

## Quotable

“What man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead.”

Fedor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

## Commentary & Analysis

### The Real Meaning of Europe is Being Crushed in Order to “Save” It

European leaders continue to tinker, seeking yet another in a series of financial engineering fixes. It is an elusive search for some Holy Grail financial fix. It will not work. The problem is much more deeply rooted (the same applies for the United States). Financial and economic incentives that are woefully out of line with the individual spirit are doomed to failure, sooner or later. Just ask the Russians about that if you have any doubt.

A man named Wilhelm Röpke warned us of the danger of the so-called “economic unions” and global “free trade” deals and the like. He said it would unleash the worst parts of capitalism and crush the human spirit in its wake and ultimately lead to more radical political action.

It’s interesting that the much of the justification for the Eurozone and single currency is based on the guise it will sway the bad nationalistic tendencies and ease the cultural divide. It is as if mutilating the various creative talents and interesting cultures that are the essence of Europe is a good thing. It is not.

How many more examples of the reflection of their policies do European central planners need? Is the crushing of human spirit in Greece, Ireland, and Spain not enough? Are the rising separatist movements across the continent not enough? Watching the machinations taking place among the Eurocrats [and crony capitalists who have deeply infected the US economy] should be an important lesson to be re-learned: never underestimate a central planners zeal for efficiency with all its destructive forces intact, above all else.

Central planners who control Europe are killing it. US policymakers who defend and promote “too-big-to-fail” and the various “free trade” deals are killing it.

Last weekend I was re-reading a short biography on [Wilhelm Röpke](#), written by John Zmirack, titled “Wilhelm Röpke: Swiss Localist, Global Economist.” It is excellent. Anyone who is uncomfortable with the remedies of modern “economic theory” and yet knows there is a better “third way” that does not include either socialism or communism should read Röpke. Reading Röpke may not change things, but it will allow you to see how shallow the Davos Man and the mantra of globalism really are.

From Mr. Röpke, circa 1944:

Europe, rightly understood, cannot be primarily defined as a vast machine designed for maximum production, and the goal of integration cannot be determined by the output of automobiles or cement. What holds Europe together in the widest sense is something of a spiritual nature: the common patrimony of Humanism and Christianity. Nothing can be more ludicrous than the belief that this bond can be replaced by the bureaucracy of the European Commission and high authorities, by planners, economocrats and technical visionaries. The danger, however, is very real that the true order of values and aims may be reversed and the economic integration may be carried though in such a way that it endangers the real meaning of Europe.

“Röpke called attempts to forge a common state from the many nations of Europe ‘spiritually empty,’ and pointed to the danger of a ‘Jacobiniacal, Saint-Simonian Europe, which might steamroll out of existence everything that is individual in the realm of political, cultural and social order,’ concluding (in his typical ringing fashion):

To join the Brussels club would be suicide for Switzerland, and that so few in the EEC understand this is for the Swiss only further proof of the gulf which divides their tradition of communal liberty from...the countries of the EEC...[which] embody the opposite tradition of centralized bureaucracy. The Swiss are tempted to ask themselves why their forebears defended liberty at Sempach, Morgarten, Grandson and Murten against feudalism and absolutism if their descendants in the twentieth century should finally surrender to a German professor.

His defense of the individual against the expansion of the state could not be more basic and clear:

If we are to take respect for the human personality seriously, we ought...to measure progress by the degree to which the broad masses of people can today be expected to provide for themselves out of their own means and on their own responsibility, through savings and insurance and manifold forms of voluntary group aid. Only this is ultimately proper to free and mature men.

And finally, if this doesn't seem to describe the trend in Europe (and America) well, I am not sure what does.

“True to his principles and his original insights into the origin of collectivism—that the omnipotent state could only expand into places where civil society had begun to recede, and that state intervention only worsened the alienation and helplessness of the worker it has pretended to aid— Röpke argued that the powerful and prosperous Western Europe of the 1950's and early 1960's could dispense with the ‘crutch’ of a welfare state. Indeed, he saw accurately that the growing importance of the state as the ordinary guarantor of well-being for the individual must come at the expense of the family—the bedrock unit of any healthy society.”

The only way to reverse this trend is to “promote the decentralization of social and economic power,” according to Röpke.

Europe is heading in the wrong direction. The US seems to be following.

Jack Crooks  
Black Swan  
[www.blackswantrading.com](http://www.blackswantrading.com)

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