

## **HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF ECONOMICS**

**Wilhelm Röpke (1899–1966): A Liberal Political Economist  
and Conservative Social Philosopher**  
**Patricia Commun and Stefan Kolev (Editors)**  
Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2018 (282 pages)

Divisions between market liberals and conservatives are not new. Nor are efforts to bridge the gap. No one arguably made a greater attempt to do so at the level of scholarly discourse than the German economist Wilhelm Röpke.

Mostly known as one of the small group of market liberals who played a major role in engineering the post-war German economic miracle, Röpke has received less attention for his contributions to establishing some of the more important political alliances that would eventually have great success in the United States. Röpke was the cofounder of the liberal Mont Pelerin Society alongside the Austrian classical liberal Friedrich Hayek, but he was also a long-time correspondent with the American conservative Russell Kirk. Much of Röpke's academic work and his public intellectual activity subsequently focused on forging links between conservatives and classical liberals that were based on more than just opposition to perceived common foes such as Keynesian economics and Communist totalitarianism.

Röpke's successes and failures as he pursued this endeavor are well-covered in a new collection of essays edited by two of the best contemporary scholars of Röpke's life and thought, Patricia Commun and Stefan Kolev. Taken together, the commentators assembled by Commun and Kolev have produced a thorough survey of this complicated subject. They show, for example, how Röpke's attempts to establish a social, legal, and political context in which modern market economies could operate without corroding

vital cultural prerequisites for free and just societies began much earlier than generally realized. But the sixteen papers also illustrate how Röpke's liberal-conservative synthesis is relevant to twenty-first-century debates. Such discussions include the meaning of that highly ambiguous word *neoliberalism* and the relationship between classical liberals and conservatives in a world that is very different from that of the 1950s and 1960s.

A common theme emerging from these essays is how much these intellectual forays on Röpke's part depended as much on personal connections as the hard, intellectual work of identifying and establishing common philosophical commitments and values around which both conservatives and classical liberals could rally. Equally important in this regard was Röpke's ability to engage with thinkers in a range of very different national and intellectual settings.

The first section of the book focuses on Röpke as an economist involved in intra-European debates: an engagement across the Bosphorus that extended for a four-year period. These papers bring to light Röpke's love-hate relationship with the Austrian school of economics as well as his involvement with other streams of European liberal economic and political thought.

The second section contains papers that explore Röpke's response to the Great Depression. Even today, Röpke's willingness to advocate for certain types of intervention in times of acute crisis attracts criticism from other free market thinkers. Röpke understood the economic drawbacks to state intervention extremely well and generally critiqued such policies. Yet he also grasped that policymakers could not ignore political realities. In this sense, he reflected upon economic challenges from the standpoint of what the authors call "a public economist": someone who, like Adam Smith, brought together economic truths with an appreciation for the fact that the work of trying to allow these truths to shape the social order could only occur in contexts that were by nature political.

The third set of papers examines Röpke's eclectic political and philosophical positions. These changed over time, but perhaps the most important insight is that Röpke was a more consistent conservative than perhaps even he himself realized. On one level, Röpke's ideas certainly developed as a result of coming into contact with non-German conservative thinkers and circles. Much of this flowed from his encounter with American conservatism. Not to be discounted, however, is the influence on Röpke's thought of the cultural pessimism that has long been prominent in German intellectual circles, especially during the interwar years.

The last section considers the extent to which Röpke can still be described as a "liberal." These papers demonstrate how any such assessment must consider the extent to which Röpke was invested in reconciling different Western traditions of political and economic thought. Röpke is often criticized for trying to harmonize what many regard as essentially incompatible positions. But he also thought that a true humanism could only emerge out of the West's classical, Christian, and Enlightenment traditions, and that it was the responsibility of intellectuals who cared about freedom, responsibility, and justice to try to develop such an integration.

If there is something missing from this collection of papers, it is sufficient attention to the role of religion in Röpke's thought. Religion was a very important subject for Röpke, partly as a sociological fact but also because Röpke was very much a believing Christian, especially in the second half of his life. This topic requires closer study and is very relevant for the subject matter addressed by this book.

Was Röpke a liberal or a conservative? I suspect that by the end of his life Röpke would have avoided excessive attachment to either label. His interest was in preserving freedom, reason, and the sources of the Western tradition in a world that was becoming deeply hostile to all of these things. It is to the credit of the editors and contributors to this collection of essays that they have produced a book that will surely spur further discussion of the thought and ongoing relevance of a sophisticated and synthetic twentieth-century public economist and social philosopher.

—Samuel Gregg

*Acton Institute, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

## Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid

**Heather D. Curtis**

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,  
2018 (370 pages)

*Holy Humanitarians* is a curious social biography that tells the story of an “evangelical,” Louis Klopsch, and his magazine the *Christian Herald*, as an anchor for accessing larger questions about evangelicalism, both then and now. The goal, in the author's words, is to tell the largely forgotten story of Louis Klopsch and his media campaign to make “Christian America” the “Almoner of the World” and in so doing to make visible “the theological principles, economic assumptions, racial biases, nationalist aspirations, gendered suppositions, and religious convictions that have shaped the meaning, practice, and trajectory of evangelical charity in the United States over the course of the twentieth century” (293). On the first, she is undoubtedly successful, but on the second the record is more mixed. Theological, economic, racial, political/national, gendered, and generically religious convictions do come through the text, but more as a feature of biography, and not therefore always straightforwardly or coherently. The author flags at least five large-scale tensions for the reader in the course of this book, worth visiting as part of one of the great origin stories of the American evangelical aid complex.

The first perennial tension that Curtis draws out is that among evangelicals themselves on the nature and priority of charity, particularly emphasizes on material charity and preaching of the gospel. A clear feature of Christian social teaching has long been captured in popular readings of the Great Commission. The *Christian Herald* was, after all, founded by an “ardent premillennialist who continued to prioritize evangelism over philanthropy in the British version of the newspaper” (63). The complication arose in whether in the