

Edgar J. Jung, “Germany and the Conservative Revolution” (1932)

Abstract

The “Conservative Revolution” was not a firmly established movement. It consisted of a number of nationalist writers and intellectuals – such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and Edgar Julius Jung – whose individual ideologies differed significantly, but who were joined together by their opposition to Marxism and liberalism (a term used to denote parliamentarianism, democratic parties, and Western democracy in general). The “Conservative Revolution” also rejected the kind of reactionary conservatism that aimed solely to restore the monarchy. In addition, its members criticized the Western version of capitalism, though it is important to note that they never fully defined the “German” style of socialism that they propagated as a counter-model. Edgar Julius Jung, a political adviser to Franz von Papen, favored rule by the elite, as opposed to what he described as “rule by the inferior” in Weimar democracy.

Source

Germany and the Conservative Revolution

[...]

We currently find ourselves in the midst of a German revolution that can scarcely be expected to manifest itself in such forms as the French did through the storming of the Bastille. It will be protracted, like the Reformation, but it will still leave its mark all the more fundamentally on the countenance of humanity. It will prompt a ruthless revision of all human values and dissolve all mechanical forms. It will oppose the driving intellectual forces, the formulas, and the goals born of the French Revolution. It will be the great conservative revolution that puts an end to the decline of occidental humanity, founding a new order, a new ethos, and a new unity in the West under German leadership. However, just as the new leadership within state and society is based not on force but on the voluntary compliance with the noble authority of those persons who are prepared to assume responsibility, so will the new leadership of Europe lie beyond the conceptual world denoted by conquest, imperialism, militarism, or denationalization. As the French Revolution shifted the center of European gravity to the west, so will the German allow the heart of Europe, its center, to come back into its own. However obstinately France might press its will for the “order” of Versailles, that nation will not be preserved from the bitter realization that issued from the world war and has inclined France today toward a politics of pure power: the realization that, biologically, the most powerful people in Europe are the Germans. [...]

By “conservative revolution” we mean the return to respect for all of those elementary laws and values without which the individual is alienated from nature and God and left incapable of establishing any true order. In the place of equality comes the inner value of the individual; in the place of socialist convictions, the just integration of people into their place in a society of rank; in place of mechanical selection, the organic growth of leadership; in place of bureaucratic compulsion, the inner responsibility of genuine self-governance; in place of mass happiness, the rights of the personality formed by the nation.

The fundamental attitude of the new individual who will be responsible for establishing this order—which recreates the inherent particularity of personality by setting the latter into a humble relationship to the whole, by blending together microcosmic value and macrocosmic preeminence—is a

religious one. The present examination will venture neither into the philosophy of religion nor even into theological concerns. It seeks solely to make clear that the humble individual, who can assume the role of the master for precisely the reason that he feels himself to be the tool of God, will be the carrier of the coming new order. I measure the fitness of an individual to be the pathbreaker of the German revolution by his degree of personal humility, which is proportional to his unbroken pride in relation to the mass tendencies of our age. The great divide that is looming does not concern moral values, social attitudes, or nationalist conviction. It concerns who is a true master because he is capable of being a servant. It concerns the question of the extent to which the individual—independently of the external force of law—establishes laws for himself. The horrible moral degeneration of our time is, in the first instance, not at all to be explained on the plane of ecclesiastical faith, obedience to state law, or any other superficial code of honor. The chaos stems much more from the absence of a “caste” that unfailingly establishes laws for itself, which are also unfailingly carried out. That is the one side. The other is equal standards for all. Who can wonder, given the current predominance of these equal standards, that the “sense of honor” of the rabble will ultimately destroy that of the elite? What can a word of honor still mean in a time when words of honor are strewn about by a streetwalker? Who can wonder at disappointments over presumed friends in a time when even the worst blood forces its way without reservation into social strata that are simply incompatible with the conceptual world of such illegitimate upstarts? Who can greet the general lack of honor with astonishment, given that there no longer exists a stratum that enforces an iron discipline upon itself to keep its ranks pure? And what, finally, has happened to that dynamic model without which it is impossible for a social ethos to influence the broad masses, such as English society succeeds in imprinting its message upon the simple man?

Humility toward higher things, freely accepted responsibility, and, for that, a claim to dominion—such is the expression of the fundamental religious attitude that only individuals of good breeding are able to muster. From this attitude, this new faith, a compelling religious world of forms will mature. When it was said above that the conservative revolution was in all ways the opposite of the French Revolution, this opinion also comprehended the hope that the conservative revolution will erect a new altar to God, as the French erected one to the goddess of reason.

The Third Reich therefore cannot be a continuation of the great process of secularization but only its termination. It will be Germanically Christian or not at all. It encompasses in itself the turn away from the secular forms of the nation-state, from the constrictions of a misdirected nationalism. The new nationalism is a religious-cultural concept because it presses toward totality and tolerates no restriction to the purely political. The language of the German revolution will be—despite and precisely because of this fundamentally nationalistic attitude—a world language. In the struggle for our self-preservation we will, for the first time, speak a language that captures the hearts of other peoples. For the German cause will become the cause of all the peoples who do not want, like France, to constrain the course of history by attempting to constitute themselves and their culture as the crowning summit of all time. Thereby the moment of international liberation is already embraced within the voluntary assumption of the German revolution as the task of Europe as a whole. Revolution signifies the domination of a new principle of social value. Every revolution must therefore be a world revolution, though its specific form might remain confined within boundaries drawn by national character. But should we dream about our little place in the sun, merely proclaim our right to existence? Or should we, frankly and freely, go before the world and say to it that, failing our contribution, the face of humanity would display no ordered spiritual features? Should we, the people of Luther, Kant, Beethoven, and Goethe, should we be denied decisive participation as well in the new political ordering of the world?

German cannot easily be used as a world language of the spirit, a statement that is not meant philologically. The language of a Hegel, a Marx, a Nietzsche has indeed acquired political vitality in the world. People in Italy, in France, and in other nations do indeed strain to hear the voices of Germany's conservative revolution. However, much more notice is being given to the mighty mass protest

represented by National Socialism. It professes its commitment to the Third Reich, but whether in that profound, comprehensive sense with which it is being cultivated by the men who have reinvigorated the idea of the holy Reich remains an open question. It is possible to maintain that it is necessary for National Socialism to be permeated by the spiritual renaissance with which Germany has been blessed in the last decade. Yet it is also permissible to attribute a more limited historical task to National Socialism, the destruction of a rotten world and the preparation of the great field upon which the new seed is to be sown. This much is certain: the longing of all the masses making sacrifices today for National Socialism springs from the great conservative genetic inheritance that stirs within them and compels them to such action. Whether—to continue in the language of racial hygiene—the phenomenal form of this longing, which goes today under the name of National Socialism, predominantly bears the traits of the conservative revolution or of the liquidation of liberalism will remain unanswered here. The mighty energies that pulse through the awakening German people are indestructible. Prophets, enemies, and friends might passionately debate the future of National Socialism; they might proclaim its rapid fulfillment or temporary setbacks. Those of us who carry the coming Reich and the will to achieve it steadfastly in our hearts will not be diverted from our fundamental course either by setbacks or the tumultuous success of the masses.

We are reproached for proceeding alongside or behind active political forces, for being romantics who fail to see reality and who indulge in dreams of an ideology of the Reich that turns toward the past. But form and formlessness represent eternal social principles, like the struggle between the microcosm and the macrocosm endures in the eternal swing of the pendulum. The phenomenal forms that mature in time are always new, but the great principles of order (mechanical or organic) always remain the same. Therefore if we look to the Middle Ages for guidance, finding there the great form, we are not only not mistaking the present time but apprehending it more concretely as an age that is itself incapable of seeing behind the scenes. A romantic is one who presents historical models that run counter to the laws of an age. The romantics of the nineteenth century painted such model images and failed to recognize that the wave of liberalism had not yet broken. When, however, they attempted from the depths of their souls to give life to a new reality in opposition to the apparent reality of the liberal world model, they were not divorced from reality. Their reality was a greater and more profound one because their perceptual senses were more finely developed.

For us things are different. The time has come, since the dissolution is complete, since the reality of the liberal conception of the world has revealed itself as illusory, since it has proved impossible to gain mastery over life through abstraction and the rule of understanding. We once again see the world as it is because we are ourselves not only of *this* world, but because we have an immediate sense of the metaphysical and feel its presence within us as a cosmic law. That is why our hour has come: the hour of the German revolution.

Source: Edgar J. Jung, "Germany and the Conservative Revolution" (1932), in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. © 1994 Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press, pp. 352–54. Reprinted with permission of the University of California Press.

Source of original German text: Edgar J. Jung, "Deutschland und die konservative Revolution," *Deutsche über Deutschland*. Munich: Albert Langen, 1932, pp. 369–82.

Recommended Citation: Edgar J. Jung, "Germany and the Conservative Revolution" (1932), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:document-3865>> [March 16, 2026].