatism

As [Koselleck \(1984, p. 756–757, 760\)](#) has noted, the terms “reaction,” “restauration,” and “counter-revolution” have been used almost exclusively with negative connotations throughout Western history: only in individual cases, like the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in France in 1814, would “restauration” be used as an affirmative term for self-identification, while also the term “reaction” has primarily been used by the revolutionaries to depict a negative, anti-progressive phenomenon. This was also the conceptual logic in Weimar-era radical conservatives' uses of “reactionary,” even though its positively occupied counter-concept was not democracy or progress but rather “conservatism” or “nationalism.”

With his 1918 antipolitical statement, Thomas Mann set the tone for further Weimar-era renderings of the conservative/reactionary relation. [Mann \(2004, p. 43, 134, 274\)](#) identified himself as a “child of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” with inclinations toward such 19<sup>th</sup>-century principles as romanticism, patriotism, bourgeois values, monarchism, music, pessimism, and humor, explicitly seeking to retain and revive the classical bourgeois culture of the years 1820–60. Nevertheless, conservatism, for Mann, did not mean the wish to passively maintain all that existed, but rather amounted to a substantive commitment to German values—values that in Mann's reading were fundamentally antidemocratic and antipolitical, whereas democracy and internationalism were the key counter-concepts ([Mann, 2004, p. 276, 524](#)). The present state of decline in Europe was due to democracy and malignant nationalism, which led to shallow internationalism—two principles that Mann linked with the revolutionary tradition, anti-European atomism, and anarchism, and identified as “reactionary” principles ([Mann, 2004, p. 222](#)). These conceptual identifications targeted both the English tradition of parliamentary democracy and the French revolutionary tradition at once, and Mann's chains of equivalences may consequently be overtly general and polarized; nevertheless, they effectively supported the conceptual

opposition of benign “conservatism” and pejoratively described “reaction.” Reactionism was not only not a category of self-identification, but one that had to be actively rejected to make room for revitalized modern conservatism.

The subsequent radical conservatives followed suit, albeit with some crucial differences.<sup>5</sup> First, Weimar-era conservative revolutionaries politicized this conceptual opposition in a new way. Whereas conservatism, for Mann, was a profound cultural orientation and as such essentially antidemocratic and antipolitical, Moeller van den Bruck rather described conservatism as a political principle in a fundamental sense of the term. For Moeller, reactionary thinking was, correspondingly, an apolitical mode of thought. Reactionary politics lacked all the qualities that made genuinely conservative politics grandiose: the capability of making history and the corresponding “demon” typical of epoch-making great men; instead, the reactionary was a fundamentally “unpolitical man” ([Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 176, 194–195](#)). Conservatism, by contrast, meant the self-assertion of a nation and amounted to “the political art of defending the people as a nation—always according to the world situation at hand.” ([Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 187](#)). In this reading, the political aspect of conservatism connoted power-political pragmatism, nationalism, and cultural self-assertion of Germanness.

Second, and relatedly, reactionism was a fundamentally ahistorical category, whereas conservatism was historical. This point emerges out of Moeller's above observations on the politics of history, rendered in terms of actively and passively historical politics. Active, creatively conservative politics was epoch-making and capable of producing historical changes; the passive variant, by contrast, was oriented toward maintaining things as they were despite indisputable historical changes and had thereby itself become merely an obsolete object of historical development. To be reactionary was to “only look for a political escape where an historical ending has taken place,” whereas the conservative would “over and over again set a beginning,” Moeller proposed ([Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 157](#)). [Freyer \(1931, p. 7\)](#) similarly lashed as “the genuine reactionaries of today” those who were still thinking in 19<sup>th</sup>-century categories: their ideas on history and the present had themselves turned into history, whereas proper conservatism was historical in a strong sense. As [Muller \(1987, p. 94–5\)](#) has noted, Freyer's depiction of historical traditions rested on a metaphor of history as ever-changing flow, and a certain element of future-oriented change was thus inherent in his notion of history; rather than pure traditionalism, his theory of historical politics relied on modern historicism and entailed the idea of an active reappropriation of the past for present and future purposes. The future-oriented creativity of the conservative revolution was

<sup>5</sup> Already this sets Mann apart from the three writers discussed in this article, not to mention irony as his strategy of reconciling oppositions versus the others' utterly serious ideology (see [Kroll, 2004](#)).



thus implied already in its notion of historicity and emerged out of it.

Also Jünger (2001, p. 123) categorized the reactionary a “non-historical person” with the aim of thereby rebutting the accusation that the front soldiers were reactionaries. With references to Bergson, Jünger postulated that no object remained intact in the flow of time and no “constellation” recurred in an identical form; a return to the preceding *Kaiserreich* was therefore impossible and pure “reaction” an absurdity (Jünger, 2001, p. 119–120). Rather than reactionaries, the nationalistic front soldiers—for Jünger the true subject of the coming conservative revolution—were people not only longing for a bygone era or ahistorically jettisoning tradition and starting from a revolutionary scratch; rather they were a political force formed by the war and by the incomplete leftist revolution but also taking into account the subsequent historical reality and willing to “learn from history” (Jünger, 2001, p. 124). This was Jünger’s main criticism toward the *Stahlhelm* organization, which he considered excessively passive in merely reminiscing about the war rather than actively harnessing its political potential, on the one hand, and ultimately a “bourgeois” rather than truly radical organization on account of its strategy of working within the Weimar parliamentary system instead of preparing dictatorship, on the other (see Woods, 1982, p. 101–105).

Jünger’s historicity argument emerged in this concrete argumentative context against a radical right-wing organization he considered insufficiently radical. Whereas the dominant mode of thought among the reactionaries was nostalgia and longing for something now unattainable, conservative revolutionism was a forward-looking ideology. The human being was “a living vessel of all things past,” also assuming all further novelties, Jünger concluded. Even if one stops, one does not remain the same, for the human being is but a “function of alternating variables” (Jünger, 2001, p. 123–124). In the revolutionary period, it was thus impossible to “set the world back a hundred and fifty years,” and build the future state upon bourgeois valuations and standards, as “reaction” sought to do (Jünger, 1932, p. 40).

Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 176) parallelly observes the singularity of history: “what once was, will never be again.” For that reason, the genuine conservatives focused on the permanent characteristics of worldly affairs rather than the exterior forms they may take – and thereby understood history in a “profound” manner as opposed to the merely “superficial” historical sense of the reactionary (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006). The stress on historical uniqueness, however, did not rule out the possibility of certain structural features being repeated in history: in fact, this was implied in the cyclical view put forth by Spengler, which all the three radical conservatives explicitly engaged with, critically or affirmatively, and considered as an alternative to the Enlightenment proposition of history as singular linear progress. In addition to its idea of the active reappropriation of earlier

historical material, particularly Freyer’s notion of historical politics implied the incessant rise and fall of cultural forms.

Third, whereas reaction was linked with obsolete 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideas, conservatism was a dynamic modern principle. Jünger’s nationalism was essentially modern and modernistic and thereby stood in clear contrast to traditional conservatism: it was “dynamic, ardent, and related to the vital energies of our metropolises” where it had emerged as the antidote of conservative views of life. This new nationalism was “not reactionary, but fundamentally revolutionary” and it had nothing to do with “monarchism, conservatism, bourgeois reaction”, or the patriotism of the Wilhelmine era (Jünger, 2001, p. 218, 504). This tradition’s particular way of learning from history included the consciously jettisoning the backward-looking nostalgia of traditional reactionism, associated in the German context with the landed gentry or the Junkers, and that of their bourgeois counterparts, in favor of modernist urbanism. While Jünger himself had early on embraced Spengler’s criticism of cities as loci of shallow civilization, he soon linked the rural perspective with reaction and repackaged his new nationalism as an urban and modern principle (Woods, 1982, p. 224–225).

Although earlier scholarship has observed the particularity of the conservative revolution, overlooking the above-discussed argumentative logic has resulted in some misleading generalizations. Given how “reaction” was the main counter-concept of conservatism for all the three thinkers, classifying them under the ideal type of “reactionary modernism,” for instance, appears problematic. At least Jünger and Freyer, whom Herf discussed in this well-known book, largely affirmed modern technology while resisting the enlightenment rationality behind it (see also Breuer, 1993, p. 70–78). Their project, however, was not a reactionary attempt at turning back the clock, and the category they affirmatively evoked here was conservatism or nationalism, not reaction.

They rather sought to employ modern technological progress as a tool of promoting a forward-looking revolutionary transition into a novel authoritarian state based on traditional values and hierarchies. The parallel between the progressive potential of technology and the forward-looking impulses of revolutions as destructive historical forces is remarkable, and both, as Jünger proposed most prominently, promoted the general nihilistic erosion of meaning while simultaneously preparing the ground for overcoming the barren liberal condition. This strategy of embracing nihilistic meaninglessness with the aim of thereby finding ways beyond it and back into meaningfulness was Jünger’s general Nietzsche-inspired philosophical strategy also in his theorizing of war (see Bousquet, 2016). The novel future that “conservatism” in the conservative revolutionaries’ particular sense entailed in fact necessitated the radical rupture vis-à-vis backward-looking imperial valuations and wiping the slate clean with such (alleged) modernist horrors as material warfare, urban decadence, and the soullessness of technology.

This logic has not always been fully comprehended. In early scholarship, von Klemperer (1957, p. 117) proposed that Moeller, Spengler, Jünger, and other new conservatives “were committed to explore new possibilities for a conservative policy” but that their work ultimately “marked the degeneration of conservatism into a policy of extremism and nihilism,” thus implying a failure on their part. This characterization appears to underplay the particularity of the conservative revolution and assess it excessively from the viewpoint of classical conservatism, for instance portraying nihilism as a mere accidental result of their thinking and something leading into a “dilemma between conserving and destroying” which Jünger allegedly “boldly disregarded” (von Klemperer, 1957, p. 7, 117). In light of the above, Jünger rather appears to have been aware of nihilism’s creative potential and employed it as a means of his radical nationalism.

Also in conceptual terms earlier scholars have occasionally discussed the movement excessively from traditional conservatism’s perspective. Breuer follows Panajotis Kondylis and others in arguing for a decisive break between classical conservatism and the conservative revolution: “whatever the conservative revolution may have been, it was not a *conservative* revolution”—at least not as long as one understands “conservative” with reference to the concrete historical content of seeking to uphold the old regime (Breuer, 1993, p. 5, 180). Breuer’s argument, however, only establishes the somewhat trivial point that these authors were not conservative in the traditional sense. The term “conservative” cannot be considered in isolation from the entire conceptual pair, and the term “conservative revolution” is meaningful only insofar as the non-traditional creative reinterpretation of “conservatism” is taken into account.

While our three thinkers’ forward-looking radicalism doubtless prevented them from traditional substantial commitments to upholding the *ancien régime*, on the level of argumentation this change of perspectives was, however, rather expressed in the rejection of reaction and the affirmation of conservatism in these authors’ specific sense. This is most prominent in Moeller’s explicit discussion of this conceptual pair, whereas Jünger rather mostly used “new nationalism” as the affirmative general category; nevertheless, also his considerations are best captured by the category of conservatism, and reducing them to that of new nationalism (Breuer, 1993, p. 180) loses sight of the alleged paradox inherent in “conservative revolution” and thereby also of conservative revolution’s peculiar argumentative dynamics, which I address later on in the article.

## The conservative and the revolutionary

As noted above, the conceptual opposition of conservatism and reaction served to highlight the political, historical, and

modernist character of radical conservatism. Ultimately, the above-discussed reading of the conservatism as the genuinely historical mode of thought enabled the apparently paradoxical formation of “conservative revolution” in the first place. While “conservative” was to be understood in a genuinely historical and forward-looking sense not only different from but also opposite to “reaction,” also the latter part of the conceptual compound needs some elaboration to be comprehended correctly. Moeller was the one to elaborate on the conservatism/reaction opposition the most systematically, but he also supplemented it with the third term of revolution and situated conservatism between the two categories to be rejected. Because of this tripartite conceptual structure, conservatism, in his particular sense, cannot be understood apart from the notion of revolution, and arguably the same goes for Jünger and Freyer. I will first elaborate their renderings of the relationship between the conservative and the revolutionary as prototypical figures in the attempt to capture the leftist revolution’s historical-political significance.

Both the reactionary and the liberal were Others to be excluded, and in a distantly Aristotelian setting Moeller typically located the benign conservative forms between the equally problematic reactionary and revolutionary ones. Whereas the reactionary only possessed absolute and dogmatic positions that remained the same, the liberal only had relative views capable of being altered according to circumstances; the conservative, however, was the only figure with viewpoints (*Standpunkte*) in a strong sense of historically informed but context-dependent pragmatic wisdom (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 192). This idea is closely related to Moeller’s general attempt to find a third viewpoint (*Standpunkt*) which would be crystallized in the infamous Third Reich he called for; the conservative is clearly the figure also inhabiting that anticipated Reich (Moeller van den Bruck, 1932, p. 87–90).

Whereas the reactionary only lived backward and the revolutionary only forward, the conservative was oriented both backward and forward, Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 230) noted in another context. The same tripartite structure was also key to the conservative’s historicity: while the revolutionary jettisoned the lessons of history and assumed the political world of the future to obey the abstract principles he had subverted it with, the reactionary, by contrast, considered the revolution a mere contingent event that could be overlooked or erased from history and something that should not be—and in so doing missed the intellectual-spiritual impulse behind it (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 173–174). This, Moeller argues, was captured solely by the conservative, who did not accept the leftist revolution in substantial terms, but exploited its “ramifications” (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 174–175). In its destructiveness, the revolutionary upheaval had opened up a future horizon beyond the 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberal-bourgeois ideals, and this historical instrumentality offered also the conservative an aspect of “revolutionary involvement” (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 176).

In terms of substantial values, the conservatives had more in common with the reactionaries, but their sense of history located them on the side of the future to which a further revolution was the only viable way. Already in the early 1920s, Moeller expected such a “third way” to transcend the prevailing ideological contradictions and antitheses in favor of a nationalist synthesis. The tensions between reactionary and revolutionary elements would eventually be replaced by a higher unity or a “third party” beyond left and right, one based on the idea of a supra-partisan “nation” (Moeller van den Bruck, 1933, p. 85). As Stern (1989, p. 254) has polemically but aptly observed, this “vulgar imitation of Hegelian dialectics” allowed Moeller to “create logical unities where none existed in reality.” Combined with the quasi-Aristotelian argumentation of the correct mean between two opposites, on the one hand, and the argumentation with less than fully nuanced ideal types like “the reactionary,” “the revolutionary,” or “the conservative,” this move made the conservative revolution appear as the sole logically inevitable course of history.

These were broader tendencies in the conservative revolutionaries’ argumentation, and utilizing similar methods, Jünger ended up in parallel conclusions. Also for him the attempted leftist revolution was above all a historical impetus to be rechanneled for conservative ends, and he, too, derived this conclusion from the historicity of the conservative as a prototypical figure in contradistinction to the reactionary and the revolutionary. Jünger portrayed not only the reactionary as a thoroughly non-historical human being, but also revolutionaries belonged to this category in their belief that revolutionary actions initiated distinct novelties, whereas in reality, Jünger argued, revolutions needed the anterior reality they rejected just as two nations fighting one another in war were both needed for a novel global *Gestalt* (Jünger, 2001, p. 121). This was the historical wisdom of the radical conservative. Political oppositions, even when based on mutual hostility and will to destroy, were thus also relations of interdependence, and antitheses were transcended on the level of global history. This ostensibly Hegel-inspired form of argumentation also implied mutual recognition and a sense of one’s identity relying on the negative other – a point Schmitt (2002, p. 89–90) would later express in terms of the enemy being “our own question as a *Gestalt*,” a quote from the poet Theodor Däubler.

In this light, also the interrelationship between conservative nationalism and revolutionary socialism appears as mutually enabling or constitutive rather than strictly exclusive. On the concrete level of verbal argumentation, this manifests in Jünger’s recurring notion of the coming conservative revolution relying on the anterior revolutionary initiatives from 1918. Although “despicable” *per se*, the revolution had “destroyed the parliamentary complex from within,” caused “the edifice to totter” and had “cleared out of the way” several potential obstacles; in this sense, the communists were the nationalists’ “best preparers”—ultimately “tools” who believed to be creative

and “gravediggers” who “dug their own graves” (Jünger, 2001, p. 151, 214–215, 217). The last formulation is an obvious allusion to Marx and Engels’s (2002, p. 233) note on how the logic of capitalism and advancing industry pushed workers to organize and how the bourgeoisie thus “produced its own grave-diggers.” In Jünger’s quasi-Hegelian and Marxian historical argument alike, the cunning of reason or historical dialectic now pointed toward the revolution by new nationalism born in the war, and the supposed subjects of history turned out to merely prepare this further subversion.

Freyer (1931, p. 42) similarly noted that revolutions are no developments or progressive movements, but “dialectical tensions” that “become charged and reloaded.” The 19<sup>th</sup> century had provided the impulses, but this potential had not manifested in a history-inducing revolution; now, however, these powers produced “a new subject of history” in the form of the self-conscious *Volk* which opposed the “industrial society” in its entirety (Freyer, 1931, p. 36, 43). As the impulses formerly only colliding within the industrial society currently organized for the properly subverting task of transcending that framework historically, it was in Freyer’s estimation appropriate to say that the 19<sup>th</sup> century thereby “liquidated itself” (Freyer, 1931, p. 25, 36–37). Only the 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalistic revolution would put to rest the previous century’s tensions, and again a third way, crystallized in the concept of the *Volk*, was implied.

For Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer alike, the contradiction between 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberalism and Marxist revolution could only be resolved by a higher third; however, to transcend that opposition, the radical conservatives would utilize the momentum of the Marxian revolution for their own ends. This setting is of crucial importance for the historical embeddedness of their otherwise abstract arguments in the German post-revolutionary context. Further, we can only comprehend the apparently paradoxical formation of the “conservative revolution” by considering its implied argument in the philosophy of history. The conservative revolutionaries’ notion of a conservative revolution was interlaced with a historical argument which incorporated the enemy categories as decisive conditions of possibility for the anticipated revolution from the right.

## Historical utilization of the revolutionary modus

Although rejecting the 1918 revolution in substantive terms, the conservative revolutionaries wanted to retain its forward-looking attitude and to harness its historical-political potential for a diametrically opposite ideological project. This necessitated rhetorically making the point that the bygone revolution was insufficient although historically significant, and we can indeed find numerous small arguments to this effect in the three conservative revolutionaries’ works. For instance Jünger spoke

about “the so-called revolution of 1918” as a “Marxian-liberal revolution,” motivated by “greed for spoils” rather than “ideas,” whereas the Rightist revolution would be a “genuine” (*echte*) or “real” (*wirkliche*) revolution, guided by the great idea of the fatherland (Jünger, 2001, p. 34, 36, 43, 63, 219). Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 17, 21, 131) similarly labeled the 1918 events as a “liberal revolution” and a “Western, parliamentary revolution, constitutionally guided by English-French models,” not a “national” and “German” one, and perhaps not a real revolution at all but a “failed revolution” or a “revolt” at best. The conceptual antitheses between a genuine, national, and German revolution, on the one hand, and a merely apparent, international-liberal, and Western revolt, on the other, served the purpose of recognizing the historical import of the recent events, yet simultaneously belittling their intellectual-spiritual significance.

The fact, however, remained that a relatively large segment of the German population had become mobilized in an unforeseen way, first by the war and subsequently by the 1918 revolution. Scholarship has noted the inextricable significance of the WW1 experience for the conservative revolution: for instance, Breuer (1993, 37–42) suggests that the overemphasis on masculinity and violence as well as the general apocalyptic tone of this strand can be attributed to the horrors of the trenches, and particularly Ernst Jünger intentionally transferred ideas of violent military comradeship onto peace-time politics (Segeberg, 1989; Weisbrod, 1998). Although their arguments on the “conservative revolution” primarily made references to the anterior 1918 revolution, the historical dynamism they invoked built on experiences and expectations of August 1914 alike – the moment of anticipated liberation from materialistic valuations in favor of a broader ethical cause, of “castle peace” setting abhorred party politics to rest, and of eventual national unity. These expectations had been painfully disappointed by the “un-German” revolt of 1918, and this overall effect the conservative revolutionaries sought to exploit.

The conservative revolutionaries also observed the Russian revolution of 1917 with care. Jünger depicted it as a revolution that “made history” by forcefully promoting “an idea,” whereas the German revolution of 1918 wanted to avoid sacrifices and was revolutionary only in phraseology (2001, p. 59). Moeller van den Bruck (1932, p. 97) noted how revolutions should “learn from one another,” and situated the anticipated conservative revolution into a historical continuum with the French and Russian revolutions, implying that these were the strong or successful revolutions in contradistinction to the failed revolt of 1918. Each revolution, however, was “unique,” and learning and benefiting from the previous ones did not imply identity: the conservative nationalists were not supposed to “push the revolution further,” but to “transpose” and “reinterpret” the incomplete November revolution, to “take the revolution out of the hand of revolutionaries,” and to “integrate” it into German history (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 17).

This is the argumentative context in which the tension-ridden idea of a conservative revolution emerges for the first time—and, importantly, it emerges not primarily as a political substance idea, but rather as a method, as indicated by the adverb form:

“We don’t wish to push further the revolution, but the ideas of the revolution that were there but that the revolution did not understand. We wish to combine these revolutionary ideas with the conservative ones that repeatedly emerge, and we wish to drive them *conservatively-revolutionarily* [*konservative-revolutionär*] toward attaining a situation wherein we could once again live” (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 22).

When formulating the idea of a conservative revolution paradigmatically in the Weimar context, Moeller did not construct it as an abstract ideology combining conservative and revolutionary elements in an equal setting, but as a *modus operandi* in specific political surroundings. For Moeller, war and revolution were “means” (*Mittel*) for finding a political solution to contemporary problems in the early 1920s Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 23). Also Jünger (2001, p. 124) portrayed revolution as a means of radically conservative politics, not to be completely rejected, although the front soldiers had “nothing in common with the so-called revolutionaries.” Revolution could only be a “method, not the goal,” as “all greatness and power [had] to grow organically” and could not be conceived from the viewpoint of pure “negation” (Jünger, 2001).

Pure nihilism would not do; eventually the upheaval would have to be linked with values – more particularly the conservative values of “patriotism, comradeship, courage and discipline” as well as “sense of duty and willingness to sacrifice” (Jünger, 2001, p. 173, 312). In the tradition of classical conservatism, the conservative revolutionaries anticipated a return to such organically grown communal values familiar from Prussian militarism and the German empire; the route there, however, was precisely the purgative negation of a revolution, an inherently negative phenomenon, which would provide a “clean slate” for organic growth (see Kroll, 2004, p. 231).

For the time being, therefore, the revolutionary means had to be employed fully, and the generation of front soldiers was indeed “remorseless in selecting means” (Jünger, 2001, p. 197). Jünger (2001, p. 507) particularly highlighted how the revolution had to be destructive and anarchistic; it was a petty bourgeois idea to assume that a revolution could simultaneously support order. Rather order was the common enemy of all revolutionary forces. “Chaos is more useful than form for that which is coming,” particularly as it wiped the slate clean (Jünger, 2001, p. 505). Concretely, this implied the rejection of all institutional means that could mitigate domestic tensions, such as participation in political elections – a “bourgeois” method par excellence, and one oriented toward “restoration” and “security” rather than the proper radical conservative goals (Jünger, 1932, p. 223, 431, 506); Jünger (2001, p. 169–170). Were the conservatives to seek attaining their beloved order



directly and immediately, they would remain in the liberal-parliamentary framework and risk being again overthrown by its supporters, and the particularity of the conservative revolution derived precisely from its distinctive *modus operandi*.

Freyer consented on the inevitable chaotic nature of the coming political revolution as well as the need to root out the “19<sup>th</sup> century” for good. For him, revolutionary principle was not one of “structure, order, or construction,” but rather its essence was “pure force, pure breaking-through, pure process” (Freyer, 1931, p. 53). Therefore “the question of which form [the revolution] will resign to when it has reached the endpoint of its movement” was “not only wrong but also cowardly.” For him, the key point was precisely that “the new principle dares to remain the active Nothing [*das aktive Nichts*] in the dialectic of the present, pure impulse [*Stoßkraft*]” (Freyer, 1931, p. 53). Were the revolutionary impulse insufficient, however, the structure of the bourgeois society would remain intact or be even actively restored, or alternatively a pluralistic interregnum would emerge and turn the rightist revolution itself into one more interest-based political perspective rather than rising above them; there was, however, only one way to win a revolution, Freyer noted, namely it giving rise to “authoritarian formations” (Freyer, 1987, p. 33).

## Revolution as movement, energy, and lava

The proposition of revolution as “pure impulse” is worth closer attention: the leading metaphor for the revolutionary potential in the three thinkers’ work was that of political-historical action as movement and kinetic energy, occasionally supported by more specific borrowings from the world of physics, railroads, or volcanic geology. I will conclude with a brief examination of how Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer constructed the historical inevitability of the nationalistic revolution by such recurring imagery. Ultimately this colorful oratory secured the required historical, political, and intellectual-spiritual continuity between the mobilization of 1914, the 1918 revolt, and the prospective conservative revolution.

My proposition is that the internal dynamics of radical conservatism cannot be fully comprehended without considering how the authors rhetorically constructed this link. In Koselleck’s analytical terminology: the internal temporality of the concept of ‘conservative revolution’ relied largely on past experiences of a war and an attempted revolution; yet by rhetorically constructing a historical continuity, the radical conservatives gave it a future-oriented twist and turned it into a politically effective “concept of expectation” (see Koselleck, 1995, p. 349–375; Koselleck, 2006, p. 44–45). The expectations of a restoring national unification via revolutionary devastation,

however, relied on the recent anterior experiences of wartime communality and 1918 radicality.

“The revolution continues,” Moeller noted – specifying that it continued in spirit, even if its realization in actual political deeds was uncertain (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 2). To persuade his readers of this historical continuity, Moeller depicted the revolution in terms of movement. It is easy to miss the metaphorical aspects of this highly habitual imagery; we do after all speak of most political organizations and ideologies as “movements” in a literalized sense. Yet the explicit analogy with physical bodies and their movement and kinetic energy, invoked by Jünger and Freyer alike, testify to a coherent argumentative strategy. The revolution continued as a “movement [*Bewegung*] that cannot come to rest before the forces it unleashed have again reached a binding outcome,” Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 2) noted. A few pages later he further invoked “a great conservative law of life” which was not “a law of inertia” (*Beharrungsgesetz*) but rather a “law of motion [*Bewegungsgesetz*] according to which all existence grows in steadiness not interrupted even by convulsions.” Appearances may change according to the era, Moeller added, but the energy itself remained (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 15).

In a section on reactionism, Moeller explicitly addressed Marx’s earlier metaphor of revolutions as the locomotives of history from the viewpoint of this law of motion: in his alternative “materialistic” imagery, revolutions were more like “collisions of history” or “massive accidents” (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006, p. 180–181). This reinterpretation of the locomotive metaphor in terms of train accidents, again, highlighted not only movement but also mass and energy. Moeller continued the metaphor by noting how “clearing work” must be left to competent outsiders who would again put the “toppled” existence into “motion, which would no longer be revolutionary but again conservative.” It was a “conservative elementary fact,” he proposed, that “life” would always find its balance after such collisions, and currently, Germany found itself in such “conservative countermovement [*Gegenbewegung*]” (Moeller van den Bruck, 2006).

Moeller’s metaphor, however, is somewhat unintuitive, as the countermovement under conservative signs, despite its name, could only be a movement *forward* on the track of history lest it become the merely reactionary turn backwards that Moeller particularly wanted to avoid. In the absence of a third direction on railway tracks, this further conservative-revolutionary impetus was difficult to depict in terms different from the original revolutionary impulse. Already on this metaphorical basis, the conservative-revolutionary movement, as far as its historical dynamics was concerned, had more in common with the forward-looking radicalism of socialist revolutionaries than with reactionary conservatism.

Invoking similar terminology from physics, and possibly inspired by Moeller’s earlier treatise, Jünger (2001, p. 87) highlighted how the experiences of war and revolution had

changed the human being and how these changes were to be “transmitted” onto the future “in accordance with the law of conservation of force.” (Freyer, 1931, p. 10) similarly read revolutions since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a phenomenon “progressing according to natural laws.” In another context, Jünger (2001, p. 187–188) generally identified life with “incessant movement,” opposing any attempt to regulate or contain such vitality by purposive mechanicality and noting how “life” in 1914 broke Marxism to pieces. Jünger also linked the two revolutions with one another with movement described in more organic terms: “Any organism is more easily capable of movements it has already performed than a movement of completely new and unfamiliar kind,” Jünger noted, and herein lay the significance of the 1918 revolution: it helped the nationalists overcome the habitual German loyalty to authorities and thus prepared the transition from a liberal bourgeois state to one run by nationalistic workers (Jünger, 2001, p. 288).

The three radical conservatives also invoked “energies” directly to supplement the quasi-physical terminology of movement or force remaining despite changing circumstances. Both Jünger and Freyer spoke of “revolutionary energies” which in (Freyer, 1931, p. 8) formulation always gathered into masses and in Jünger (1932, p. 187) estimation were beginning to unfold. It was crucial to maintain the “revolutionary fire” as “potential energy which could later also be transmitted to other paths” (Jünger, 2001, p. 124). (Freyer, 1931, p. 43) noted how these “energies” derived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and provided the new 20<sup>th</sup>-century revolution with “impulse” (*Stoßkraft*) albeit not its “will” which now came from the novel nationalistic movement. To further depict that kinetic power, (Freyer, 1931, p. 16, 18) highlighted the continuous presence of “societal movement” in what he explicitly called the “physics of society.” The “inner movements” and class contradictions of the industrial society caused “mechanical pressure” and “agglomeration,” and when “interests collide [*stoßen*] with opposing interests” and “have effects on one another” according to “the measure of their mass and their living force,” this provided revolutions with their “impulse” (*Stoßkraft*) (Freyer, 1931, p. 8, 12, 15–16, 53). In Freyer’s image, the aggregate revolutionary movement resulted from opposing impetuses in social dynamics mutually strengthening one another. This idea lay in the background when Freyer noted that revolutions were not unilinear developments, progress, or simply “movements”, but “dialectical tensions that “become charged and reloaded” (Freyer, 1931, p. 42).

Freyer’s imagery clearly invoked ideas from modern physics and the movement of objects in space, but also geology and volcanic activity arose as a further underlying source of metaphors. Historical forces not only “dam up” and “agglomerate” into “amorphous energy,” he noted, but “subterraneously form into instinctive and bellicose powers, into movements of will with a front and an aim; they become a subject.” (Freyer, 1931, p. 37). Freyer’s strong imagery has

not escaped scholars’ attention. Muller (1987, p. 200) notes how Freyer described political-historical movement in terms of forces, impetuses, breaking through, and process – all “images that suggested the inevitability and inexorability of natural forces and hence added to the ideological tone of the pamphlet.” Pankakoski (2021) similarly argues for the centrality of geological metaphors for Freyer’s historicistic conservatism and proposes that the supplementary volcanic metaphors serve to insert radical historical dynamics into the otherwise stability-oriented and conservative geological framework.

Also Moeller spoke in similar terms. Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 2) posited that the “crater” of the 1918 revolution first only spit out slogans and platitudes but nevertheless enabled Germans to look into “the depths” and perceive “a subterranean flow” or “the powerful stream of German history” there, a flow now seeking to alter its course and again push “into a single direction.” That direction, obviously, was the nationalist-conservative one. A few pages later Moeller van den Bruck (2006, p. 10) noted that the revolution only had a meaning if it produced a “reversal” which relied on “carrying upward” the “glowing and fluid” resources of the *Volk*, which elsewhere had “cooled down and solidified.” This was Moeller’s central metaphor for the lively political energy of the people, occasionally melting the barren institutions of liberal politics and reactionary monarchism alike.

On the rhetorical level, he remained ambivalent on whether the underground volcanic flow would naturally turn from its earlier course or whether active conservative politics should, or could, produce that result. Like Moeller, also Freyer oscillated between diagnosis and agency, or merely anticipating a historically inevitable revolution from the right, on the one hand, and instigating one, on the other – an ambiguous position these thinkers, ironically enough, inherited from Marx. Given their repeated criticism of “chiliasm,” unstoppable progress, and other such problematical positions of inevitability in the philosophy of history, their own absolute belief in a dawning revolution from the right appeared mildly self-contradictory. At any rate, it was the task of radically conservative politics to actively mobilize the permanent underground resources and harness them into the service of a conservative revolution so that the necessary change of political direction would take place. “All creative politics is conservative,” (Freyer, 1935, p. 120) noted, but “in a revolutionary sense” so that it “pierces through the crust of the late centuries and ... makes the inexhaustible springs of the people flow.”

In sum, the kinetic, energetic, and volcanic metaphors the three radical conservatives employed in their central political texts served the same purpose of fabricating historical and theoretical continuity between the various revolutionary outbursts. Once perceived in this argumentative framework, the leftist and rightist revolutions were not only isolated and contingent events, but essentially manifestations of the same revolutionary potential, the essence of which these authors

nevertheless described in exclusively nationalistic terms. For them, the attempted socialist revolution and the subsequent success of the Social Democrats were thus less indicators of a general left-wing tendency prevailing in the Weimar Republic, but rather testified to the further revolutionary potential of the German people.

The very notion of conservative revolution emerged in this argumentative structure, linked with a specific historical juncture. As noted, its future-oriented temporality relied on immediate past experiences of a war and a failed revolution in the most literal sense to the term. Detaching the concept from this context would, however, shatter its internal temporal dynamics. One may, of course, claim today that a Leftist cultural revolution has taken place gradually since the 1960s that necessitates as well as justifies a Right-Wing counter-revolution; the argument of continuing a movement or utilizing prevailing revolutionary energies is, however, much less persuasive if the events are decades apart and if the “revolution” refers to a vague and long-term cultural shift rather than undeniable events of contemporary history everyone has experienced. Although many elements from the conservative revolutionary imagery resonate with the current world situation, the particular argumentative form I identify at the heart of the conservative revolution concept depends on such historically embedded experiences for its popular persuasiveness. Those willing to revive the idea today would have to inject new temporal dynamics into it by explicitly theorizing recent historical dynamics should they wish to persuade other than those already persuaded by the idea of a Leftist revolutionary takeover.

## Conclusions

When read as a historical formation and with respect to the argumentative forms employed by the three thinkers in this essay, the notion of “conservative revolution” appears perhaps less paradoxical than proposed by most previous scholars. The concept unequivocally carries an internal contradiction only insofar as we interpret both of its two elements as similarly substantive ideological principles located on the same level or as philosophical abstractions: then conservatism and revolutionary radicalism, or conserving and subversion, are contradictory principles, and their combination indeed an oxymoron.

In the original interbellum usage, however, conservatism was primarily a substantial value commitment—the *ex post* affirmation of the Prussian values of authority, discipline, and the primacy of the whole against Western liberal individualism—as well as an aim linked with concrete societal and cultural projects. For Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer, revolutionary subversiveness, by contrast, was the means of attaining a concrete situation characterized by such principles—a context-dependent procedural, rather than substantive, principle of political organization, supported by heavy argumentation in the

philosophy of history. The paradox of “conservative revolution” is largely the product of implicitly conflating these two levels into one, purportedly timeless idea and of turning the specific *modus operandi* into a substantive ideology.

This, further, exemplifies the context-bound nature of the conservative revolution. Just like conservatism proper emerged as a reaction to the Enlightenment rationalism and universalism and armed with the tenets of historicism, also radical conservatism or the conservative revolution emerged as a historically embedded argument on the specific historicity of conservative politics. Like original conservatism, also the radicalized version of the conservative revolution can be read with Mannheim (1995, p. 229) as “existentially bound thinking,” linked with the leading questions of the interbellum era.

Although attempts at reinvigorating this tradition have emerged recently particularly in Europe and the US, the conservative revolution was arguably a historically unique formation; its uniqueness follows from the internal argumentative logic of conservative revolution and the impetus and kinetic energy, as it were, constructed rhetorically by the three authors. Without the abrupt devastation of the old cultural order in war and revolution and the construction of a democratic-parliamentary system that large segments of the German population felt alienated in, the conservative-revolutionary dynamics and its mobilizing effects are difficult to summon. The persuasiveness of the idea, especially in terms of its temporal aspects and energetic continuity, is contingent upon concrete events. Most importantly, however, the anticipated conservative revolution was parasitic on the anterior incomplete left-wing revolution. The temporal horizon of conservative revolution is remarkably short, and its dynamics necessitates this concrete anterior event and the concomitant energetic continuance.

There might thus be limits to the concept’s ideological persuasiveness that stem from its internal temporal logic and hinder its utilization 21<sup>st</sup>-century contexts. This, of course, does not undermine the usefulness of “conservative revolution” as an analytical category in intellectual history, including comparative trans-European settings, such as those proposed by Dietz (2017). Similar trains of thought were perceived in other countries than Germany in the interbellum, and the European New Right is a transnational intellectual movement. The analysis of this article, however, does suggest that the argumentative persuasiveness of conservative-revolutionary ideas originally relied on the proximity of the socialist revolution and its historical dynamism which Moeller, Jünger, and Freyer integrated into their radically conservative arguments.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary

material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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