EMIL BRUNNER'S SOCIAL ETHICS AND ITS RECEPTION IN ORDOLIBERAL CIRCLES

Tim Petersen

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS[1]

The question of the Christian roots of the Social Market Economy is one that has often been asked. Many texts with different approaches to this question have seen publication.[2] A further possibility would be to investigate in detail the encounters of the spiritual fathers of the social market economy with Catholic social teachings and Protestant social ethics.

The conflict between Catholic social teachings and neoliberalism assumes great importance in the socio-philosophical debates that take place in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.[3] The Protestant background of most of the ordoliberal economists begs the question of the extent to which Protestant social ethics was drawn into the discussion.[4] In comparison with Catholic social teachings, the Protestant counterpart gets significantly less attention from them. Ordoliberal economists believe that Protestantism has little to offer in this respect. Thus it is that Wilhelm Röpke, speaking in 1944, sees Protestantism as suffering under a body of literature on the subject that is socio-philosophically impoverished and, above all, unstable.[5]

With hindsight, one cannot quite go along with Röpke's verdict.[6] However, in a way he is right: Protestant social ethics does not possess a coherent body of teachings such as is offered by its Catholic counterpart. Moreover, social ethics has not long been anchored in the institutions of the Protestant church. This has to wait until after the Second World War.[7]

With this background in mind it becomes clear why, in Röpke's eyes, the book *Justice and The Social Order* by Emil Brunner (1889-1966), published in 1943, fills "a real gap".[8] It is not just Röpke, but also Walter Eucken (1891-1950) who absorbs Brunner's social ethics. For this reason, my aim in this text is to present both Brunner's social ethics and Eucken and Röpke's reactions to it. To achieve this, I will place Brunner's theology in its historic context and introduce the man himself. The second main part will be devoted to Brunner's social ethics. Röpke and Eucken's reception of Brunner will round off the study.

2. HISTORICAL-BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical Background

Of defining importance before the First World War is a notion of progress shaped by historicism and enshrined in philosophy, theology, theoretical economics, politics and economic systems. This is rooted in German Idealism. With the historical philosophy of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831), the idealistic teachings gain a dynamic element.[9] The Hegelian notion of evolution also makes its way into other strands of 19th century philosophy.[10] It is only with the object-centered philosophy of the 20th century that the evolutionary teaching loses importance.[11]

The situation is similar in the German Protestant theology of the 19th century. The key figure here is the Romantic Friedrich David Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The evolutionary notion occurs in his thinking at the point where he interprets religious history as a progressive process leading toward Christianity.[12] Further on in the 19th century, the idea of progress gains yet more ground in theology.[13]

The extent to which German economic science develops along similar lines is striking. The evolutionary idea becomes apparent in the thinking of Friedrich List (1789-1846).[14] This notion continues to hold sway in the Old Historical School (for: *Alte Historische Schule*).[15] Gustav von

Schmoller (1838-1917), head of the New Historical School and leading economist in Imperial Germany, also declares his loyalty to the evolutionary notion.[16]

The theoretical evolutionary notion shadows the real-life development of Germany. The patchwork of small territories is transformed in 1871 into a nation, somewhat delayed in her emergence but demanding a place in world affairs that fits her new-found status.[17] The German economy also undergoes rapid transformation. Out of a predominantly agrarian economy emerges a leading industrial power.[18] The optimism born of ideas of progress goes hand-in-hand with an overblown European nationalism that results in the First World War.[19]

As far as theology is concerned, the First World War marks a significant break with the past. Historical-optimistic cultural Protestantism has to give way to dialectical theology. Alongside Karl Barth (1886-1968), Emil Brunner is one of its major exponents.

2.2 Emil Brunner[20]

Emil Brunner is born in Winterthur, Switzerland on December 23, 1889. As a child he moves to Zürich. Both here and in Berlin he studies theology. In 1912 he completes a doctorate on the typically cultural Protestant subject of *Das Symbolische in der religiösen Erkenntnis* (i.e. the symbolic in religious awareness). After military service he undergoes a period of theological training for the ministry with religious socialist Hermann Kutter (1863-1931).

Between 1916 and 1924 Emil Brunner works as a pastor in Obstalden. Stimulated by the theological discussions initiated by Karl Barth, he switches to a scientific career. In 1921 he qualifies as a professor. In 1924 in Zürich he becomes a Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology, a chair that he occupies until 1955. In 1924 his book, *Die Mystik und das Wort* (*Mysticism and the Word*), is published. It contains a critical examination of Schleiermacher's theology. For a while after this Brunner works on the key Barthian publication, *Zwischen den Zeiten* (*Between the Times*).

The Divine Imperative, Brunner's book on social ethics, published in 1932, leads to a split with Karl Barth. This conflict strongly influences

Brunner's work in the following years. His personal direction takes him for a time to the Oxford Movement of the American evangelist Frank Buchman (1878-1961).[21] At the same time, however, he is influenced by the rise of totalitarianism and the Second World War. Such is the backdrop to his 1943 work, to be considered in this essay, *Gerechtigkeit. Eine Lehre von den Grundgesetzen der Gesellschaftsordnung* (*Justice and the Social Order. A Teaching about the Basic Laws of Social Order*).

After the Second World War, Brunner spends more than 16 years working on a three-volume collection of dogmatics, intended as a counterweight to Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*). In the 1950s he continues to express his views on political-ethical issues. In so doing he adopts an anti-Communist stance, which again sets him at odds with Karl Barth. Emil Brunner died in Zurich on 04.06.1966.

3. EMIL BRUNNER'S *JUSTICE AND THE SOCIAL ORDER*

The reception given to Brunner by the ordoliberals basically rests on the book *Justice and The Social Order*. This can only be understood in the light of the changes to Brunner's theological position that took place in the course of the 1930s. For this reason I will begin by assigning the book to a particular place in Brunner's spiritual development. Then I will describe the content of the general part of *Justice and The Social Order*. The last section will be devoted to the work's economic aspects.

3.1 *Justice and The Social Order* in its Theological Context

For theology, the First World War represents a fundamental break with the past. The previous progressive optimism gives way to a more pessimistic attitude. Instead of proclaiming the advent of harmony between God and the world, theologians now start to emphasize the unbridgeable gulf between God and man. Theology departs from its previous focus on historical works. Contemporary theologians even look back and speak in terms of an "anti-historical revolution".[22]

Bestriding this upheaval is theologian Karl Barth. His "dialectical theology" stands in stark opposition to the teachings of the 19th century. Barth counters liberal historical-critical empiricism with an apodictic "dominus dixit" (i.e. the Lord has spoken). He casts aside ideas of culture and religion with their old positive connotations. Instead, he stresses God's

divinity and thus the distance between God and man that can only be surmounted through Christ (hence, “dialectical theology”).[23]

Karl Barth proves a magnet for other young theologians, whose lot it will be to shape the history of theology in the coming decades. One of these is Emil Brunner. Just like Barth, Brunner criticizes 18th and 19th century philosophy.[24] In systematic terms, Brunner nails his colors to Barth’s mast when the latter makes his distinction between theology and philosophy.[25]

In his work of social ethics, *The Divine Imperative* (*Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*), published in 1932, Brunner takes the daring step of going beyond the prevailing ideas of dialectical theology. He believes that it is time to apply the results of dialectical theology to the field of practice in everyday life.[26] His contention that worldly ethics of happiness and duty are not sufficient in themselves is fully in keeping with the tradition of dialectical theology. To counter these he cites Christian revelation.[27] On the anthropological level, he uses the example of the Christian view of humanity as an alternative to the directions taken by Naturalism and Idealism, both of which he finds wanting. Brunner understands the Christian view of humanity as meaning that man has to turn away from egocentricity and devote himself to the service of God. The mundane reflection of this is to be found in service to one’s fellow man.[28] It is this call to personalism that takes Brunner beyond the limits of dialectical theology. The question of just how one is to serve one’s fellow men in a complex society is answered by the reformed theologian with an appeal to old reformatory teachings of social order. It is the Christian’s duty to render service within the divine and natural orders of things and – here Brunner’s reformed tradition makes itself felt – to change it for the better.[29] For Brunner, such orders include the institutions of marriage and the state, culture and the economy.

As an order the economy has its own set of laws. These, however, are variable and can be changed.[30] Correspondingly, he calls for a new economic conception. In *The Divine Imperative*, Brunner rejects both individualism and collectivism. He sees the human being as a social creature. However, his attacks are mainly reserved for capitalism. He thereby explicitly aligns himself with neo-historian Werner Sombart (1863-1941) and Institutionalist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).[31] The Christian should nonetheless participate in the capitalist economy and use his Christian

witness to reform it.[32] It is the task of the church to participate in this reform process through proclamation and Christian works.[33]

The parting of company with dialectical theology which becomes apparent here continues with *Natur und Gnade. Zum Gespräch mit Karl Barth* (*Nature and Grace. About the Conversation with Karl Barth*). In this work Brunner defends the thesis of divine revelation in nature. Barth counters this in his polemical essay “Nein!”, (No!), in which he condemns natural theology as unchristian.[34] Undeterred, however, Brunner sticks to his path. One of the focal points of his theology is social ethics. During the Second World War Brunner meets an array of men skilled in practical economic life and science alike, including economist Karl Brunner (1916-1989). One of the results of these meetings is Emil Brunner’s work of social ethics, *Justice and The Social Order*.[35]

3.2 Principal Content

Totalitarianism and the Second World War form the political-historical back drop to the book *Justice and The Social Order*, published in 1943. For Brunner, the major injustice of the age has resulted from the decline of the occidental Christian notion of justice. The idea of natural justice has given way to legal positivism. It must at this point be said that Brunner is not merely calling for the reinstatement of natural justice, which he also views in a critical light. It is for this reason that he tries to develop another concept of justice altogether.[36]

For Brunner, justice is defined in terms of just apportionment. The principal notion behind this is encapsulated in the proverb: “To each his own”.[37] For Brunner, justice entails acting in accordance with law. However, law is not to be understood here in a legal positivistic sense.[38] Brunner’s basic assumption is of an identity between divine law and justice. Divine law is seen to be observed when a person created by God is permitted to occupy the social rank to which he has been assigned.[39] Just as there is a connection with law, so is there a connection with the principle of equality. This must not however be understood as some kind of egalitarianism; it means rather that similar cases should receive similar treatment.[40] Brunner sees the basis of this equality as deriving from the fact that people are children of God.

Brunner's views of law and equality define his ideas of society and human nature. Individual rights only make sense in the context of the relationship with God. For Brunner these include the rights to religious freedom and individual property.[41] The fact that people are not equal, however, means that they are dependent on one another. This means that communities as well as individuals must have rights. It is for this reason that the individual is under obligation to take up his assigned place in the institutions of family and state.[42]

Postulating community and individual rights in this way leads Brunner to occupy the middle ground between individualism and collectivism. Individualism represents an atomistic theory of the state and favours unbridled capitalism. However, he also condemns collectivism. Brunner counters the latter with his third way of freedom in the context of community, to be brought into being through the vehicle of a federally-organized social structure.[43]

Similarities between his views and the Catholic concept do not however lead Brunner to become a proponent of the philosophy of natural justice. Whilst recognizing the latter's merits in respect of justice, he rejects the formulation itself. To support his case he draws on the different interpretations of the term in the various different schools of natural justice. Brunner also believes that collisions between postulated natural justice and positive law often culminate in the unjust defeat of the latter.[44] It is this scepticism vis-a-vis natural justice that allows him to make concessions to historicism in respect of the question of the relativity of the concept of justice. Whereas he does believe in absolute justice, he simultaneously avers that all means of bringing it about are contingent upon time and space.[45] It is for this reason that Brunner also rejects building the concept of justice on a foundation that is directly Biblical-exegetical in nature.[46]

Brunner derives concrete requirements for a just social order from his theory of justice. He sees the concrete manifestation in the classical family structure[47], a society structured according to function[48], a just state[49] and a just community of peoples.[50] The economy also has its part to play in the formation of the just society.

3.3 The Economy in *Justice and The Social Order*

According to Brunner, the economy as a divine order of creation is, like the family, a holistic value, that may not in the atomistic sense be reduced to individual economic subjects.[51] On the basis of this economic blueprint Brunner lists the following points as elements of a just economic order.

- *1. The justice of property*

  Brunner's position midway between individualism and collectivism influences his stance on private property. On the one hand he subscribes to the dictum of "no property, no freedom".[52] On the other, however, he also believes in restricting the individual's right to hold property. As property always stands in relation to society, the property owner is under obligation to support society through the payment of taxes and duties.[53] Nonetheless, Brunner warns against overstating this duty to render payments to the state, thereby hobbling society's will to work.[54]

- *2. Just interest*

  Whilst branding interest as "unearned income",[55] Brunner also recognizes it as legitimate. This stance he justifies by citing the postponement of consumption it brings about and the function of interest as a return for risk incurred.[56] He does not consider the Biblical prohibition of interest to be applicable here, because the Bible does not take productive capital into account, merely talking instead about consumer credits.[57] Just as he rejects a prohibition of interest on grounds of principle, Brunner also refuses to countenance such a prohibition as applied to the rate of interest. However, in his opinion, the rate of interest charged must be commensurate with the level of income.[58] This "primacy of the right of the workers"[59] is from an economic perspective unworkable and appears vague. It is this position that leads Eucken to a misunderstanding in his reception of Brunner.

- *3. Just price*

  Brunner concedes that the issue of just prices is a very difficult one. Here, however, ordoliberal competition theory comes to his aid. Brunner sees the cause of perceived price injustice as lying in markets

dominated by monopolies. For this reason, he believes that it is not direct state intervention that will lead to just prices, but that which is nowadays termed regulatory policy.[60] The conditions for a market free from monopolistic domination would have to be created. “When these conditions are fulfilled, something like a just price arises on the market of itself.” [61]

- *4. Just wages*

In contrast to the question of just prices, Brunner’s ideas on the subject of just wages represent a significant departure from liberal thinking. He sees the labor market as a sui generis market. For Brunner, the principle of just wages means that, in times of crisis, the community as holder of capital must observe the compensation principle, and capital should be used to maintain wage levels.[62] As is the case with the determination of interest rates, Brunner’s ideas appear largely impracticable when seen from an economic point of view.

- *5. Just distribution of economic power*

What Brunner understands by the distribution of power is not the power of competition but its redistribution within individual companies. These considerations emerge in their totality from the perspective of his personalistic social philosophy. Employers and employees should take their respective places within a company community. Hierarchies should be maintained, but in concert with a willingness on the part of both sides to listen to one another. [63]

- *6. Capitalism and Communism*

Brunner’s sees the opposing pair consisting of Capitalism and Communism in much the same way as he does the antipodes of individualism and collectivism. From the center ground he rejects capitalism as a form of over blown economic individualism and communism as a collective economic order that robs the individual of his rights.[64]
Here, Brunner explicitly disagrees with Röpke. He rejects Röpke’s thesis that its multiplicity of possible interpretations means that the term “capitalism” should not be used. He continues to regard the term as applicable, drawing on Werner Sombart to support his case.[65]

- *7. The just economic order*

  In Brunner's eyes, the question of command versus market economy is not coterminous with that of capitalism versus collectivism. Here he makes the case for a middle way. He affirms the positive effects of the market economy. At the same time, however, he sees the necessity of state intervention. This he says should take the form of measures to preserve the economic order.[66] In his opinion, this leads him to contradict Röpke, with whom, in his own words, he otherwise has so much in common.[67] Here we seem to have stumbled upon a semantic problem: Brunner's notion of state economic management is in fact very close to Röpke's concept of regulatory economics.

In comparison to *The Divine Imperative*, *Justice and The Social Orde*" demonstrates a change in Brunner's position. He does admittedly remain sceptical of capitalism. However, this scepticism seems less informed by historicism than by the ordoliberalism that was emerging at the time.[68] In respect of wage and interest theory, however, there are significant differences.

4. RECEPTION IN ORDOLIBERAL CIRCLES

Brunner's book *Justice and The Social Order* is known by ordoliberal economists. Walter Eucken subjects it to scrutiny in his *Grundsätze der Wirtschaftspolitik* (*Principles of Economic Policy*). Wilhelm Röpke even gives Brunner's social ethics its own recension.

4.1 Wilhelm Röpke

In order to be able to place Röpke's reception of Brunner in its historical context, it is important to know that Röpke, during his period in exile, underwent the transformation into a thinker deeply influenced by social philosophy. It is for this reason that I shall preface the subject of his reception of Brunner with an account of this development.

4.1.1 Röpke as Social Philosopher[69]

The young Röpke was strongly influenced by the social reformist and empirical historicism of economist Walter Troeltsch (1866-1933). Röpke's dissertation "Die Arbeitsleistung im deutschen Kalibergbau"

("The Efficiency of German Potash Mining") testifies eloquently to this. His professorial essay "Die Konjunktur. Ein systematischer Versuch zur Morphologie der Verkehrswirtschaft" ("The Economy. A Systematic Attempt to Create a Morphology of Transport Economics") has significantly more theoretical characteristics, such as make their way into the entire post-war German national economy. At this time, Röpke reveals his disquiet about the whole field of historical economics.

The 1929 global economic crisis helps propel Röpke in the direction of social philosophy. He interprets the Depression as a crack deep in the foundations that highlights the problems of higher orders.[70] The following years see Röpke, always a political animal, intensifying his involvement in socio-political debate. Röpke's move to Istanbul University shortly after the National Socialist takeover in Germany reinforces his interests outside the economic sphere yet further. In collaboration with Alexander Rüstow (1885-1963) he works on a socio-philosophical concept.[71]

Using the work done in Istanbul as a basis, in 1942 Röpke publishes the first part of his trilogy. Under the title *The Social Crisis of Our Time*, he diagnoses a serious cultural crisis, especially apparent in the phenomenon of massification. One possible way forward lies for him in the *Third Way*[72] between laissez-faire and collectivism, denoting a state-regulated free market economy.[73] He goes on to flesh out this program in the second part of the trilogy, *Civitas humana*, published in 1944. At this time Röpke is engaging strongly with Christian religious trends. So it is that he reads the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*.[74] When he falls ill at the beginning of 1944[75] and *Civitas humana* starts to roll off the presses,[76] he also turns his attention to Brunner's *Justice and The Social Order*.

4.1.2 Röpke's Reception of Brunner

For technical printing reasons Röpke can only express his great appreciation of Brunner's book and basic agreement with its author[77] in a short footnote to *Civitas humana*. A few months later Röpke has the opportunity to use a review of his work to grapple more intensively with Brunner.

As Röpke's brief remark in *Civitas* reveals, he finds himself in basic agreement with Brunner's premises. He gives the work his warmest recommendation.[78] His feelings toward Brunner's basic ideas are, in his

own words, feelings of agreement and enrichment and gratitude.[79] There are various reasons for this attitude. Röpke sees parallels with the methodological approach that he himself espouses. Just like Röpke, Brunner is in quest of a synthesis of the social sciences. Röpke therefore hails Brunner as an effective and enriching comrade in arms.[80] This comradeship, however, goes far beyond mere methodology. Röpke agrees with Brunner's basic insights, values and conclusions.[81] Going into more detail, Röpke praises Brunner's rejection of collectivism, whether with a National Socialist or a Communist face. Röpke naturally applauds Brunner for his support for the right to private property. At the same time, Röpke also notes Brunner's positive attitude to the family and federalism.[82]

However, these passages in which Röpke states his agreement also contain critical elements. These also have to do with Brunner's economic-technical statements, which comes as no surprise. Nonetheless, his criticisms on the grounds of economics do not take precedence. Röpke does not want to appear to be a wiseacre. For this reason he only briefly addresses the difference in the meaning of the term "capitalism" highlighted by Brunner. Other differences in opinion in respect of the inevitability of monopolies, the working conditions in the early industrial age and economic policy are only touched upon in passing.[83]

He reserves his principal criticisms for the field of social philosophy. Here, Röpke the humanist, who describes his own theological stance as "Erasmic"[84], takes up a position of opposition to the cultural sceptic Brunner, who cannot deny his roots in dialectical theology. Röpke criticizes Protestantism for its sceptical attitude to the Ancient World. He himself sees a strong continuity between occidental Christianity and the history of ideas from antiquity. In his view, Christianity takes its socio-philosophical cue from antiquity. This applies in his opinion above all to the views of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC).[85] Röpke's criticism of Brunner is that he does not take this continuity sufficiently into account. It is his belief that Brunner does not accept the true significance of general human cultural inheritance with particular reference to the legacy of the Ancient World – or, if he does, then only reluctantly.[86] In Röpke's view, this could lead to an idolization of the state, such as can be found in the works of Martin Luther (1483-1556)[87], or to a theology of confinement. Evidence of this he claims to see[88] in Brunner's assertion that worldly justice must be subject to divine revelation.[89] The opposition of humanism to dialectical theology takes more concrete

form at another point. Brunner attacks Greek philosophy for its pantheism. In keeping with the religious scepticism of dialectical theology, he avers that the concept of justice to be found in Greek philosophy is modelled on the laws of nature.[90] Röpke refutes this, drawing on a contradictory assertion made by Animaxander (610-547 BC). He does at the same time, however, affirm Brunner's criticisms of Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384- 322 BC).[91] However, this is by no means unusual for a representative of Humanism who takes his guidance from Hellenism than from attic philosophy.[92]

The review says a lot about Röpke as he is in 1944. It must be admitted that Röpke is assuredly still in the economists' camp. However, the principal focus of his attention is on social philosophy. In this, Röpke's recourse to antiquity and Christianity in is in line with the tradition of 16th century Christian humanism.

4.2 Walter Eucken

Walter Eucken's reputation derives from his theory of economic order, which is at once coherent and dogmatic. This is the yardstick Walter Eucken uses to approach Emil Brunner. It is for this reason that I will first outline the development of Walter Eucken's theory of economic order.

4.2.1 Walter Eucken's Regulatory Economics[93]

Walter Eucken hails from an academic background in the classic Wilhelminian mould. His father is the philosopher of life and winner of the 1908 Nobel prize for literature Rudolf Eucken (1846-1926). Walter Eucken's 1913 dissertation "Die Verbandsbildung in der Seeschiffahrt" (i.e. The Establishing of Associations in Maritime Shipping) bears a typically historical title. Like Röpke and the dialectical theologians, Walter Eucken parts company with historicism in the 1920s. After his professorial work "Die Stickstoffversorgung in der Welt. Eine volkswirtschaftliche Untersuchung" (i.e. An Investigation of World Nitrate Supplies, An Analysis by Political Economics), his essay "Kritische Betrachtungen zum Deutschen Geldproblem" (i.e. Critical Observations on the German Money Problem) marks the point of rapprochement with theoretical national economics. In his 1932 essay, "Staatliche Strukturwandlungen und die Krisis des Kapitalismus" (i.e. Structural Changes in the State and the Crisis of Capitalism), he analyzes the collapse of the German economy.

In his view, an interventionist economic policy has led to the admixture of economic and state spheres. He bemoans the fact that Germany has turned into a nation of state-run capitalism.[94] He claims to see the historical trigger of this development in the Historicist School. Eucken uses two essays from 1938 and 1940 to carry the fight above all to historical relativism,[95] along with the notion of progress and historicist empiricism.[96]

At the same time, Eucken is working out a scientific alternative program. In order to overcome the "great antinomy"[97] between theoretical and historical research in the national economy, in 1940, in T*he Foundations of Economics* (*Die Grundlagen der Nationalökonomie*), he develops his own methodological conception. Borrowing from Max Weber (1864-1920) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Eucken advocates the teaching of the "market" and "command" economic models. Economic reality, he avers, always combines the two systems.[98] The answer to the question of which type appears better to him is answered in Eucken's *Grundsätze der Wirtschaftspolitik* (*Principles of Economic Policy*). Here he postulates the ideal of a competitive order, whose foundation should be a market economy in which competition holds total sway.[99] It is the role of institutions to implement and maintain this competitive order. Alongside the state and science, Eucken cites churches as having the power to fulfill this function.[100]

The considerations that Eucken brings to bear on the church have to be understood in their historical context. When it comes to the question of the church's political activity, Eucken seeks a compromise between Calvinist theocracy and the Lutheran teaching of twin kingdoms. This argument rooted in the Reformation takes on new significance in respect of national socialist totalitarianism.[101] Eucken does not want the church to get involved in daily political life; what he does want is for it to make its views known on questions of existential importance.[102] This aligns him with a modified version of the two-kingdoms teaching. This latter is represented by Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986)[103] and the report entitled *Politische Gemeinschaftsordnung* (i.e. *Political Order of Communal Life*), on the political-economic part of which Eucken collaborated.[104] Eucken's sceptical response to Catholic social teachings follows closely that of his own pupil Karl Paul Hensel[105] (1907-1975). In his view, the twin pillars of the social teachings, subsidiarity and professional order, are irreconcilable.[106] In a third point on the question of the church as a regu-

latory power, Eucken turns his attention to protestant theology. He criticizes its scepticism in respect of natural orders and the concomitant separation of theology from the other sciences,[107] whereby he makes a critical allusion to dialectical theology.[108] Eucken sees Brunner nonetheless as giving rise to the hope that the isolation arising from the Protestant theological position may be overcome. This is the background to Eucken's treatment of Brunner's *Justice and The Social Order*.[109]

4.2.2 Eucken's Reception of Brunner

Comparing Eucken's attitude to Brunner with Röpke's reveals some parallels. Both Eucken and Röpke praise the basic direction of Brunner's social philosophy whilst criticizing his grasp of economics. It must be said, however, that the emphases in each case are completely different.

Eucken initially says of Brunner that his ideas are aligned to a great extent with those of the competitive order, some of whose basic premises he explicitly acknowledges.[110] This, however, is as far as his praise goes before giving way to criticism. For Eucken, Brunner is one of those theologians who does not sufficiently take into account the fact of economic interdependence.[111] This, he claims, is apparent from Brunner's teaching on interest. At this point it is unclear whether Eucken really understands what Brunner is saying. He writes that:

"Like other ethicists, Brunner too has come to the conclusion that only a low rate of interest can be justified: a higher rate of interest, say, of over 5 per cent, cannot be justified and is morally reprehensible."[112]

This representation of Brunner's ethics of interest does not quite hit the nail on the head. Eucken's representation is at fault in that his words can be so interpreted as to lead to the mistaken conclusion that Brunner is demanding a maximum interest rate of five per cent. This is not the case. Brunner does in truth say that such a limit had a certain justification at the time of the Reformation. However, in respect of the present day he finds himself in explicit agreement with the ordoliberals, as the following makes clear:

"On the contrary, we must say that a 'just' rate of this kind cannot be determined and that, moreover, in a free economy, a regulation by statute, even with the best will of all concerned could hardly be carried through without a dislocation of the whole economic apparatus."[113]

However, Eucken is right in pointing out that Brunner turns the whole idea of interest into an ethical problem. Brunner postulates a priority of income over interest and admits that, at this point, his notion of justice contradicts the market concept.[114]

Eucken's interpretation of Brunner's ethics of interest is the pivotal point of the former's criticisms. Eucken claims that Brunner's insistence on low rates of interest would lead to misallocations, misdistributions and inflation. It would be nothing other than unacceptable selective intervention by the state. By holding to such a view Brunner is contradicting himself (and Walter Eucken's ideas of regulatory policy).[115] Thus it is that Eucken challenges Brunner and the church not to forget how things work in the real economy and to get behind his project to promote the competitive order.[116]

Eucken reveals himself as a consistent but rigid thinker. His verdict on a work of social ethics is determined by his concept of economic order. Unlike Röpke, who is capable of overlooking differences in economic thinking, Eucken can only accept a social philosophy that can be integrated into his system of economic order.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

The example of Brunner's reception by the ordoliberals serves to accentuate the Christian roots of the Social Market Economy. Its founding fathers grappled intensively with the theological and socio-ethical concepts of their age. These same founding fathers strongly influenced Ludwig Erhard and the practice of the Social Market Economy.[117] In Brunner's case there is a yet more direct connection to post-war West German politics. Eugen Gerstenmaier (1906-1986), long-serving president of the Bundestag, or lower house of parliament, and the "Union's chief ideologue" [118] in the Adenauer era, saw in Brunner's *Justice and The Social Order* the foundations for the reconstruction of Germany.[119] The extent to which this influenced economic practices in the early years of the Federal Republic cannot be examined here but would be an interesting question.

At the same time, both common ground and differences in the thinking of Walter Eucken and Wilhelm Röpke become apparent.[120] Eucken's reception of Brunner is conditioned by his very strong adherence to his

own system of economic order. This makes for clarity and consistency. At the same time, however, his thinking appears narrow. Röpke, on the other hand, is, as far as economics is concerned, much more conciliatory and places greater emphasis on the socio-philosophical elements. This makes his thinking more open in a positive sense. It must at the same time be said that a clearer stance on Brunner's economic statements would be desirable. Some commentators have used these different perspectives to conclude that Eucken's break with historicism is much more definitive than Röpke's.[121] Eucken and Röpke's reception of Brunner shows that this thesis has value. At the same time, one must not lose sight of the fact that Eucken and Röpke, not with standing completely different emphases, finally arrive at similar verdicts.

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1| *This paper was originally published as a research paper entitled "Die Sozialethik Emil Brunners und ihre neoliberale Rezeption" (The Social Ethics of Emil Brunner and its Reception by the Neoliberals). For the formal review of this paper and advice regarding its content I owe a debt of thanks to Dr. Joachim Zweynert (HWWI Thuringia). The revised version was proofread for formal mistakes by Pascal Klockmann (Intern at the Tax Consultancy Bureau Petersen), to whom I am likewise grateful.*

2| *Lachmann (1988) investigates market economic and Christian ethics, seeing the two as complementary. In a later contribution (2002), he looks more closely at the historical background. Brakelmann and Jähnichen (1994) develop the thesis of continuity between the Social Market Economy and economic historicism and related social Protestantism of the late 19th century (pp. 14-21), which in my view is not unproblematic. Nutzinger and Müller (1997) also talk in terms of this continuity (pp. 31-32), whilst simultaneously attempting to trace the Protestant influences in biographies (pp. 34-37) and in the religious-sociological work of the founding fathers (pp. 55-57), all the while continuing to investigate the fundamental socio-philosophical principles of the Social Market Economy (pp. 28-53). Roser (1998) conducts a historical-biographical (pp. 23-207) and systematic (pp. 208-339) investigation of "Protestantism and the Social Market Economy", using the example of Franz Böhm (1895-1977). Rieter and Schmolz (1993) describe the relationship of the Freiburg School to the resistance to National Socialism inspired by ecclesiastical Christianity (pp. 103-108). Goldschmidt (2005b) later published a series of works on this subject. Dietzfelbinger (1997) examines the religious sociology (pp. 118-185) of Alfred Müller-Armack (1901-1978) and the Christian influences on his concept of the Social Market Economy (pp. 239-278).*

3| *Cf. Petersen (2008).*

4| *Among others, Stefan Kolev (HWW Thuringia) and Daniel Braun (KAS Erfurt) as well as Consistory Dr. Thomas Seidel (International Martin Luther Foundation) all pointed me toward this question. My thanks go to them for this.*

5| *Röpke (1976), p. 74 (letter to Dr. Heinrich Drosz dated January 29,1944).*

6| *Thus it is in the 1920s that a group of economists and theologians gathers around Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and the religious socialists, all wishing to see a synthesis of Christianity and socialism (cf. Zahrnt (1966), pp. 461-462.). In the field of sociology of religion, the liberal theologian and friend of Max Weber (1864-1920), Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) makes an important contribution (1922/1961). It is with his "Evangelische Wirtschaftsethik" (Protestant Economic Ethics) that Georg Wünsch (1887-1964), religious socialist and student of Troeltsch, sees his contribution to the renewal of Protestantism.*

7| *Rauscher (1977/1988), p. 14.*

8| *Röpke (1976), p. 74 (letter to Dr. Heinrich Droz dated January 29, 1944).*

9| *Höffe (2001), pp. 216-218.*

10| *So it is that Karl Marx (1818-1883) (Hirschberger (1952/2007), pp. 472-477), August Comte (1798-1857), the founder of French Positivism (Ibid., p. 528), and the English empiricist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) (Ibid., p. 533) all base their assumptions on the notion of a progressive historical process.*

11| *Hirschberger (1952/2007), p. 570.*

12| *Pannenberg (1997), p. 70.*

13| *Thus it is that Richard Rothe (1799-1867) sees a positive development in the rise to pre-eminence of the state and the decline of the Church that will culminate in the establishment of God's kingdom on earth (Barth (1947/1960), p. 550).*

14| *Pribram (1998), p. 409.*

15| *Thus it is that one of the latter's exponents, Bruno Hildebrand (1812-1878), makes it his objective to turn economics into a teaching based on evolutionary principles (1848/1998, V).*
16| *Schmoller ((1893/1949), pp. 9-13) postulates an evolutionary progression from domestic husbandry, through local economy, up to national economy.*
17| *Mann (1958/1992), 55-569.*
18| *Treue (1962/1973), 534-594.*
19| *Mann (1958/1992), 563-569.*
20| *Portrait from: Brunner (1986), in particular pp. 389-391; Berger-Gerhardt (1958), pp. 137-139.*
21| *Later on, Wilhelm Röpke also encounters this movement, also known as "Moral Re-Armament", with its European headquarter in Caux on Lake Geneva. He feels aesthetically repulsed by it, even though he acknowledges the positive role it plays in the struggle against Communism (Röpke (1976), pp. 114-115, letter to Gertrud Fricke dated January 25, 1951).*
22| *Pannenberg (1997), pp. 341-342.*
23| *Zahrnt (1966), pp. 13-65.*
24| *Brunner. (1922/1962), pp. 262-263.*
25| *Brunner, (1925/1962), pp. 290-298.*
26| *Brunner (1932/1939), pp. VII.*
27| *Ibid., pp. 3-94.*
28| *Ibid., pp. 136-146.*
29| *Ibid., pp. 277-292.*
30| *Ibid., pp. 388-389.*
31| *Ibid., pp. 401-411.*
32| *Ibid., pp. 419-423.*
33| *Ibid., pp. 423-425.*
34| *Zahrnt (1966), pp. 72-84.*
35| *Brunner (1986), pp. 81-84.*
36| *Brunner (1943), pp. 3-11.*
37| *Ibid., pp. 15-24.*
38| *Ibid., pp. 24-28.*
39| *Ibid., pp. 54-64.*
40| *Ibid., pp. 29-36.*
41| *Ibid., pp. 64-76.*
42| *Ibid., pp. 77-89.*
43| *Ibid., pp. 89-100.*
44| *Ibid., pp. 100-112.*
45| *Ibid., pp. 113-129.*
46| *Ibid., pp. 130-147.*
47| *Ibid., pp. 167-174.*
48| *Ibid., pp. 218-230.*
49| *Ibid., pp. 230-267.*
50| *Ibid., pp. 268-307.*
51| *Ibid., pp. 174-175.*
52| *Ibid., p. 175.*
53| *Brunner encapsulates this in the following formulation: "The Christian doctrine of justice demands [...] not equality but compensation." (ibid., p. 185)*
54| *Ibid.*
55| *Ibid., p. 187.*
56| *Ibid., pp. 189-190.*
57| *Ibid., pp. 194-195.*
58| *Ibid., pp. 191-193.*

59| *Ibid., p. 193.*
60| *Brunner himself does not use the term "regulatory policy". Following along ordoliberal lines he makes demands for an anti-monopoly policy, speaking in this context of a necessary "relative stability and relative freedom" of the market (ibid., p. 199). Whether, or to what extent, these ideas reflect a direct absorption of Walter Eucken's regulatory economics cannot be gleaned from reading the book. This would be a field for further research.*
61| *Ibid.*
62| *Ibid., pp. 200-204.*
63| *Ibid., p. 206.*
64| *Ibid., pp. 207-213.*
65| *Ibid., p. 327. Röpke, for his part, rejects Sombart's theory of capitalism as an over-simplification. (Röpke (1937/1994), pp. 32 and 59).*
66| *Brunner, (1944), pp. 213-218.*
67| *Ibid., p. 328.*
68| *This is also indicated in his use of the term "profit economy". Whereas he still freely uses this term in "The Divine Imperative", borrowing from Sombart (p. 402), in "Justice and The Social Order" he sees the use of the dichotomy of profit versus subsistence economy (p. 199) as only applicable to a limited extent. Brunner's socio-ethical development could therefore be the object of a description of the history of theology based on economic theory.*
69| *Taken from Tuchtfeldt/Willgerodt (1994); Hennecke (2005), unless otherwise indicated.*
70| *Röpke (1937), pp. 325-326.*
71| *Neumark (1980), pp. 15-16.*
72| *In later editions of his text book Röpke distances himself from this term (Röpke (1937/1994), p. 330).*
73| *Röpke (1942).*
74| *Röpke (1976), p. 69 (letter to Alexander Rüstow dated May 13, 1943).*
75| *Ibid., 73 (letter to Dr. Heinrich Droz dated January 29, 1944).*
76| *Röpke (1944/1946), p. 28.*
77| *Ibid.*
78| *Röpke (1944), p. 171.*
79| *Ibid.*
80| *Ibid.*
81| *Ibid.*
82| *Ibid., p. 172.*
83| *Ibid., p. 171.*
84| *Kuehnelt-Leddihn (2000), p. 281.*
85| *Röpke (1944), p. 171.*
86| *Ibid., p. 172.*
87| *Luther and his notion of the state are subjected to vehement attacks by Röpke during these years. For more on this see Röpke (1944/1946), pp. 199-201 among others.*
88| *Röpke, (1944), p. 172.*
89| *Brunner (1943), p. 108.*
90| *Brunner (1943), p. 57.*
91| *Röpke (1944), p. 172.*
92| *See on Humanism and its criticism of Aristotle: Hirschberger (1952/2007), pp. 19-21.*
93| *Taken from Klinckowstroem (2000), pp. 53-115; Lenel (1989), particularly pp. 292-294.*
94| *Eucken (1932b), p. 303.*

95| *Eucken (1938), pp. 198-204.*
96| *Eucken (1940), pp. 474-488.*
97| *Eucken (1940/1965), p. 21.*
98| *Ibid., pp. 78-112.*
99| *Eucken (1952/1990), pp. 245-250.*
100| *Ibid., pp. 325-350.*
101| *Zahrnt (1966), pp. 218-259.*
102| *Eucken (1952/1990), p. 347.*
103| *Zahrnt (1966), pp. 242-251.*
104| *Ritter (1945/1979).*
105| *Hensel (1949).*
106| *Eucken (1952/1990), p. 348.*
107| *Ibid.*
108| *Eucken (1932a, pp. 88-89) had already taken a critical stance vis-a-vis dialectical theology in "Die Tatwelt". His Freiburg comrade in arms, Constantin von Dietze (1891-1973) talks in his memoirs of Eucken's total rejection of Barth's theology (quoted in Goldschmidt (2005b, p. 306)). During the time of National Socialism his position on ecclesiastical politics converges with that of Barth, although he continues to be alienated by the latter's very Christocentric theology (Oswalt (2005), pp. 343-344). I am grateful to Uwe Dathe from the University of Jena for some important information on this subject.*
109| *Eucken (1952/1990), pp. 348-349.*
110| *Ibid., p. 349.*
111| *Ibid.*
112| *Ibid.*
113| *Brunner (1943), p. 192.*
114| *Ibid., p. 192.*
115| *Eucken (1952/1990), p. 349.*
116| *Ibid., p. 350.*
117| *For more on Eucken and Röpke's influence on Ludwig Erhard see Mierzejewski (2006), pp. 45-49.*
118| *Klein (2006), p. 61.*
119| *Gerstenmaier (1960/1962), p. 407. He also mentions that Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (1904-1988) also greatly appreciated Brunner's social ethics (ibid., p. 406). My thanks go to Klein (2006, p. 67) for leading me to this quotation.*
120| *Kolev (2009, p. 1) talks of significant similarities and divergences in essential elements.*
121| *Zweynert, (2007), p. 11.*