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The Man Who Invented the Third Reich:
Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and *Das Dritte Reich* (1927)

Biography:



Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876 – 1925) was one of the most important figures of the Conservative Revolution in Weimar Germany. In his early years, Moeller van den Bruck lived an impoverished bohemian life, with his only income being royalties of his German translation of Dostoyevsky's works. While his own works, such as *Der Preußische Stil* (1916) and *Das Recht der Jungen Völker* (1919), albeit being the fundamentals to Moeller's anti-democratic and anti-liberal political ideal, received little to no readership and review. In 1919, Moeller cofounded the neoconservative Juniklub along with other conservative intellectuals. The

Juniklub quickly became one of the most important right-wing hubs in the early 1920s and it was at the Juniklub, in 1921 or 1922, that Moeller had the fateful encounter with a still insignificant Adolf Hitler. However, like Nietzsche whom he often compared himself with, Moeller suffered from syphilitic dementia and had retreated from his dominant role in the Juniklub even before the meeting with Hitler. Nevertheless, Moeller remained intellectually active, and in 1922 published his last book, *Das Dritte Reich*. The work became phenomenal, influencing right-wing groups in Germany and was crucial in the development of Hitler's National Socialist movement, even if for the phrase *das Dritte Reich* alone. Suffering from constant nervous breakdowns and depression, Moeller ended his own life in 1925 in an asylum. Although it is not known how much influence Moeller actually asserted on Hitler, or on the emergence of the National Socialist movement, it is known that for at least two times, Moeller's works were presented as gifts to Hitler, and that a copy of *Das Dritte Reich* signed by Moeller himself remained in Hitler's room in the Führerbunker until the Führer's death.¹

Summary:

Moeller's magnum opus, *Das Dritte Reich*, contained the most comprehensive exposition of his Weltanschauung. It is in this book that Moeller launched his strongest attacks against liberalism, parliamentary democracy, and the decadent political situation of the Weimar

¹ Interviewee Otto Günsche, interview by Stan Lauryssens, in *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich: The Life and Times of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck*. (Stroud, Gloucestershire [England]: Sutton, 1999).

Republic. Influenced by the concept of a Third Rome of Dostoevsky and Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Moeller developed the ideal of a Third Reich for Germany. Following the Holy Roman Empire and the Kaiserreich, the Third Reich would represent the fulfillment of German history and the harmonious incorporation of all oppositional social and political tendencies, which would thereupon cease to exist. However, Moeller had no plan for the concrete form of which the empire would take since the concept was “misty, indeterminate, charged with feeling; not of this world but of the next.”² If the Reich would take form in a republic, it would be a republic where its people participate in spirit through the medium of national values shared by all. Contradictorily, Moeller believed that a strong leadership (that of a Führer belonging to a third party that opposed traditional parties), complemented by willingness on the part of the masses to admit their own inability to lead themselves, stood out as a requirement for the coming of the Reich. The third party then should be the inspiration of nationalism and conservatism, and be the opposition to liberalism and rationalism. For these romantic yet conservative ideals, most scholars believe that Hitler and his National Socialist movement owed much inspiration to Moeller. But the question of whether Moeller would recognize Hitler and his Nazi regime or not remains an ongoing debate. It is perhaps no coincidence that Moeller’s work became an almost precise prediction of the Nazi ascendancy. But one can nevertheless see the discrepancy between the two. While Moeller called for a Reich of spiritual and cultural purity, Hitler insisted on racial purity and other ideals more zealous and radical than Moeller’s. For Otto Strasser, the disagreement was the result of a distortion of *Das Dritte Reich* by Hitler, who never really understood Moeller’s ideals.³ Nonetheless, Moeller’s *Das Dritte Reich*, regardless of its monotonous literature style, contributed to the conservative revolution that opposed the weak Weimar Republic, and imprinted an eternal sight in the gallery of conservative intellectualism in Germany.

Searched Terms: Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Moeller, van den Bruck, Third Reich, Das Dritte Reich, Hitler, National Socialism, June-Club, Juniklub

Results:

- van den Bruck, Arthur Moeller. “The Third Empire.” (1923) In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3852&language=english
The English version of the excerpt on GHDI.
- van den Bruck, Arthur Moeller. *Das Dritte Reich*. Berlin: Ring Verlag, 1923. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3852&language=german
The original German text on GHDI.

² Gerhard Krebs, “Moeller van den Bruck: Inventor of the Third Reich,” in *The American Political Science Review* 35, no. 6 (December 1941), 1098.

³ Otto Strasser, *Hiter and I*, trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), 27.

- van den Bruck, Arthur Moeller. *Das Dritte Reich*. Hamburg: Hanseatischer Verlag, **1922**. This is the first edition of the book. By 1933, four editions of the book were reprinted by seven different publishers in Germany. Publication of *Das Dritte Reich* did not stop because of the Nazi ascendancy but continued through the decade in Germany until 1942.
- Adam, Reinhard. *Moeller van den Bruck*. Königsberg Pr.: Gräfe und Unzer, **1933**. Adam, a contemporary German observer trying to elucidate the “spiritual foundation... upon which the present national-socialism is based” (Adam, 150) in a presentation before a scholarly society just a week after Hitler came to power in March 1933, declares that those “foundations were essentially laid by a single man: Moeller van den Bruck” (Adam, 150). I did not examine the actual book but took the passage from Wachutka,⁴ who cites Adam to reinforce his own claim that Moeller was influential among his contemporaries, and that much homage was paid to him by national-socialist officials up until the early 1930s.
- van den Bruck, Arthur Moeller. *Germany's Third Empire*. Translated by Emily Overend Lorimer. University of Michigan Press: G. Allen & Unwin, Limited, **1934**, 1971. The first authorized English edition. Its translator, Emily Overend Lorimer was a British linguist and translator of both *Das Dritte Reich*, and *Mein Kampf* in the 1930s. She advocated for the concentrated study of the two when both Hitler and National Socialism were not of great concern in Britain.⁵
- Strasser, Otto. *Hitler and I*. Translated by Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, **1940**. For Strasser, one of the close friends of Moeller, the author of *Das Dritte Drite* was the *Rousseau of the German Revolution*. Whereas Hitler on the other hand, is “an incarnation of the principle of destruction” (Strasser, 62). In Strasser’s words, the essence of Moeller’s idea of a Third Reich is one that is “federal, Christian, and European” (Strasser, 27). Clearly, Strasser suggests that Moeller’s Third Reich was not to be built upon racial purity as Hitler asserts, but on a purity that is spiritual, cultural and collective. Alas, Hitler, who plagiarized the ideals of Moeller, “never understood him” (Strasser, 27). It is important to point out that Strasser remained an opponent of Hitler throughout his lifetime after the latter murdered his brother Gregor Strasser. But the anti-Hitler Nazi’s account, filled with hostility and contempt against Hitler, nevertheless serves as an important source for understanding the relationship between Moeller and Hitler, and the influence that the former had on the latter. It is also significant that the account provides an answer to the debate, where he states that Moeller committed suicide when he realized that Hitler had betrayed his ideas. While this is not verified by any other scholarly works examined here, the testament of Strasser adds a color of mystery to and makes the bohemian and impoverished life of Moeller appear more tragic and legendary than it might have actually been.

⁴ Michael Wachutka. “A Living Past as the Nation’s Personality: Jinnō shōtōki, Early Shōwa Nationalism, and Das Dritte Reich,” in *Japan Review* no. 24 (2012). Wachutka is cited as the last work of this exploration.

⁵ Stone D., “The Mein Kampf Ramp: Emily Overend Lorimer and the Publication of Mein Kampf in Britain”, in: *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2013), 81-95.

- Stirk, S. D. *The Prussian Spirit: A Survey of German Literature and Politics, 1914-1940*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, **1941**.

In the work, Stirk deems Moeller one of the most influential figures of German conservatism and claims that “Hitler and the National Socialists owe much of their political Weltanschauung to Moeller” (Stirk, 45). In their striving for simplicity, austerity, straight and aspiring lines, and monumentality, Hitler and the Nazi architects took much of their inspiration from and conform in high degree to the “‘Prussian style’ discovered and described by Moeller” (Stirk, 53). Stirk believes Moeller’s *Das Dritte Reich* played a greater part in German party politics up to 1933 than any other, including *Mein Kampf*. But the work’s eventual erasure from public appearance by the Nazis (a debatable statement, which this exploration has not examined due to lack of time) was perhaps, as Stirk puts it, due to the ideological dispute between Hitler and Moeller as the Nazis found it impossible to harness Moeller in the service of their racial theories. Like other works on Moeller, Stirk outlines the major differences between Moeller and Hitler, and emphasizes the significant influence that the Prussian, as he describes Moeller, had on the Führer of the Third Reich. Ultimately, Stirk names Moeller “one of the chief creators of [Prussianism] and as the publicist who did so much to prepare the way for Adolf Hitler” (Stirk, 59).

- Krebs, Gerhard. “Moeller van den Bruck: Inventor of the Third Reich.” In *The American Political Science Review* 35, no. 6 (December **1941**): 1085-1105.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1950548.pdf>

The value of Krebs’s work lies in his summary of Moeller’s complex writing in *Das Dritte Reich*. The analysis of the work or life of Moeller is scant. According to Krebs, Moeller and Hitler once met in the Juniklub, in 1921 or 1922, and had a long talk, though it was not known of what they talked about. While Krebs notices the striking similarities between *Das Dritte Reich* and *Mein Kampf*, he makes no assertions on whether the two influenced each other. Nevertheless Krebs believes that were Moeller alive in the Nazi days, he would have hailed the Nazi regime as the incarnation of his vision or at least a step in the right direction. While Krebs is the only scholar found by this exploration to depict a positive reaction of Moeller to the Nazi regime, it may be important to consider the possible influence that the Nazi regime might have asserted on the article published in 1941.

- Bischoff, Ralph F. *Nazi Conquest Through German Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, **1942**.

Bischoff sees Moeller as one of the architects of a German Conservative Revolution. He outlines Moeller’s ideal in *Das Dritte Reich* as a combination of Prussian leadership and organization, German romantic nationalism, and a socialism based on the welfare of the group as a whole. However, Bischoff does not intend to assert the amount of influence that the writings of Moeller had on Hitler and the formation of his National Socialism (though he does emphasize that Moeller’s work is the origin of the phrase, ‘da dritte reich’ so often used by Hitler). Instead, Bischoff draws a parallel comparison, and finds the strikingly similar beliefs and political intentions between Hitler and Moeller. Nevertheless, Bischoff’s work lacks a conclusive statement on the interaction between

Hitler and Moeller, or on the interesting possibility about Moeller's reaction to the establishment of the Nazi Third Reich.

- Nova, Fritz. *The National Socialist Führerprinzip and Its Background in German Thought*. Ph. D. Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, **1943**.
Nova uses *Das Dritte Reich* as the evidence of Moeller's anti-democratic and ultra-conservative political philosophy. But Nova also emphasizes that Moeller shows a deep understanding of democracy and in fact devotion to the system by stating "it is not the form of state that creates democracy... but the active participation of the people in the state's functions" (Nova, 28). In fact, Nova too, states that Moeller does not reject democracy per se but seeks a "democracy on the condition that it be directed by leaders" (Nova, 57). This political view, Nova argues, led to Moeller's idea of the *Führer*, or the *aussenseiter* who would be "in a position to give directions to the 'mass' and "is capable of conceiving the whole" (Nova, 58) outside of political party constraints. While Nova makes no assertion that Moeller's thoughts directly influenced Hitler and his National Socialism, the author does stress that Moeller's idea of a *Führer* bears "almost National Socialist features and qualifications" (Nova, 60). Ultimately, Nova states that the Nazi *Führerprinzip* is a flexible and dynamic abstraction drawn from a number of concrete elements (i.e. Moeller's ideas of the *fürher*, and *Prussian style*). Although the Nazi *Führerprinzip* was never final nor original, it nevertheless represents a stream of German tradition flowing back to, as Nova writes, the establishment of Friedrich Wilhelm I's Prussian authority, which continued to thinkers such as Nietzsche and Moeller before the Nazi ascendancy.
- Schwierskott, Hans-Joachim. *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der revolutionäre Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik*. Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag, **1962**.
According to Schwierskott, Moeller impressed Hitler with his vision when first they met in 1922. But Moeller saw Hitler distorting the message of the Dritte Reich with his *proletarian primitiveness*, and until his death in 1925, Moeller kept his distance from the national socialist activities represented by Hitler (Schwierskott, 144-5). Schwierskott also states that when Hitler assumed power, he quickly set about discrediting Moeller, whose approach in *Das Dritte Reich* was deemed as "un-German" and "not leading towards national-socialism" (Schwierskott, 150-2). However, like Stirk and Strasser who claim that Moeller's work was eventually erased from German literature by the Nazis, Schwierskott's statement remains questionable. Nevertheless, while Hitler might not have adopted the concept of a Third Reich exclusively from Moeller, the disagreement between Moeller and Hitler, and Hitler's insecurity that Schwierskott describes demonstrate the strong, if not dominant influence of Moeller on the formation of Hitler's own political aspiration.
- Kaltenbrunner, Gerd Klaus. "Vom 'Preußischen Stil' zum 'Dritten Reich': Arthur Moeller van den Bruck". In *Propheten des Nationalsozialismus*. Edited by Karl Schwedhelm. Munich: List, **1969**, 153-157.
According to Kaltenbrunner, despite Moeller's refusal of Hitler's offer for collaboration, his political ideas were exploited by the Nazis. Kaltenbrunner also demonstrates the

popularity of Moeller's work and questions the claims of Stirk, Schwierskott, and Strasser that Moeller and his works were erased by Hitler as soon as he took power by stating that by 1935, 130,000 copies of Moeller's *Das Dritte Reich* had been printed (Contradictorily, the number of 130,000 also appears on Otto Strasser's testimony in 1974 with Lauryskens).

- Lauryskens, Stan. *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich: The Life and Times of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck*. Stroud, Gloucestershire [England]: Sutton, **1999**.

Lauryskens is a British reporter who in this book outlines the parallel lives of Hitler and Moeller, which except for a few occasions, have almost no interactions at all. According to Lauryskens's interview with Hitler's personal guard, Otto Günsche, a copy of *Das Dritte Reich* inscribed "To Adolf Hitler" and signed by Moeller was present in Hitler's room in the Führerbunker until the Führer's death. Lauryskens also conducted an interview with Otto Strasser, good friend of Moeller and original member of the Nazi Party in 1974, shortly before Strasser's death in the same year. In Strasser's words, "Without Hitler, [Moeller] would have become a household name, on par with Marx and Charles Darwin... [Moeller] took his life on the day he realized that Hitler was betraying his ideal... Hitler, of course, had borrowed the title of [Moeller's] book for his own use. People tend to ignore it today, but up to 1930 *The Third Reich* was widely read and discussed in Germany, much more so than *Mein Kampf*... This got on Hitler's nerves and he ordered Alfred Rosenberg to start a smear campaign in the [newspaper] *Völkischer Beobachter* against Moeller van den Bruck" (Lauryskens, 150). Also, "[Moeller's] name had to be erased from the conscience of the German people because Hitler was the visionary, not a mentally unstable dandy and a despised intellectual who shot himself in a mental asylum... With *The Third Reich* out of the way, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was promoted as the highest form of literary art" (Lauryskens, 151). Similar to his own memoir in 1940, Strasser's words were filled with hostility and contempt against Hitler, and admiration and nostalgia for Moeller. But as the last person alive in 1974 who knew Moeller personally, Strasser's words in the Lauryskens interview remain an important source in understanding the life of Moeller and his influence on Hitler.
- Gassert, Philipp, Mattern, Daniel S. *The Hitler Library: A Bibliography*. Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, **2001**.

A complete list for the Hitler Collection in the Third Reich Collection, Library of Congress. In the bibliography, *Das Dritte Reich* appears as a book in the collection originally dedicated to Hitler by Herta v. Treuenfels in 1927. The book inscribed "Alles kann der gewaltige Wille des Einzelnen ersehen - nur nicht ein [fehlendes?] Volk (Dahn, Kampf um Rom)." In addition, another work by Moeller, *Armin: Mit einem Lebensbild Moeller van den Brucks von Gustav Steinbömer* is dedicated to Hitler from a Dr. Hilda Penkuse in 1936, with the dedication "Dem Führer zum Jahrestag der Nationalen Erhebung!" According to the Bibliography, *Das Dritte Reich* is also present as part of the collection in the library of the Reich Chancellery, Hitler's office in Berlin, and is currently held by the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford, California. Both of the 1927 and 1936 dedications reveal that Moeller was an influential figure in Germany even after the Nazi ascendancy in 1933, and his *Das Dritte Reich* a widely circulated work worthy of

being presented to the Führer. The dedication by Dr. Hilda Penkuse as an anniversary present may also suggest the special place that Moeller and his *Das Dritte Reich* had in Hitler's heart. The presence of the book in the Reich Chancellery would reinforce such claim.

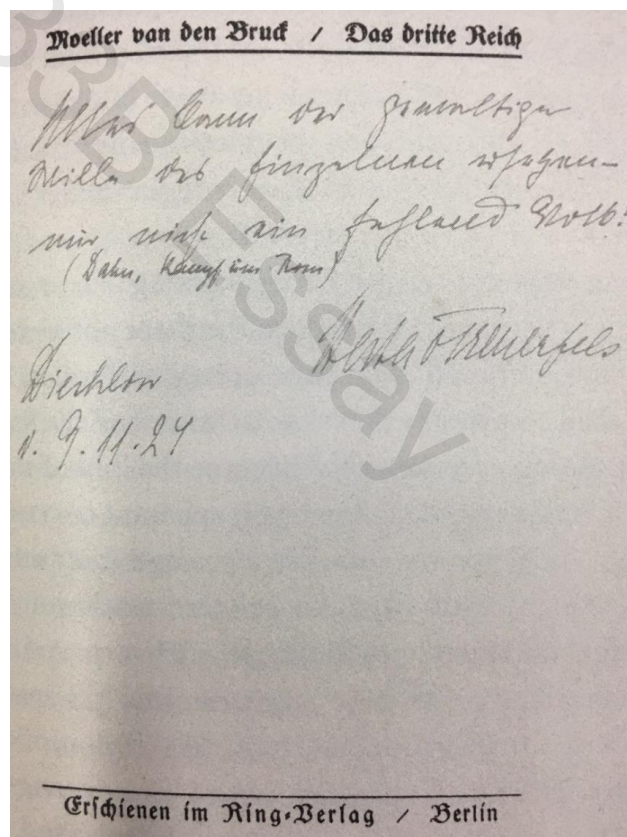
- Schoeps, Karl-Heinz. *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*. Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2004.

For Schoeps, *Das Dritte Reich* is “practically the bible of young National Socialism” (Schoeps, 17). To prove his point, Schoeps provides a source that reveal Hitler's subtle confession of borrowing his political ideas from others. In a talk given before a group of Alter Kämpfer on February 24, 1938, Hitler confessed that the Nazi ideology did not contain anything new, but “much of what was in [its] platform... had already been thought up a very long time before that” (Schoeps, 169). By emphasizing Hitler's unusual candor in the talk, Schoeps makes the point that *Das Dritte Reich* is the most influential in inspiring a Nazi ideology, which is no more than “an opportunistic mixture of the most disparate ideological complexes” (Schoeps, 16). However, Schoeps also notes the ideological tension between Moeller and Hitler and for which Moeller refused Hitler's offer to collaborate. In addition, Schoeps points out the fate of Edgar J. Jung, an opponent of Hitler who propagated numerous Nazi ideas in his work *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen*, and claims that he and the Conservative Revolution had made Hitler's assumption of power possible. The murder of Jung in 1934 by Nazi hands suggests that for Schoeps, Moeller might would have posed a threat to Hitler's grand scheme or to the Nazi ideology were he alive in 1933.

- Ryback, Timothy W. *Hitler's Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

According to Ryback, a copy of *Das Dritte Reich* was inscribed to Hitler by Moeller in November 1924, on the first anniversary of the failed Munich putsch (this may verify Laurysens's similar description). Ryback does not discuss directly the influence that Moeller might have had on Hitler, but simply states Hitler did not hesitate to use selected ideas from his ideals and “most famously plagiarized” the title of Moeller's book for their movement. Nevertheless, one can still get a glimpse of the value that Hitler saw in *Das Dritte Reich* from the fact that he kept the book in his personal collection until his death.

Treuenfels's dedication of *Das Dritte Reich* to Hitler.
In: Timothy W. Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life*, New York: Knopf, 2008.



- Wachutka, Michael. "A Living Past as the Nation's Personality: Jinnō shōtōki, Early Shōwa Nationalism, and Das Dritte Reich." In *Japan Review* no. 24 (2012): 127-150. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41592691.pdf>

Wachutka examines the work of German Japaneseologist Hermann Böhner, the first translator of Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō shōtōki* (1339, *Chronicles of the Authentic Lineages of the Divine Emperors*), into German and who in 1935 compared the Japanese piece with Moeller's *Das Dritte Reich*. According to Wachutka, Moeller was quoted extensively by Böhner because it made a good correlation to and analogies with German culture for the German audience. For Böhner, both works were concerned with the ultimate question of "who we are," and were "conversations with God," "self-dialogs," and "conversations with the eminent Us" (Wachutka, 140). Furthermore, a comparison between the two was seen fit because both Chikafusa and Moeller in a dark moment for their respective nations tried, through their writings, to invoke a spirit of the past, elevate it into a transcendental beacon, and bring hope to their peoples for a renewed and glorious future. Besides the analysis of Böhner's work, Wachutka's examination of Moeller's life and work also adds another view to the debate on the relation between Moeller and Hitler and the possible reaction of Moeller to the ascendancy of National Socialism. Wachutka points out that Hitler in *Mein Kampf* sees the new Germany built on a biological racial purity, whereas Moeller in *Das Dritte Reich* calls for a spiritual purity. By emphasizing the ideological difference between the two, Wachutka indirectly suggests that were Moeller alive at the time of Hitler's ascendancy in 1933, he would have rejected Hitler and his Nazi regime as he did in 1922 when the two first met.