



## **Time as Radical Action: The Call for Conservative Revolution**

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**Reaction Time: Radical Cultural Conservatism After World War II**

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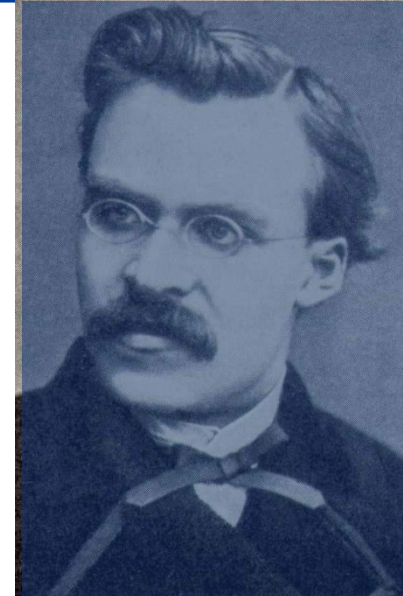
# Oxymoron?

- Conservatism
  - Preservation of the old institutions, traditions, habits, hierarchies
  - Weber: Traditional domination (*Traditionale Herrschaft*)
    - The authority of tradition, of the 'eternal yesterday' (ewig Gestrigen)
    - The mores (Sitte) hallowed by immemorial validity and habitual attitude
- Revolution
  - Destruction of old institutions, traditions, habits and hierarchies.
  - New beginning: Modern domination – (*Zukünftig Herrschaft*)
    - The authority of the future, of the “coming-to-be tomorrow”
    - The hopes hallowed by the future dreams and new habits
- Marx: Capitalist modernity itself “revolutionary”
  - *“All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.”*
- Oxymoron as the Enigma
  - Aporia for the thinking of the conservative revolution



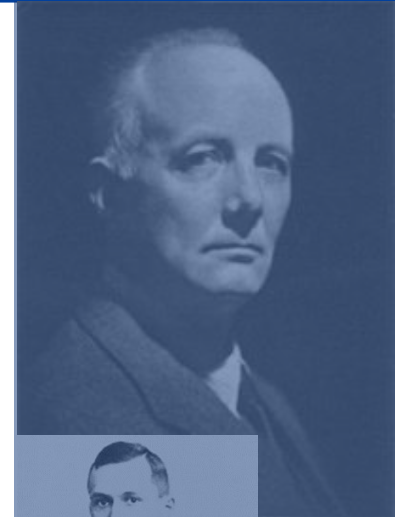
# Aesthetic revolution – literature as spiritual space

- Thomas Mann 1921: Nietzsche
  - *“Its synthesis is the synthesis of the enlightenment and faith, freedom and bondage, spirit and flesh, 'God' and 'world'. Artistically expressed it is the synthesis of sensuality and criticism, politically expressed it is the synthesis of conservatism and revolution. For conservatism only needs to have spirit to be more revolutionary than any positivist liberal Enlightenment and Nietzsche himself was from the beginning, already in his Untimely Meditations nothing but conservative revolution.”*
- Hugo von Hofmannsthal: 10.1.1927. University of München
- The literature as the spiritual space (geistiger Raum) of the nation
  - *“We are not searching for freedom, we are searching for bonds (Bindung)”*
  - *“The Process of which I am speaking is nothing other than a conservative revolution of a scope unknown to European history. Its goal is form, a new German reality (Wirklichkeit) in which the entire nation participates.”*



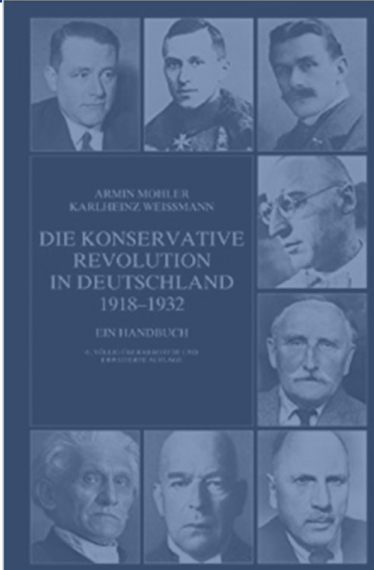
# Conservative revolutionary

- Hermann Rauschning: Ex-national socialist and conservative revolutionary
  - Conservative revolution 1941, personal story
  - The Revolution of Nihilism. Warning to the West 1939
- Leo Strauss 21.6.1941 seminar on German Nihilism
  - National Socialism is only the most famous form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unenlightened and most dishonorable form
  - Nihilism as the modern form of passionate cultural criticism
    - Glaukon's protest against the city of pigs
    - Rousseau's protest against the civilization of taste
    - Nietzsche's protest against the last man
    - German nihilism as protest of Weimar culture
    - Militarism – yet “originally” nothing to do love of war, but love of morality, responsibility for endangered morality.
- Nihilism ↔ Conservatism
  - Revolutionary passion ↔ anti-revolutionary moderation
- Young nihilists led by Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger, Heidegger – Hitler unsubstantial



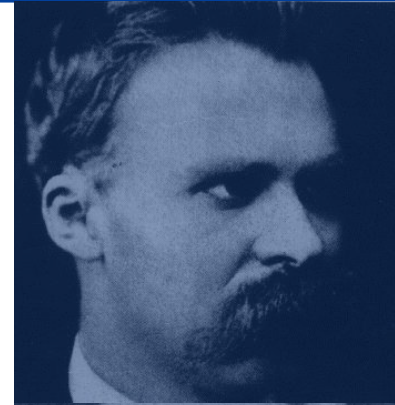
# Conservative revolutionaries?

- Armin Mohler: Jünger's secretary
  - 1948 Doctoral dissertation (Jaspers and Schmalenbach)
  - Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932. Grundriß ihrer Weltanschauungen. Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, Stuttgart 1950.
- Dissertation? Source book
- Conservative revolution ≠ Nazirevolution
  - Fascism and National Socialism as misapplication of revolutionary conservative thought
- Revolutionary conservatism
  - 'Trotskyites' of the Conservative Revolution



# Reaction ?

- Conservative revolution as reaction
  - Reaction against Modernity, Liberalism, Parliamentarism, Weimar culture etc.
- Mohler: Reaction against the spiritual space-time created by French Revolution
- Ernst Nolte: Chain reactions caused by Russian revolution
- Moeller van den Bruck:
  - Conservative ≠ Reactionary, more action than reaction
- Friedrich Nietzsche: Moralizing reaction
  - Reactionary = the man ressentiment
  - Slave morality reactive, master affirmative
- Edgar Julius Jung: Call for conservative revolution
  - Deutschland und die Konservative Revolution 1932
  - Revolution signifies the domination of a new social value principle.
  - Chaos from the absence of a "caste"
  - Nazism only phenomenal form of the longing for conservative revolution
  - *The Rule of the Inferiour: Its Disintegration and Removal Through a New Reich* 1930
- Hitler as the man of ressentiment



GEGEN DIE HERRSCHAFT  
DER MINDERWERTIGEN



# The Call Beyond Time

- Reaction Time
  - The interval between stimulation and response in chronological time
- Thinking against chronological time
  - Unidirectionality of time (Einsinnigkeit der Zeit)
- Moment (Augenblich) ≠ response or reaction
  - Platon εξαίφνης (exaifnēs) – sudden - Kierkegaard (Øieblikket)
  - Not category of time but the constant point of intersection between time itself and eternity
- Political vocation: Who / what is calling ?
  - Moment → Nothing
  - Raum → Myth
  - *“This is the wisdom of the cell. I'm losing my time and win my space (Raum)” (Schmitt)*



# Revolution and reaction

- Reaction as a part of revolutionary vocabulary
  - *“To the extent that our political terminology is modern at all, it is revolutionary origin.”*
- French revolution as the founding act
  - *“Historically speaking, both conservative thought and reactionary movements derive not only their most telling points and their elan but their very existence from the event of the French Revolution.”*
- Revolution a new beginning, a new story
- Revolution (Constructive) ↔ Polemics (enemy)
  - *“They [reactionary movements] **have remained derivative** ever since in the sense that they have **hardly produced a single idea or notion that was not primarily polemical**. This, incidentally, is the reason conservative thinkers have always excelled in polemics, while revolutionaries, to the extent that they too developed an authentically polemical style, learned this part of their trade from their opponents. **Conservatism**, and neither liberal nor revolutionary thought, **is polemical in origin** and indeed **almost by definition**.”*





# Reaction ↔ action

## ■ Action

- Goes back to the Latin verb *agere* – to push forward.
- Belongs to ancient political vocabulary

## ■ Reaction

- Later composite, scholarly origin, couple action and reaction
- *“In fact, reactio and reagere are not part of the ancient Latin lexicon. They are not found in any text from Antiquity.”* (Starobinski, 22)

## ■ Antonymies

- Classical Latin: *agere* ↔ *pati* (to suffer, to undergo), *actio* ↔ *passio*
- Philosophical Greek:
- Ποιέω (*poieô*, make, produce) ↔ πάσχω (*paskhō*, to have), πάθος (*pathos* (what happens, undergo)

## ■ Reaction

- Early middle age derivate, action with prefix *re*

JEAN  
STAROBINSKI  
ACTION  
ET RÉACTION  
VIE ET AVENTURES  
D'UN COUPLE

STAROBINSKI

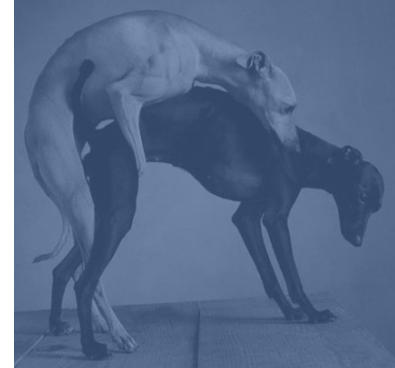
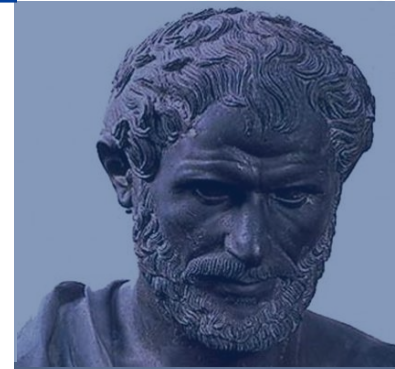
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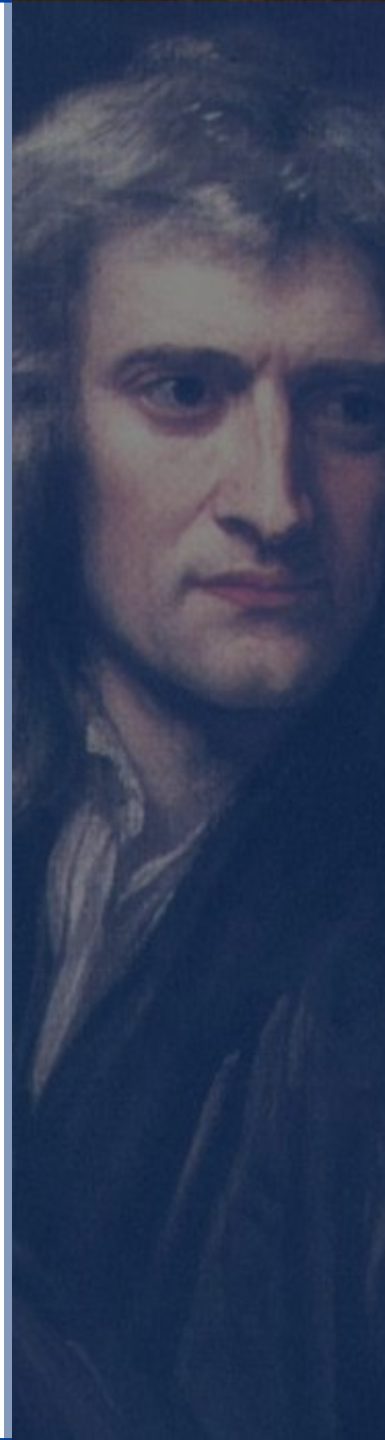
# Aristotle: Generation of animals

- Doing and undergoing (ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν)
  - “The cause why the movements relapse is this. Acting one is itself acted upon by that on which it acts: (Αἴτιον δὲ τοῦ μὲν λύεσθαι τὰς κινήσεις ὅτι τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ πάσχει ὑπὸ τοῦ πάσχοντος)
  - Thus that which cuts is blunted by that which is cut by it, that which heats is cooled by that which is heated by it, and in general the moving cause (except the first cause of all) does itself receive some motion in return.  
ἀντικινεῖται
- Albert Magnus: Quaestiones super De animalibus (1263)
  - The movement in return (ἀντικινεῖται) → reagere (Albert Magnus)
- Why sperm can be corrupted by menses?
  - One that acts physically is acted on



# Constant interaction

- Newton's third law of motion: Interaction
  - *“To any action there is always an opposite and equal reaction; in other words, the actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal and always opposite in direction.”* *Actioni contrariam semper & æqualem esse reactionem*
- Reaction as contemporaneous with the action
- Antoine de La Salle: *La balance naturelle* 1788
  - The universe governed by two forces, constant action and reaction



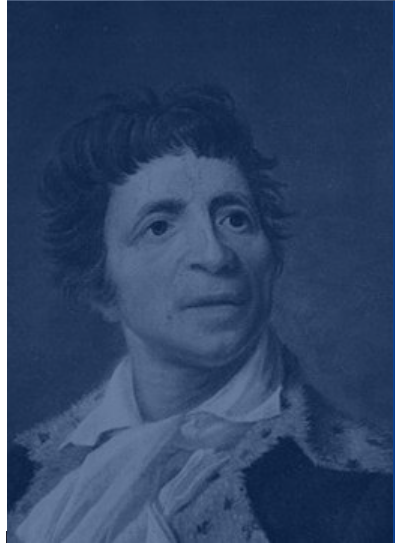
# Rousseau

- Continual action and reaction,
  - « *Après avoir ainsi considéré chaque espèce de société civile en elle même, nous les comparerons pour en observer les divers rapports : les unes grandes, les autres petites ; les unes fortes, les autres faibles ; s'attaquant, s'offensant, s'entre-détruisant ; et dans cette action et réaction continuelle, faisant plus de misérables, et coûtant la vie à plus d'hommes, que s'ils avaient tous gardé leur première liberté. »*



# French Revolution

- Reaction becomes part of a political vocabulary
- First as a neutral term ≠ counter-revolution
- Mirabeau 27.11.1790 – Reaction against “reactionaries”
  - *“Necessity of reaction against the incurable tendency among bishops and parish to bring back the former abuses.”*
- Jean-Paul Marat L’Ami du Peuple 10.8.1792
  - *“Fear the reaction, for your enemies will not spare you if chance falls their way again.”*
- Reaction against people
  - Still downfall of Robespierre was reaction as release
  - After that “Royal reaction” against people
- Benjamin Constant Des réactions politiques
  - Reactions against people
  - Reactions against ideas



# Bichat's vitalism = reaction

- *La vie est l'ensemble des fonctions qui **résistent à la mort**.*
  - “Life is the assemblage of the functions which resist death.”
- Life is reaction
  - “In living bodies, such in fact is the mode of existence, that whatever surrounds them, tends to their destruction...they could not long subsist, were they not possessed in themselves of a **permanent principle of reaction**.... **This principle is that of life**; unknown in its nature, it can be only appreciated by its phenomena, but the most general of these **phenomena is an habitual alternation of action and reaction** between exterior bodies, and the living body.”
- Reactive child
  - “There is a superabundance of life in the child because **reaction overcomes action**. In the adult, **action and reaction are on a balance** while the vital swelling disappears. In the old man, the reaction of the inward principle is lessened, the action from without remaining unaltered; it is then that life languishes, and insensibly advances towards its natural end, which ensues when all proportion ceases.”



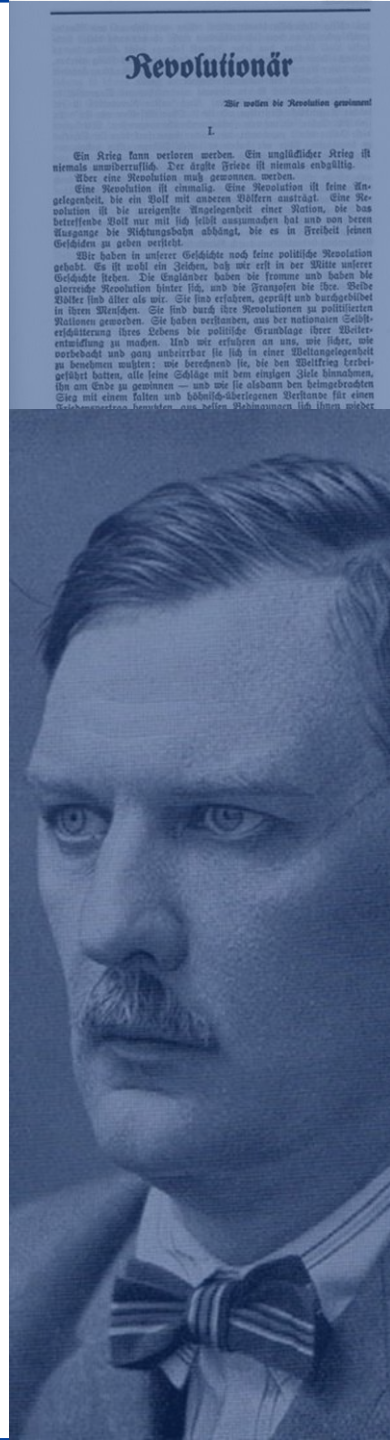
# Revolution

- Arthur Moeller van den Bruck: Das dritte Reich 1923 (Third Reich)
- Revolution as radical beginning
- Unique moment
  - A revolution is a never recurring moment (Augenblick) in the life-history of a people. Our Revolution is one such moment (Augenblick) .
- National revolution
  - Moment to give to our political existence (dasein) a national form (Gestalt)?
  - We are a people without reality/actuality (Wirklichkeit)
  - We possess nothing but possibilities
- Aristocratic socialist revolution
  - Surpassing Marx with Nietzsche

Ein Krieg kann verloren werden. Ein unglücklicher Krieg ist niemals unüberwindlich. Der größte Friede ist niemals endgültig.

Wes eine Revolution muß gewonnen werden.  
Eine Revolution ist einmalig. Eine Revolution ist keine Angelegenheit, die ein Volk mit anderen Völkern austrägt. Eine Revolution ist die ursprüngliche Angelegenheit einer Nation, die das betreffende Volk nur mit sich selbst auszusuchen hat und von deren Ausgang die Nützlichkeiten abhängt, die es in Freiheit seinen Geschicken zu geben vermag.

Wir haben in unserer Geschichte noch keine politische Revolution gehabt. Es ist wohl ein Zeichen, daß wir erst in der Mitte unserer Geschichte leben. Die Engländer haben die fremde und haben die glückliche Revolution hinter sich, und die Franzosen die ihre. Beide Völker sind älter als wir. Sie sind erfahren, geprüft und durchgeleitet in ihren Menschen. Sie sind durch ihre Revolutionen zu politisierten Nationen geworden. Sie haben verstanden, aus der nationalen Geschicklichkeit ihres Lebens die politische Grundlage ihrer Weiterentwicklung zu machen. Und wir erfahren an uns, wie schwer, wie vorbedacht und ganz unerbittlich sie sich in einer Weltangelegenheit zu bewegen wußten; wie fernschauend sie, die den Weltkrieg erlebt hatten, alle ihre Schritte mit dem einzigen Ziele hinnehmen, ihn am Ende zu gewinnen — und wie sie dadurch den heimgekehrten Sieg mit einem kalten und kühnlich-überlegenen Verstande für einen Friedensvertrag besetzten, aus dem Bedingungen für ihren wieder



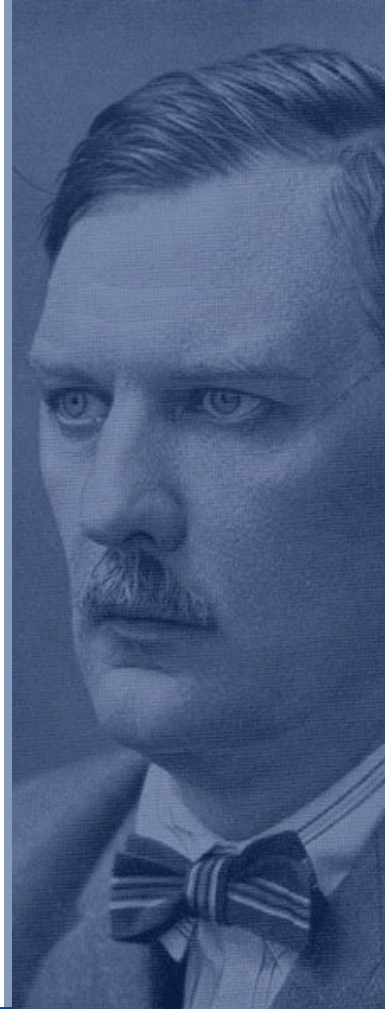
# Reactionary

- Against reactionaries
  - “*Politics can be reversed: History cannot*”
- Reactionary ≠ Revolutionary
  - Reactionary wants to cancel the revolution
- Spiritual ↔ Political
  - Reactionary and revolutionary → Revolution only as political event
  - Conservative → Political and historical event ← spiritual process
- Violence (Gewalt) → Power (Macht)
  - Reactionaries and revolutionaries use violence
  - Conservatism seeks to gain power, not outward but indwelling power
  - Emanating from a constructive idea, which confers impersonal right and possesses enduring potency.
  - Conservative revolutionary = conservative power and revolutionary violence
- Reactionary ≠ Conservative
  - No greater antithesis - Es gibt keinen größeren Gegensatz.

Der revolutionäre Mensch ist der voreiligen Meinung, daß die Welt nun für alle Zeiten von den politischen Gesichtspunkten bestimmt sein werde, nach denen er sie umwarf.

Der reaktionäre Mensch schließt in ungeheurer Richtung und hält im Grunde für möglich, daß die Revolution aus der Geschichte wieder weggespült werden kann, als ob sie niemals in ihr gewesen wäre.

Der Revolutionär kommt von seinem Irrthum sehr bald zurück. An demselben Tage, da er die Formen zerbrach, die er vorfand, sieht er sich vor der Notwendigkeit, das Leben in neuen Formen einzurichten. Er, der sich bis dahin um die Bedingungen des Staates, den er als Oppositionsmann kritisierte, nicht sonderlich zu kümmern pflegte, muß die für ihn einigermaßen verblüffende Entdeckung machen, daß die politische Welt, in die er nunmehr eintritt, auf Geheßen beruht, in Bindungen hängt, von Verheißungen abhängt, über die er sich nicht einfach hinwegsetzen kann. Er, der bis dahin unverantwortlich war, erfährt zum ersten Male eine Verantwortung, die sich nicht so ohne weiteres mit seiner Absicht vereinbaren läßt, den Staat durch Improvisationen zu ersetzen. Er, der womöglich ganz ohne Formen auszukommen gedachte, sieht sich vielmehr gezwungen, seine vorgefaßten Regierungspläne, statt sie radikal durchzuführen, irgendwie anzupassen.





# Conservative

- Always prepared to make a beginning.
- Not against revolution but in favor of surpassing it
- Preservation of the people
- Eternity ↔ Transitory
  - Conservatism has Eternity on its side
  - Recognizes the enduring element in the transitory
  - The great things: love, hate, hunger, need, adventure, company, strife, trade, competition, will, ambition and lust for power itself.
  - Behind transitory is timeless immutability, including space (raum) enclosing the time.
  - Space "remains", Time "escapes".
- Creativity
  - Reaction creates nothing – revolution destroys (makes space)
  - Conservative creates in the fresh space by giving things enduring figure (gestalt)
- Great and small politics

Wir leben, um zu hinterlassen.  
 Wer nicht glaubt, daß wir den Zweck unseres Daseins schon in der kurzen Spanne erfüllen, in dem Augenblicke, in dem wir, dem Meies Dasein nur wahr, der ist ein konservativer Mensch.

Er sagt sich, daß unter Leben nicht ausreicht, um die Dinge zu schaffen, die sich der Geist, der Wärme, die Erfindungskraft eines Menschen vornimmt. Er sieht, daß wir als Menschen, die in eine bestimmte Zeit geboren werden, immer nur fortsetzen, was andere begonnen haben, und daß wiederum dort, wo wir abbrechen, andere abermals aufnehmen. Er sieht den einzelnen Menschen vergehen, aber das Ganze seiner Verhältnisse bestehen. Er sieht lange Geschlechterfolgen in überlieferten Diensten eines einzigen Gedankens. Und er sieht Nationen am Bau ihrer Geschichte.

So gibt der konservative Mensch sich eine Rechenschaft über alles, was flüchtig ist, hinfällig und ohne Bestand, aber auch über das, was erhaltend ist, und wert, erhalten zu werden. Er erkennt die vermittelnde Macht, die Vergangenes an Rünftiges weitergibt. Er kennt mitten im Seienden das Bleibende. Er erkennt das Ueberdauernde.

