Research Article

Werner Sombart's Longue Durée

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The work of Werner Sombart is often overlooked in the academic traditions of economics and sociology. Nevertheless, it deserves an attentive consideration and a reassessment regarding several important aspects, namely: the recognition of the category of capitalism; the relations of capitalism with war and luxury; the importance of religious factors in the emergence of modern capitalism; the dual nature of the modern economic mind, opposing burgher and entrepreneurial mentalities; the long-term perspectives of capitalism's evolution; and the specificities of US political trajectory. A critical reading of Sombart's work is still potentially very productive to better understand all these aspects.

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1. Sombart within the traditions of social sciences

Werner Sombart (1863-1941) was a well-known author in the early 20th century. He has interacted with Max Weber, Alfred Weber, Thorstein Veblen, John Commons, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, and numerous other notable social theorists, who on various occasions referred respectfully to his writings. Amidst a long period of subsequent semi-disappearance, his memory has been occasionally revived within the ambit of sociology, the history of economic thought, and economic history, albeit in limited and very differentiated ways. This scarcity of references was partially due to his support of Nazism during the 1930s, although the problem is definitely not limited to just this aspect. The respective reasons represent a possible topic for future socio-historic research, to the same extent as Sombart's work itself.

Talcott Parsons was undoubtedly the protagonist of Sombart's reception by the sociological tradition. Sombart was granted a prominent place in early writings, indeed being on a par with Weber in a famous 1928 paper on the centrality of the category of 'capitalism'. Nevertheless, some years later, Sombart was already confined to a rather diminished position in 1937's *Structure* (Parsons 1968), after that falling into obscurity. Parsons presents Sombart as being a representative of the turn-of-the-century's 'German historicism', with his alleged theoretical vices being 'empiricism' and 'idealism'. These accusations have dubious validity, arguably making more sense in terms of the sociology of academic life, rather than strictly in terms of the history of ideas. Analogously to Charles Camic comments on Parson's treatment of the Institutionalists, it can be said that Sombart's exclusion from the sociological pantheon was not so much due to any 'content fitness', but rather to a logic of 'predecessor selection', primarily concerned with the various authors' academic reputation (Camic 1992). In any case, the misunderstandings induced by Parsons have lastingly marked the subsequent institutional consecration of sociology, namely the supposed foundations of its separation from economics, and thus these misunderstandings were partly validated, albeit in a merely performative way (Graça 1995; 2008).

In Raymond Boudon's work we find another important reference to Sombart's writings in sociological literature. According to Boudon (1979; see also Boudon and Bourricaud 1989), Sombart's writings are characterized by being: 1) an example of the 'generalizing' method of sociology, as opposed to the 'individualizing' perspective of history; 2) an illustration of 'methodological individualism', i.e., an attempt to explain social configurations based on the assumption of rational choices in individuals' actions. Particularly, in Sombart's *Why is there no Socialism in the United States?* North American social reality was presented in such a way that, from the perspective of each agent, it would be more rational to proceed according to an individual strategy than in groups. In the trail of Albert Hirschman (1970, 106-117), Boudon concludes that instead of political protest, based on organized collective action by disadvantaged groups, the tendency in the US is to invest in individual upwards social mobility. He nevertheless recognizes the existence of collective action there, albeit mostly corresponding to ethnic groups, rather than social classes. Such social configuration avoided socialist ideals, with Boudon's diagnosis confirming that of Sombart. Boudon's ideas concerning the differentiation of conceptual fields for history and sociology are very debatable, and it is also doubtful whether Sombart's work can be legitimately invoked in favor of any 'methodological individualism'. However, Boudon has an

important merit for drawing attention to Sombart's work in a complimentary manner, as it justly deserves, particularly regarding the issue of the absence of socialist ideas in the USA.

Within the ambit of the history of economic thought, Sombart was also cited by Schumpeter (1986, 809-14), as a being a member of the so-called 'Youngest German Historical School', together with Max Weber and Edgar Jaffé. Having been be a disciple of Adolph Wagner and Gustav Schmoller, with respect to the famous *Methodenstreit* Sombart's background was one of an inclination for the inductive and historiographical faction, represented by Schmoller, as opposed to the group headed by Carl Menger, which was deductive and assumed the universal validity of economic categories. Nevertheless, and still according to Schumpeter, Sombart was supposedly a remarkable author, endowed with a holistic vision and an artistic ability to capture the general sense of realities, having thus considerably surpassed his mentor, Schmoller.

Sombart worked indeed initially in the company of Schmoller (his PhD supervisor) and was associated with him on the *Verein für Socialpolitik* project, with the purpose to produce a series of reforms officially designed to strengthen the ethical aspects of the economy. This 'ethical economy' mostly consisted of support for traditional forms of activity, particularly small agricultural enterprises and the related group of cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors. Schmoller thus directly linked such reformism with his scientific activity. However, towards the turn of the century, together with Max Weber and others, he came to support a modernized version of both academic research and social policy, and consequently became opposed to Schmoller and those promoting the tenets of the 'ethical school' of economics. Instead, Sombart and Weber argued for a clear separation between values and science, and thus he became "Weber's most important supporter in the debates on value judgements that were to take place at the meetings of the association for social policy or the German society for sociology" (Lenger 1997, 156).

Within this same context and recognizing the absence of a clear theoretical support in the historiographic work of Schmoller's group, Sombart considered both the Austrian School of economics and Marxism as possible suppliers of theory. However, his inclination was mostly towards Marx's work, which namely implied the notion of the economy as a system, and the consequent element of objective coercion in agents' conduct.[1] This approach was largely responsible for his pioneer use of the "capitalism" category (Braudel 1983, 237) referred to in his work for a multiplicity of aspects, namely: cultural, organizational, and technical. In his famous *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, Sombart proceeded to define the long-term periodization of capitalism: the "pre-capitalist" period,

characterized by the predominance of handicraft and self-sufficiency (approximately up until the Renaissance), "nascent capitalism" (from the Renaissance up until late eighteenth century), and "high/mature capitalism" (up until the early twentieth century).

However, Marx was not the only relevant influence for Sombart, as he deemed the emergence of a capitalist spirit to be more important than the mere accumulation of material resources. In other terms, "the genesis of capitalism was above all a 'psychogenesis'", representing an approach arguably incompatible with Marxism. Nevertheless, in his opinion this "should not be read as a refutation of the materialist realism of Marx, but rather as a completion" (Lenger 1997, 159). An 'understanding' or 'comprehensive' approach to social realities, taking into consideration the meaning attributed by agents to their actions, and thus also a psychological component, was therefore assumed to partly be a correction, but mostly as a complement to Marx's views: "As early as 1896 Sombart had noted the lack of psychological explanation in Marx and proposed to replace the outdated dialectics by such psychological explanations" (Lenger 1997, 159). In a detailed exam of Sombart's work, in 1937 Mortin Plotnik basically exposed a similar depiction of Sombart's stance: besides Sombart's personal brilliance, "it was the adequacy of the method of *Verstehen* and the Marxian approach (the thinking in terms of economic systems) that produced a work like *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*" (Plotnik 1937, 76).

Still within the context of this group of topics, it should be noted that Sombart ended up identifying three basic analytical models, namely: "normative" (*richtende*), "ordering" (*ordnende*), and "understanding" (*verstehende*). He accepted combinations of these models, although expressing his preference for the third model ("understanding"). Indeed, he posited the "understanding" model as an alleged 'third way' between the so-called "normative" and "naturalistic" approaches. In effect, he was positing a "value-free" attitude (a clear-cut distinction from Schmoller's approach), while at the same time he intended to go beyond a variety of knowledge with the strict purpose of the control of natural processes, as with the so-called "naturalistic" or *ordnende* approach (Plotnik 1937, 72; Backhaus 1989, 600-602; Peukert 2012, 538). Sombart's economic science, besides being explicitly considered to be part of his sociology (Plotnik 1937, 65), was thus officially an "understanding" one: to all purposes, in agreement with Weber's approach. Sombart's methodology basically combined a sociology and economic analysis which considered the meaning attributed by agents to their actions, and consequently the influence of values in social conducts, yet simultaneously aimed at a form of scientific knowledge supposedly free from value implications.[2]

2. War and luxury

Like Weber, Sombart was also convinced of the importance of taking into consideration Europe's past in order to fully understand the size and meaning of that which he called "modern capitalism", largely an analogous of Weber's "rational capitalism". In both cases, these approaches may be partly understood as the result of an attitude of fundamental conservatism, according to which recent history is supposedly less important than usually assumed, evoking what Hirschman (1991) called the argument of "futility" within his famous typology of reactionary rhetoric. Both categories of "modern capitalism" and "rational capitalism" can also be partly perceived as expression of an eminently Eurocentric colonial-imperial *Zeitgeist*: only in Europe the social forms destined to rule the world could have flourished (Blaut 2000), albeit this argument is somewhat less applicable in the case of Sombart's analysis (see below).

Nevertheless, significant differences exist between Weber and Sombart. It is fair to say that Sombart's research can be described as an extended enquiry into 'the aristocratic ethic-cum-aesthetic and the spirit of capitalism'. This is related to his assessment of two important social facts: war and luxury. For if for Weber the crux of the creative force of modern capitalism was religious, then the essence of Sombart's analysis becomes, on the contrary, understandable stating his belief that such an origin was aristocratic, referring to the warrior and the courtier. Hence, the names of two of his most important works: "War and Capitalism" and "Luxury and Capitalism". He emphatically posited a fundamental affinity among the three terms of war, luxury, and capitalism. While Sombart (1943) categorically expressed that capitalism does incite wars, he simultaneously underscored that the most important causal relationship was the inverse: i.e., war induces capitalism, both logically and psychologically, voluntarily and involuntarily. This is achieved via increased public spending, which is a decisive creator of effectual demand through the education and discipline imposed by armies on large masses of peasants, previously accustomed to a slower and more 'natural' pace of life. War also promotes the inventive and innovative spirit, encouraging both novel ideas and their application to practice: the path from technical inventions to technical innovations was shortened in war before the productive processes.[3]

Sombart highlights that, since the 16th century, European armies are characterized by: unity of command, with the consequent rationalization and simplification of procedures; an increase in the need for rigorous quantification; a generic drive for unlimited growth, corresponding to both the

long-term tendency of armies and the intrinsic logic of capital. Similarly, with the need for a disciplined proletariat, war becoming the perfect propaedeutic exercise for the rational industry of modern times. Indeed, for Sombart, the warrior virtues (discipline, diligence, patience, persistence, but also exact calculation, global vision, unified command, and sense of timing) are all practically the double of economic virtues, or rather vice-versa. These virtues represent a mixture of "burgher" and "entrepreneurial" factors, whereby, according to Sombart's economic types (see below), the "burgher" factor predominates at the low levels of hierarchies, while the "entrepreneurial" factor thrives in the superior levels.

According to Sombart, the armed forces were the first social sphere where the rigorous division and coordination of labor was massively imposed. The armed forces were subsequently copied by their supplier civilian industries, and then by the whole economy. Similarly, the existence and growth of military apparatuses created a consumer standard which was sufficiently patterned and predictable to produce an 'effectual demand', which in turn triggered the increased use of productive resources. It is appropriate to consider this an *ante litteram* "military Keynesianism", i.e., a demand-side economic approach, but one that emphasizes not aspects related to welfare, rather those of a warfare state. It is also distinctive, as it highlights and praises the competitive component of consumption, which is an element inseparable from social inequality, while the Keynesianism of Keynes had a predominantly egalitarian leaning.

With regards Sombart's emphasis on luxury, this generically corresponds to the narrative of Europe's Modern Age history that highlights the transformation of nobility from warriors into courtiers. This phenomenon, later referred to by Norbert Elias (2000) as the "civilizing process", is directly associated with the genesis of the modern state, reflecting the increased importance and social weight of monarchs and bourgeois groups and the ensuing decline of traditional nobilities, who become dependent from monarchs and are thus reduced to 'nobilities-of-service'. The element that expresses hierarchy is thereby transferred to the consumption of refined goods. "Subjective luxury", or the personal communication of each nobleman with his entourage, is abandoned, an evolution which Sombart (1990, 106) calls the "objectification of luxury", where social relations become mediated by goods. In addition to luxury, the topic of consumption and wants is really very important in Sombart's argument about capitalism and its historical periodization. The traditional economic mentality involves proceeding "unhurriedly, without haste or precipitation" (1982, 20) to acquire goods only for limited needs. By contrast, capitalism, which is linked to a principle of "unlimited acquisition"

(Parsons 1991, 7), is explicitly associated with artificiality, restlessness, and compulsive change. However, this definition is insufficient to capture the notion of luxury, as overabundance, ostentation, and lustful behavior are also crucial, Sombart provocatively referring to luxury as being the "legitimate daughter of illegitimate love" (cit. in Grazia 1996, 20), which in turn gave birth to capitalism.

An important bundle of issues is therefore alluded to. In his famous work on modern consumerism, Colin Campbell generically mentions Sombart, together with Veblen (1925), as authors who had attempted to address the thorny question of how the middle classes were involved in performing such contradictory roles: "On the one hand, [they] are regarded as defying the aristocratic ethic, and on the other hand, as adopting it" (Campbell 2018, 70). In addition to Veblen's perspective (the desire "to be 'one of the boys', or a desire to 'dissociate oneself from the common herd'" – 2018, 93), which mostly seems to Campbell to be too simplistic, Sombart is presented as representing a somewhat higher degree of sophistication in the treatment of this group of phenomena. Among the classical authors, it was only he who clearly identified "what Trilling has called, the 'pleasure-sensuality-luxury complex', and perceived that 'at base' a 'love of luxury' might derive from 'purely sensuous pleasures'" (Campbell 2018, 108). Among contemporary economists, Campbell added, Tibor Scitovsky was the only one who attempted to follow this line of thought. Beyond the sinuosity and ramifications of trajectories of post-puritanical ethics, a nucleus of permanent dispositions thus exists (arguably close to that which can be considered an unchangeable human nature) that is likely to inevitably induce the aforementioned "pleasure-sensuality-luxury complex" and the correlated series of consumerist drives.

Sombart's attitude led him to highlight the social activism of women in his work, but once again, contrary to Veblen and several other authors of progressive or socialist leanings, for Sombart the social activism of women is not about dignifying them through working capabilities or "parental instinct" (Loader, Waddoups, and Tilman 1991), but rather in the diametrically opposed way. In sharp contrast to these other authors, Sombart opted precisely to highlight the importance of favorites and cocottes. If on the one hand it is luxury, rather than working-and-saving, that stimulates the development of capitalism, on the other hand the "triumph of women", as Sombart (1990, 105) designates it, equated with this "(old style) feminism" (Sombart 1990, 110), is tellingly manifested in the form of the courtesan and her imitators; and, more broadly, is associated with the "victory of the principle of illegitimacy" (Sombart 1990, 47).

This should be noted. As pointed out by Grundmann and Stehr (2001), if Sombart has regained some notoriety in more recent times it was largely as an effect of the so-called 'cultural turn' of social studies (whereby consumption assumes greater importance for analysis than production), and the emergence of women's studies.[4] In this context, the names of Mukerji (1993), Grazia (1996) and Roberts (1998), already referred by Grundmann and Stehr (2001), need to be mentioned; and more recently, also Pomeranz (2000), and Armitage and Roberts (2016). The first three accept Sombart's theses as being fundamentally valid, despite their obvious misogyny, and more valid than other authors' contributions, especially that of Veblen. Either way, whether the respective research is deemed to be 'cultural', or more related to economic factuality, referring to women's studies or with other perspectives and concerns, Sombart's name recurrently appears in the literature regarding luxury. Simultaneously, an attitude of consistent skepticism is also identifiable in various works regarding the alleged stimulus provided by luxury consumption to capitalist activity, which is particularly and notoriously the case of the research of Fernand Braudel (1981, 186; cf. Mukerji 1993, 439; Franchetti 2013, 138). Is Sombart's thesis valid, Braudel wonders, or is it true that, up until the innovations of the Industrial Revolution, the multiple forms of luxury do not represent a factor of economic growth, but rather express the inability of societies to efficiently apply their accumulated resources?

> "In this sense, one could suggest that a certain kind of luxury was, and could only be, a phenomenon or sign of sickness peculiar to the ancien regime; that until the Industrial Revolution it was (and in some cases still is) the unjust, unhealthy, conspicuous and wasteful consumption of the 'surplus' produced by a society with fixed limits on its growth" (Braudel 1981, 186).

It should be noted that the attitude towards luxury already had significant nuances in the work of Richard Cantillon, Sombart's economist of reference on this subject. For Cantillon, a country's trade surplus, with the resultant inflow of hard currency, tends to give rise to an overall increase in prices, and consequently a loss of competitive advantage in the international market which 'automatically' cancels out this trade surplus. There is, however, an important difference between countries whose surplus was acquired through the sale of manufactured goods and overseas trade and those countries where the excess of currency is a result of the exploration of the primary productive sector (e.g., the discovery of mines in colonies). In the first case, the good habits of the population would ensure that the overall balance of trade implies a consistent increase of prosperity, while in the second case there

would be no progress in the overall cycle, should "the Portuguese nobility and others" (Cantillon 1952, 144) obtain habits of excessive ostentation, which in turn would be generalized to the entire nation, given that "the multiplier is sociological" (Cantillon 1952, 36, footnote by Louis Salleron). Norbert Elias, although basing his reasoning on Mirabeau (who basically paraphrases Cantillon on this subject), stresses precisely the importance of this idea of the possibility to transform what would otherwise be a simple cycle into a continuous upwards trend (Elias 2000, 39). Nevertheless, for Cantillon, the solution to the standoff is supposed to reside in the support given to manufacturing and overseas trade by "an able Minister" (1952, 107), while, on the contrary, Mirabeau and the Physiocrats have favored laissez-faire policies. Whatever the case, according to Elias, the outline of the economic analogue of the "civilizing process" (the continuous growth) had been drawn here.

However, and despite their affinities, Sombart is fundamentally in alignment with the authors for whom the 'normal' social trajectory is that of the cycle, not the continued progress. In many respects his attitude is one of acceptance of the inevitability of repetition, which obviously includes the inescapable component of decay. He essentially sees splendor in luxury, albeit deadly, but nevertheless splendor. His positioning is thus closer to that articulated in John Robinson Jeffers' famous poem, expressing resignation, mixed with bitterness and irony: "A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains: shine, perishing republic". This observation is fundamentally corroborated by Armitage and Roberts (2016), who recognize that the aspects of the trajectory of societies that Sombart focused on are very hard to consider to this day, including the tragedy of their inevitable decline and death. In this sense, Sombart's failure (if it really is failure) is essentially all of ours:

> "As Sombart (...) puts it: "This necessary cycle seems to encompass the deepest tragedy of human destiny; that all culture, being an estrangement from nature, carries in itself the germs of dissolution, destruction, and death". No traditional economic history can incorporate all of these ideas, but Sombart's ***Luxury and Capitalism***, if both an undervalued masterpiece and a 'failed' explanation of the precise relationship between luxury and the spirit of capitalism, is an honorable failure. It is up to us to continue Sombart's work on the spirit of capitalism through the mapping of the terra incognita of the contemporary spirit of luxury" (Armitage and Roberts 2016, 20).

Meanwhile, and in a more sober way, there is a need for us to also highlight the importance of the objectification of luxury for economic development, which was particularly recognized in the work of

Kenneth Pomeranz (2000, 114ff.).[5] The objectification of luxury was definitely positive from the perspective of a continued economic growth, and indeed it was crucial for the "great divergence", although arguably this reasoning does not apply to any-and-all luxuries, but strictly to "objective luxury", thus expressing the permanent search for increasingly exquisite patterns of consumption, and obviously under condition of being closely accompanied by the growing sophistication also of the production processes.

3. A Janus-faced capitalist mentality

With this emphasis on the importance of war and luxury, Sombart marked a dissenting path vis-à-vis the currents of social theory which, in the line of Adam Smith, posited a sociological affinity of business with peaceful tendencies and the famous working-saving-and-investing ethos. Indeed, war and luxury merge in his analysis under the form of an exaltation of hierarchy. This approach warrants highlighting, given namely Sombart's enthusiastic support to the furies of German *Kriegsideologie* of 1914-18, seeing in the war the protection of *Kultur* and an 'organic' way-of-life based on 'community' and 'ideals', against the 'mechanical' and 'societal' or materialistic traits of *Civilization* (Losurdo 1998). More broadly, however, he was associated with the so-called "reactionary modernism" (Herf 1984), a category corresponding to a group of authors of Weimar's Germany who tried to reconcile the *Kultur* and the "popular community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*) — that is, the 'organic', 'communitarian' traits — with the realities of modern technology, thus obtaining its 're-enchantment'.

In his summary of the factors of Sombart's reconciliation with modernity, Herf includes the aspiration for a 're-enchantment' or 're-spiritualization' of technology. In this ambit he quotes Sombart, who indeed explicitly stated that his position was not one of "cultural pessimism" (Herf 1984, 145ff.). There is, however, another important aspect of this stance: the so-called 'entrepreneurial' element of business mentality, and everything associated with it. Sombart's "modern economic man", or bourgeois, is said to consist of two distinguishable components: that of the citizen, or burgher (*Bürger*), and that of the entrepreneur (*Unternehmer*). Sombart's approach is one of a characterologist, with the purpose of identifying psychological types. The "burgher mentality" is said to correspond to the "holy economy" (supposedly detectable already in the *masserizia* of Leon Battista Alberti, in 15th century Florence, basically with the same traits as Benjamin Franklin's industry-and-frugality), the morale of business (predictability, respect for the given word), and a calculating mentality that reduces everything to quantities, thus abolishing qualitative differences. On the other hand, the

"entrepreneurial spirit" was seen to correspond to acquisitiveness, as well as the inventive, conquering and organizing frame of mind. This explains why Sombart includes military campaigns, feudal property, and privateering among the sources of the "capitalist spirit". This entrepreneurial spirit comes down to recognizing 'enterprise' in everything that refers to a sense of opportunity, ingenuity, inspiration, and organizational and innovative capacity, as well as the unlimited desire for knowledge (a trait of the supposed "Faustian soul"), an inclination to disobey any rules, and the "will for power" (Sombart 1931) – up to the level of simple preying. We are really dealing here with a predator's psychology. The entrepreneur's temperament is portrayed as "acute", "insightful", "ingenious", and "endowed with a special fantasy, which Wundt calls combinatorial".[6] If Franklin is mentioned with regards the "burgher" mentality, Sombart deems correct to also mention Goethe and Nietzsche in the same vein, regarding the "entrepreneurial" mentality.

Obviously, it is the psychology of the entrepreneur that brings the bourgeois closer to European traditional aristocracies: the warriors and courtiers. Some of the traits usually referred to economic activities, though, may prove somewhat harder to classify. One example is the trader (*Händler*), which is in part included on the 'burgher' side but may nevertheless be also considered a component of the 'entrepreneurial' spirit, inasmuch as this character is able to induce other agents into voluntary cooperation, mainly through the appeal to feelings, rather than via arguments. We thus face here an example of authority (*Herrschaft*), much more than mere power (*Macht*), according to Max Weber's analytical framework; and really a "charismatic" variety of authority, enabling businessmen to both captivate their collaborators, whose work they supply with unity and telos, and persuade potential buyers, encouraging them to 'discover' new needs which previously were dormant. In many respects, Sombart's analysis of this group of subjects approaches that of the 'Austrian school' of economics, particularly Friedrich von Wieser (Ebner 2000, 2005, 2006; Campagnolo and Vivel 2011).

It should also be mentioned that the definition proposed by Sombart oscillates between the simple psychological characterization, the quest for the alleged "biological" foundations of the psychological types (Sombart 1982, 205 ff.), which constitutes the least usable part of his work (see below), and the identification of the corresponding social groups and their respective mentalities. As for "moral forces" and "social circumstances" in the birth of modern capitalism, and in contrast to Weber's study on Protestant ethic, highlighting one allegedly exceptional event, in the case of Sombart we deal (notwithstanding the aforementioned tendency for a cyclical view of history) with the notion of a process of increasing rationalization of conducts; or at least with the idea that many modern cultural

devices inducing rationality were detectable already in long-past societies. In addition to Renaissance Florence's *masserizia*, Sombart goes back as far as the Ancient Age, encountering "the idea of a rationalization of vital conduct" in the writings of authors such as Xenophon and Seneca, particularly in relation to the Stoics' notion of natural law, the legitimation of individual enrichment, the notion that time is scarce and should be properly used, and even the characteristic that he boldly designates as "burgher virtues – especially application and saving" (Sombart 1982, 234).

In this regard, Braudel (1983, 568-580) noticeably expresses an attitude that is generally more favorable to Sombart's ideas than to Weber's, stating that the cultural genesis of the capitalist mentality is more related to Italian Renaissance than to Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, both economists had allegedly exaggerated the importance of causal relationships from culture to economic practices, rather than the opposite ones, which was due to their common obsession with Marx (1981, 513; 1983, 401-402); and they both were Eurocentric, as other societies deserved much more attention, especially Asian ones (1983, 581ff.). Although not totally incorrect, Sombart had also overstated the importance of double-entry bookkeeping (1983, 573-5), as well as the degree of coherence of mercantilist policies (Braudel 1983, 542ff.) and the overall importance of state apparatuses as a source of capitalism (Braudel 1983, 549ff.). However, according to Braudel, Sombart was completely (and crucially) right in his identification of the twofold character of the 'spirit of capitalism', which was nicely captured by his burgher-entrepreneur duo, rather than by any univocal scheme:

> "If I had Sombart's taste for systematic and once-for-all explanations, I might be tempted to suggest that a major element in capitalist development was risk-taking and a taste for speculation. In the course of this book, the reader will have noticed that reference is often made to the underlying notion of gambling, risk-taking, cheating; the rule of the game was to invent a counter-game, to oppose the regular mechanisms and instruments of the market, in order to make it work differently – if not in the opposite direction. It might be fun to try and write the history of capitalism within the parameters of a special version of games theory. But the apparent simplicity of the word game (gaming, gambling) would quickly turn out to cover a multitude of different and contradictory realities – forward gambling, playing by the rules, legitimate gambling, reverse gambling, playing with loaded dice. It would be far from easy to make these fit a single theory" (1983, 578).

4. Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism

Referring to Catholicism, especially Thomism, Sombart highlights the "rationalization of life" (1982, 246), which is associated with *liberalitas*, perceived by the Scholastics as the "economic virtue in a strict sense" (1982, 248), the just middle-way between *avaritia* and *prodigalitas*. In its rationalizing endeavor, it supposedly suggests above all to avoid idleness. Analogously, wealth is considered in principle a good thing. Indeed, after the 13th century, Scholastics also legitimized individual enrichment. Even the concept of capital (i.e., money that grows) would also have been legitimized by the Scholastics of the 14th and 15th centuries. The condemnation of usury itself is interpreted by Sombart as an incentive for productive investment, which is distinct from the 'indolent' lender's attitude – and in this sense it should be considered a propitiator of capitalism (1982, 243-260).[7] Several of these arguments are certainly debatable. However, it should be emphasized that Sombart's ideas were widely invoked by Amintore Fanfani, who sought to demonstrate that, contrary to what one would suppose after reading Weber, Catholicism has by no means inhibited the progresses of capitalism (Fanfani 2003).[8]

In the case of Protestantism, Sombart basically sees a continuation of the work of Scholastics but compounded by the intensification of religious feelings. Regarding the subtleties mentioned by Max Weber about "worldly asceticism", predestination, etc., Sombart dislikes the strictly theological aspect of problems, claiming that these were details missed by the vast population. This highlights an important disagreement between the two authors. Sombart argues that for the common believer, post-Lutheran ethics were almost identical to those before the Reformation, albeit intensified by religious fervor: industry, occupation with useful things, temperance, and saving. However, Sombart adds that the Protestant reinforcement of restraints ultimately brought about an important loss of "artistic sensibility" (1982, 269) which in the case of Catholicism had produced the inclination towards magnificence, in other words the "desire to do something great and splendid". Accordingly, as a result of all the implied voluntary restrictions to consumption, Protestantism ended up delaying the development of capitalism. Moreover, freeing lending/usury from restrictions did not necessarily have positive consequences (see above). Nor did the puritanical ethics condone unlimited enrichment, instead it advocated a variety of enrichment submitted to the restraining notions of fair price and the balanced retribution of efforts, which, in effect, represented a similar attitude to that of Thomism (Sombart 1982, 271).

On the contrary, legitimation of enrichment is one of the traits emphasized in Judaism. Although Jewish morality defends the principles of fair price for relations within the same ethnic group, nevertheless in the case of relations with Gentiles, Judaism adopts ethical codes which we are now accustomed to in economic life, whereby each agent merely attempts to proceed in the most advantageous way. This idea of an absence of moral regulation of economic practices (an "anomy", in Durkheim's wording) may obviously be met with some mistrust. Indeed, this subject has been closely scrutinized, given the suspicions of anti-Judaism or even anti-Semitism aroused above all by subsequent European history. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Sombart's tone of discourse often praises the above-mentioned Jewish ethic, precisely due to of its allegedly pioneering traits.

The argument of moral deregulation also concerns loans: the Jewish custom is to lend capital without charging interest to one of his own, but interest can instead be charged to Gentiles. In effect, the principles of Jewish ethics do not deviate from the previously identified burgher mentality. Sombart suggests that the very notion of an abstract and mystery-free God, as well as the corresponding variety of moral judgment, based on the idea of a careful measurement of both the merits and failures of the individual believer, had in turn stimulated a quantifiable (or 'accounting') and individualistic mentality (Sombart 2001, 143ff.). This resulted in his explicit association of Judaism with the invention of double-entry bookkeeping (2001, 146-147). Indeed, according to Sombart Judaism's system of measurement of the believer's moral credits and debts even made it possible to distinguish the component that is the analogous of the investment from the component corresponding to profit. Consequently, it may thus be said that Jewish morality had an intuition or a prefiguration of the very concept of capital (2001, 147).[9] In parallel, each believer is divinely judged according to their actions and by their merits and demerits with regards objective facts, whereby all qualitative differences are ignored. This represents the introduction of an 'equal law for all' in the religious sense, long before the modern era. Everything in Judaism thus seems to propitiate rationality, primarily capitalist rationality.

The importance of Jewish ethics in the creation of the capitalist mentality, and particularly the relevance of the aforementioned 'double standard', may only be appreciated if we take into consideration that the Jews have predominantly lived widespread among other peoples. Sombart admits that religious and ethnic minorities tend to play a relevant economic role, as most social promotion routes are often barred to their members. On the other hand, it is understandable that from the perspective of foreigners, social realities tend to resemble 'deserted' or 'dead' realities and are

therefore ripe for quantification and manipulation. This statement is considered valid for several other minorities (Sombart 1982, 303-318), however according to Sombart, Judaism, qua the mentality of the quintessential "people of the desert", thus observes a perfect affinity with capitalist ethics in its 'burgher' variant. Sombart even endeavors (2001, 174-176) to exhibit the detailed presentation of analogies between the mentality of 17th century Puritans in Great Britain and that of the Jews in general, positing that Protestantism has only contributed to capitalism inasmuch that it on occasions may somewhat have resembled Judaism.

The prominence of this aspect is however circumstantial, with Sombart reaffirming his notion of the birth of modern capitalism that emphasized the multiplicity of its causes. It should also be noted that the alleged sources of the capitalist spirit are direct and logical. Jewish ethics propitiate capitalist practices, because it denies the notion of fair price and introduces a quantitative attitude; the same goes for late Scholastics inasmuch as it condones individual enrichment, etc. The general tone of Sombart's analysis is simple and directly understandable, on the contrary to that of Weber, for whom the nucleus of the problem was supposed to reside in the 'psychological', rather than the 'logical' consequences, and all the causal nexuses were very subtle and oblique, with capitalism being basically an unwanted result of Protestantism. The (partial) equivalent of that which Protestantism represents for Weber is therefore Judaism, considered to be in perfect harmony with capitalist activities with regards their 'burgher' traits. For Sombart, indeed as for most authors of the aforementioned "reactionary modernism" and even beyond them (e.g., Weber or Simmel), the predominance of quantitative and impersonal aspects is translated into the "disenchantment of the world", the objectification of social relations, and the "iron cage". Given the fact that all this is posited to be in association with the notion of "the Jew", and although Sombart basically refers to "the Jew" in parallel with Simmel's (1971) treatment of "the stranger", it is understandable that concerns regarding an anti-Jewish, or even an anti-Semitic bias emerge, referring to his work.

Undeniably, on several occasions Sombart flirts with anti-Judaic tropes. Examples include: the theory that the Jews created the ghetto (2001, 167); the idea of the Jews' intrinsic nomadism, or "Saharism", whether brought about by selection or by adaptation (2001, 229); or even the notion of a direct passage from the desert into the modern city, which itself is supposedly nothing more than a great desert (2001, 233). This approach likely reflects the tradition of German academia to recognize the Jewish specificity, whether in a praiseworthy extolling way, such as in the case of Wilhelm Roscher, or (more often) with malevolent intentions. In balance, this all contributes to rendering Sombart's

position shaky. Nevertheless, and recognizing his oscillations and possible inaccuracies, it seems reasonable to argue that above all his ideas deserve to be evaluated by the intrinsic merit of highlighting Jewish specificity, not so much because this approach was made approvingly and/or disapprovingly. Undoubtedly, what can be extracted from Sombart's writings is the idea of a Jewish people who, because of their isolated condition (whether imposed by others, or self-imposed), subsequently reinforced by their peculiar ethics reaffirming this segregation (supposedly a cultural fact, although biological-racial hypotheses should not be totally discarded), has become particularly linked with the 'burgher' quantitative, rational and utilitarian set of attitudes. Within the usual sociological "community-society" antinomy, it obviously leans to "society", rendering it more rational, albeit disenchanting. It is hard to draw and further inferences from Sombart's analysis.[10]

5. Racism: the mismeasure of Sombart?

Maybe there is enough justification for a reassessment of Sombart's work precisely because he deemed Judaism to be very important for the creation of modern capitalism, whereas for Weber, the Jews are basically depicted by their status as a stateless people, leading to a "pariah capitalism", which (alongside "pirate capitalism" and similar variations) leans decidedly towards the side of pre-modern realities. The relevance of these realities for the birth of "rational capitalism" would be null or effaced by the comparative importance of Protestant ethic. For Weber, the history of modernity was accordingly shaped by a variety of strictly North-Western European religious influences, while Sombart recognizes the initiative and importance of many more elements, within a much more varied sociocultural, ethnic, and geographical palette.

This supposed irrelevance of Jews regarding the emergence of modern rational capitalism must be contextualized. Regarding capitalism's links with religion, by positing a relationship of "elective affinity" between capitalism and Protestantism, Max Weber basically proceeded to establish its symbolic integration in the German *Kultur*, thus conciliating it with the imaginary of the 'popular community', as well as the 'organic' aspects. It is therefore understandable that Weber refers Protestantism to a nascent capitalism and associates it with the ethics of professional work, "vocation", and a general endeavor to ensure a "transfiguration of values". In summary, Weber attributes a heroic meaning to Protestantism. In contrast, for Sombart the Jew (typically in a marketer or financial role) is predominantly external to production processes and, being associated with a quantifying trait, is limited to the 'burgher' aspect. In sum, Sombart also reconciles capitalism with

the *Kultur*, but in the opposite way, through the 'entrepreneur' element, which is coupled with qualitative traits and the transmutation of values (cf. Loader 2001; Ebner 2000, 2005, 2006; Reinert and Reinert 2006).

Still about attitudes towards Judaism and the Jews, it should be noted that in a 1919 article discussing the more-than-proportional intellectual contribution of the Jews and their level of intellectual performance, assumed to be clearly above average, Veblen attributes these characteristics to a culturally "hyphenate" condition of most of that ethnic group. The brightest Jews, and those more inclined to radicalism, are usually the most 'uprooted' ones. Veblen posited that it is this hyphenation – this hybrid belonging or partially foreign condition, being separated from the "idols" of the group of origin, albeit without being fully integrated in any other group – that induced their success in "the uneasy gild of pathfinders and iconoclasts, in science, scholarship and institutional change and growth" (Veblen 1919, 36). This led Veblen to wonder about the possible consequences of the Zionist enterprise. Lipset and Ladd Jr. (1971) refer these ideas and confront them with subsequent developments, but unfortunately omit to mention that Veblen's reasoning oscillates between this strict argument, with a complete absence of any allusion to "race", and the argument that when considered globally, Jews should be assumed to be a "mixed race". Veblen acknowledges that all European peoples are a mixed race to a greater or lesser extent, however Jews are undoubtedly exceptionally hybridized, and "these intellectuals of Jewish extraction are, after all, of hybrid extraction as well" (Veblen 1919, 37), miscegenation thus apparently being a good thing.

These ramifications of Veblen's reasoning seemingly have little relevance for the context of this paper, except to emphasize how widespread ideas related to the relevance of 'race' were during this period, being casually expressed without embarrassment or apparent malice by several authors, and in very diverse contexts, where besides the term 'race' often assumes the role of a mere synonym of 'nation'. In this regard, and referring to the subsequent strictly biological, anti-Semitic, and racist drift of Sombart's ideas, it should at least be mentioned that even during the last phase of his writings, when he formally supported Nazism and tried to influence the regime's policies, he publicly opined that the "Jewish spirit" was mostly a cultural reality, which besides had already been irreversibly disseminated throughout the world, regardless of what might occur with any possible minority identified as Jewish, whatever the criterion used for its definition (Sombart 1937, 176-179; cf. Bodemann 2014, 127-128). In any case, the central aspect of the inclusion of mentions to Judaism by Sombart were the cultural traits. Biological elements, albeit present, were referred to at a merely

secondary level, as evidenced by a tirade in German Socialism, which merits mentioning, precisely because of its pathetic tone:

> "The German spirit in a Negro is quite as much within the realm of possibility as the Negro spirit within a German. The only thing that can be shown is, that men with a German spirit are far more numerous among the German people than among the Negro people, and the reverse" (Sombart 1937, 175).

With regards topics related to race and ethnicity, Sombart is often judged harshly, albeit with various degrees of severity, examples being, inter alia, Rammstedt (1988), Grundman and Stehr (2001), Bodemann (2014), and Kramer (2019). He is however completely exonerated by Iannone (2013), as well as in Iannone (2015), Pisanelli (2015) and Protti (2015). It seems appropriate to try and gain some perspective of this issue, noting that these ideas are expressed in a cultural (European and North American) context where racist ideas are deemed acceptable, in effect ideas which are generally accepted both in terms of common sense, and in academic circles (Shipman 1994; Gould 1996). For example, regarding the question of the greater or lesser proclivity of various groups to a capitalist ethic, Max Weber himself (2001, xliii) "admits that he is inclined to think the importance of biological heredity very great", although he ends up producing a judgment of provisional agnosticism on this matter.[11] It is also revealing that in the 1930s, no other than the well-known Amintore Fanfani (2003, 156-7) when expounding on the greater or lesser propitiation of capitalism by various groups, after referring to Weber's inclination towards the need to consider heredity, proceeds to argue with apparent seriousness and equanimity the existence of a greater or lesser inclination to capitalism in predominantly "dolichocephalic" and/or "brachycephalic" peoples, and in which phase of their economic history exactly. Let us also remind that the Nazi project itself, particularly in which refers to its racist aspects, explicitly sought inspiration both in the European (especially British) colonial experience and in the "racial democracy" that the US would supposedly have been able to produce (Losurdo, 2011; Whitman, 2017). No matter how they are interpreted, Sombart's 'racial' ideas should therefore be treated *sine ira et studio* and be framed within the period and the circumstances in which they were exposed, avoiding both their moral 'whitewashing', and their exorbitant and decontextualized consideration.

6. The entrepreneur and the dynamics of capitalism

As a supplement to the three stages of his periodization of capitalism, Sombart adds the emergence of a "late capitalism", characterized by tendencies for cartelization, rationalization, and increasing regulation, together with the progressive objectification or "depersonalization" of the entrepreneurial function (Sombart 2014, 607ff.; volume III, chapter 53), in which the very difference between private and public property (or capitalism and socialism) supposedly would be progressively eroded. He predicts that this will lead to a reduction in the general vitality of the economy, under the threat of both the insufficiency of markets and the scarcity of natural resources resulting from multiple ecological blockages. As a solution, Sombart recommends a possible resurgence of features of times past – economic structures thus evolving in a 're-agrarian' and neo-traditionalist way – highlighting the strengthening and even reconstitution of a middle class of farmers as a fundamental support of the socio-political order. This project was intended to promote a neo-patriarchal economy, with an increase of the active population employed in the agricultural sector, combined with a variety of intervention of public authorities that, whilst reinforcing the principles of private property and hierarchy, was always oriented by the criterion of political considerations. Simultaneously, autocratic tendencies would also be reinforced, partly because of the inevitable 'power-politics' nature of international relations, and partly as a result of the intention to mitigate economic crises, which are deemed to be compounded by international trade (Sombart 1937, 281ff.; 1946 II, 488ff.; 2014, 647-658, volume III, chapter 60; Varsanyi 1963, 164ff.; Chaloupek 1995, 139).

Many of these traits evidently suggest the economies of countries with fascist or related regimes during the interwar period, examples being traditionalism, *Führerprinzip*, and neo-agrarian inclination, however restrained by considerations on international politics. Nevertheless, and besides his sociologically interesting ideas on the importance of the middle-class, it should be noted that in the field of international trade Sombart quotes Keynes with approval regarding the assurance of a sufficient level of effectual demand. He goes on to add that the state's regulatory intervention, which was still lacking a "unified plan" in most countries ("except in Russia", 1937, 287), should imply a certain degree of economic closure in the name of the efficacy of policies and the preservation of sovereignty.[12]

More important than any circumstantial proximity to Keynes, however, are the affinities of Sombart's work with that of Schumpeter. Let us now proceed to identify the main similitudes. First of all, there is

the importance of the idea of the entrepreneur as an innovator. This character, brought to the forefront of economic theory by Jean-Baptiste Say, has in the French economist's work the crucial role of combining and unifying contributions of other agents, already identified by British political economy (land, labor and capital), introducing an additional, re-vitalizing element, allowing to overcome the fundamental unpredictability of realities (Say 1815, 93-94, chapter XXI; 1972, 348-58). Indeed, this contribution fundamentally represents the economic analogue of the *pouvoir modérateur*, which Benjamin Constant added almost simultaneously to the classic tripartite (legislative, executive, and judiciary) concept of sovereignty. It is thus fair to affirm that Say innovated in economic theory by basically importing an eminent 'decisionist' or 'Bonapartist' element from political theory (cf. Graça 2008, 482). In the case of Sombart, though, and similarly to Schumpeter, the entrepreneur's exceptionality is reinforced, due to the increased importance of innovation.

Innovation refers to all aspects of economic life, namely: consumption patterns, techniques, and products. The origin of such changes resides ultimately in the desire for social recognition through consumption, which inevitably entails a degree of conflict. These aspects of economic life are a product of the celebrated "heterogony of ends", which simultaneously implies the primacy of *ágon* (the struggle) over *nomos* (the rule) and of the challenge made by others, compared with that which is decided by each one: "heterogony", thus, as the exact opposite of "autonomy". In addition to the common references to Wundt, whom Schumpeter (1976, 131ff.) explicitly refers to regarding the use of this expression, in this case it is important to note that both these turn-of-the-century economists were probably inspired by the model of conduct corresponding to the "duelists' society", or *satisfaktionsfähige Gesellschaft*, to which Norbert Elias (1996, 51ff.) attributes the most distinctive feature of the German version of the civilizing process. This notion focuses on the assumption of the imperative requirement to respond to a challenge set by others, under penalty of losing face, or social respectability. Driven by the blind game of social interactions, innovation is therefore considered to be the result of a primarily non-rational inspiration, coupled with a drive for competition. The entrepreneur is omnipresent as a factor of paramount importance, given his capabilities to unite, coordinate, persuade, and regenerate. Indeed, the entrepreneur is the perfect analogue of Weber's charismatic leader, unmistakably evoking also the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, i.e., the creator of new values, by means of a Dionysian "creative destruction". This aspect, later emphatically associated with the entrepreneur by Schumpeter, is perfectly identifiable already in Sombart's work along the

same lines. Indeed, it is fair to say that, to a large extent, Schumpeter concealed how much his thesis owed to Sombart's work (Loader 2001; Ebner 2000; 2005; 2006; Reinert and Reinert 2006).

If it is assumed that Schumpeter's considerations regarding the creative and innovative character of capitalism are also easily identifiable in Sombart's work, then it can be easily understood why Sombart was persuaded that with capitalism being threatened by democratizing tendencies, the search for distinction should decrease and the pace of economic growth would also predictably slow down. Therefore, in Sombart's portrait of "late capitalism", the previous traits of permanent dissatisfaction and perpetual movement eventually give way to exactly the opposite themes, namely: routinization, objectification, etc. Sombart also cogitates with approval (and particularly after the arrival of Nazism to power), about a mythical surpassing of the "economic age" (1937, 22-25), associated with the presumed spiritual renewal of societies, the slowdown of growth apparently having various advantages, somewhat in line with recent theories about 'zero-growth' and/or 'negative growth' (cf. Iannone 2019; Iannuzi 2019). Above all, however, the economic growth of European countries would supposedly be compromised by an ecological blockage (i.e., the steady depletion of natural resources) and with the end of European domination of the whole world, the emergence of rivals in the 'peripheries' thus threatening the position of the countries of the 'center' of a world-system that Sombart, with a much less Eurocentric attitude than what was usual in his time, unequivocally considers to be grounded on domination and exploitation (Sert 2018; Rosca 2018).

Finally, a mention is due to the importance of the rhetorical component in Sombart's diagnosis. The pathos of uncertainty and indeterminacy is certainly just as relevant, in the conclusion of *Der Bourgeois*, as the strict logical value of his arguments on the supposed factors of capitalism's loss of dynamism. Capitalism would supposedly tend to soften and surrender to fatigue, yielding to the joint pressure of rentiers and money lenders, as well as the "increasing bureaucratization of firms" and the fall of fertility rates, representing an evolution which "no national or religious enthusiasm" could alter significantly. This diagnosis is superbly summed up in the assertions of the last lines of the book:

> "Maybe the giant, already blind, will then be condemned to pull the wagon of democratic culture. But perhaps that will also be the time of the twilight of the gods. When this moment arrives, the gold will return to the waters of the Rhine. Who knows?" (Sombart 1982, 368).

There is thus an undeniable and fundamental difference of attitude between, on the one hand, the alleged giant which is anesthetized by objectification and the iron cage (the heroically entrepreneurial capitalism alas enchained by Lilliputian or Philistine democracy), and on the other hand the convenience, later assumed, of domesticating capitalism, promoting the partial return to an agricultural past as a way of overcoming the "economic age", leading to more regulation and cartelization, autarchy, and the predominance of a rural middle class, etc. Regarding this second line of reasoning, it is hard to avoid agreeing with Nicholas Varsanyi's argument that Sombart's reasoning is essentially "retrograde": "On the whole his concept is pure romanticism accompanied by fanaticism. It is retrograde, it is for autarchy, against international trade and other international interchange. In short, it is backward" (1963, 172). Comparable considerations, albeit in a more moderate tone, are also made by Friedrich Lenger, who observes that it is deeply ironic that by defending such neo-traditionalist ideas, Sombart not only returned to his "earlier esteem of the peasantry, but also repeated what he had identified as the systematic fault of the ethical and historical school in 1897, i.e. to use the standards of the past to cure the problems of the present" (Lenger 1997, 163).

7. Concluding observations: Sombart and us

Nevertheless, far beyond his possible 'retrograde' reveries or psychological regressions, Sombart's discourse is undoubtedly characterized by a perennial content and a theoretical surplus, granting him enough merit to be wholly our interlocutor. In fact, by posing the question of how to satisfactorily contain or 'embed' capitalism, Sombart unescapably addresses us and becomes contemporary to this day. Much more recently, Wolfgang Streeck (2016) has repeatedly highlighted the omnipresent, seemingly insuperable and enduring difficulty to 'domesticate' capitalism, by building a compromise within some 'mixed economy', capable of at least safeguarding the fundamentals of democracy. A set of social dispositions is yet to be found, grimly admitted Streeck, capable of preventing this compromise from being wrecked by capitalism's 'viral' tendency to untangle itself from all imaginable embeddedness or 'incrustation', expanding its logic indefinitely into the entire existence. Unlike Streeck, Sombart obviously did not include the safeguard of democracy in his purposes, given his explicit acceptance of the argument of the charismatic leader's direct connection with the deep and 'organic' will of the 'popular community', and thereby also with the will of God (1937, 194-195). However, the awareness that "capitalism" is an entity with very deep dimensions, including the

famous 'Faustian' inclination towards unmeasured ambition, or the notion that this may perhaps be controlled, but not completely suppressed, are possible lines of argumentation that Sombart's writings still allow us to obtain easily and with plenty. The same goes for the recognition that this reality implies trade-offs and choices, including political choices, some of them maybe tragic - in other terms, the awareness of our collective cultural "polytheism" as Max Weber, following "the elder Mill" (2004, 22), once labelled it.

Within this context, and in conclusion, it is advisable to return for a moment to the debates around the central theme of *Why is there no socialism in the US?* Sombart's thesis, which is referred to at the beginning of this paper, is opposed by Robin Archer (2016), in whose opinion the quintessential objection to his arguments is to be found in the case of Australia. Although the North American and Australian socio-political experiments possess a very significant group of common traits, in Australia an important Labour Party was implanted proclaiming socialist ideals (similarly to its British analogue), and so it would make sense to reopen the file of Sombart's study. Contrary to Sombart's position, Archer rejects the ideas concerning the supposed specificity of industrial relations in the US (the alleged superficial generosity of North-American employers), but in his overall assessment he also admits the existence of greater egalitarianism and a higher social mobility in the US than in Europe (Archer, 2016).[13] Importantly, Archer goes on to add that the Australian case is extremely similar to that of North-America, including the prevailing egalitarianism and the initial presence of a frontier, that is, a huge mass of land available for distribution to white settlers. Why then do important differences exist in the trajectories of these two countries?

Archer accepts from Sombart's opinions the notion that we must consider, in the case of the US, the predominant importance of political machines and the exceptionally high levels of party loyalty, leading to the transformation of the main political parties into "political churches" (Archer, 2016, 476). However, the principal explanation for the differences between the two countries would supposedly reside elsewhere, and for its identification it would be important to take the following into consideration: a) the manifold cultural diversity (ethnic, religious, etc.) induced by successive waves of immigration, which is much greater in the US and consequently inhibited labor solidarity in favor of various other forms of collective action; b) police repression, which also is and has been much more intense in the North-American case, stifling the possible seeds of socialist ideas in the bud, thus 'salting the earth' in the US (perhaps definitively) for the growth of socialism. Rather than a background of deep-rooted sociocultural reasons, the factors for the elucidation of the US trajectory

are thus supposed to reside in more 'epidermal' aspects, somehow suggesting the pertinence of a homological 'explanation of politics by politics'.

As pointed out in this paper, many of Sombart's writings are quite stimulating and provocative, and not only concerning luxury, war, and religion as determining sources of capitalism. Undeniably, his ideas on the question of the unsuccess of politically organized socialist tendencies in the US are also still capable of raising a vivid interest, as well as an intent to refute and overcome them. And that is undoubtedly the most fitting homage that may be made to any author, especially one who wrote more than a century ago.

Footnotes

[1] The nearness to Marxist views has arguably harmed Sombart's early academic career. In this context, he was also praised by Engels for allegedly understanding Marx much better than most of the contemporary German academic elite (Plotnik 1937, 33; Gioia and De Nardis 2015).

[2] This fundamental position notwithstanding, Sombart's treatment of the relations between science and values suffered some fluctuations. Under an increased influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, partly via Max Scheler, he came to assume that the utilitarian spirit of the bourgeoisie mostly expressed resentment against the seigneurial way-of-life. The same applied to English "merchants" during World War I, against German "heroes", and to the socialist tradition, during the early 1920s also subsumed under the theory of resentment). According to Scheler's views, the so-called values of life and culture had priority over those of utility and comfort (Lenger 1997, 161). Obviously, Scheler's opinions directly "questioned the principle of a value-free science"; but the advocacy of this has "later regained its prominence in Sombart's writings when attacked by the Nazi dictatorship" (Lenger 1997, 162).

[3] In the work where he famously affirms the affinity relationship that Weber posited between capitalism and Protestantism, Robert Merton (1938, 514-515) states that Sombart's opinion on the fundamentally 'empirical' character of 18th-century technology was exaggerated, although the connection between science and practical results was by then lesser than in later periods. In a partially contrary sense, Fernand Braudel assured that manufactures were replaced by factories very slowly (1983, 302), and that, for example, methods of transport remained extremely difficult until more recent times, e.g., in Napoleon's time, just as during Caesar's (Braudel 1983, 357).

[4] Among other aspects, Grundmann and Stehr appropriately call for a reassessment of Sombart's thought in the name of a transdisciplinary approach, assuming the fundamental unity of human sciences (2001, 284).

[5] Pomeranz appeals abundantly to Sombart also for his pioneering calculation of transport costs in pre-modern societies. The same goes for Braudel (1981 and 1983).

[6] Both the chess player and the genial doctor present entrepreneurial traits: "The art of diagnosis permits not only to heal the sick, but also to succeed in stock-exchange speculation" (Sombart 1982, 209). Oppositely, within Bergson's famous antinomy contrasting *homme ouvert* and *homme clos*, the burgher's temperament matches the latter (Sombart 1982, 210). This temperament is receptive, non-expansive. Valuing everything not subjectively, but objectively, the burgher would be uncapable to understand Cicero, when the Roman stated that "what matters is not each one's usefulness, but what one is" (Sombart 1982, 210).

[7] This was directly disputed by Weber, who in a note to *The Protestant Ethic* deems it to be an absurd idea (Weber 2001, 149-152). Sombart's opinions in this regard are similar to those expressed by Franz Keller, a Catholic clergyman.

[8] For Fanfani, the problem had immediately moral and political dimensions. Catholicism had supposedly promoted industry and honesty in businesses, but it was unequivocally separated from the aspects of moral deregulation often associated with capitalism. The attitude of Protestantism, he adjoined, had not been essentially different.

[9] The question of the greater or lesser importance of double-entry bookkeeping has been the subject of interesting debates, far beyond the issue of its connection or not to Judaism. For instance, Braudel (1983, 573-575) refers to it, suggesting that Sombart had overemphasized its importance. Basil Yamey, based on whose work Braudel presents reservations, continues the debate much later (2005), denying the validity of Sombart's position. For their part, Carruthers and Espeland (1991) appreciate above all the associated rhetorical element, or the rationalizing aspect. It is not about *stricto sensu* promoting the rationality of conducts. The kernel is in the effect of persuasion and appeasement of moral objections via the ex-post formal 'balancing' of matters. Through double-entry bookkeeping, a certain variety of 'balancing', thus also of 'justice', is always obtainable in businesses. Registering the various anti-and-pro-Sombart positions, Eve Chiapello (2007) mostly expresses words of praise for Sombart's thesis, the same applying for John Ryan (2014).

[10] Be it as it may, according to Grundmann and Stehr (2001), Sombart's theses on Judaism continue to induce controversy, constituting one of the reasons why he is not included in the sociological canon. Mapping positions regarding Sombart, these authors (idem, 270-1) mention the cases of Bert Hoselitz (preface to the 1951 English edition of his book on the Jews), George Mosse (1964), and Werner Mosse (1979; 1987), who can all broadly be generically characterized as being 'pro-Sombart'. On the contrary, Grundmann and Stehr present David Landes (1974), Barth Landheer (1951), Toni Oelsner (1962) and Paul Mendes-Flohr (1976) as being fundamentally 'anti-Sombart'. Gary Abraham (1988) highlighted above everything else the proximity of Weber's and Sombart's views. The opinion of Oelsner is particularly interesting, when she refers to Wilhelm Roscher's connection between the Jews with the legitimation of interest, as well as the invention of the bill-of-exchange and the protection of traders who had involuntarily received stolen goods: all of which are false associations, according to Oelsner. She nevertheless stresses that the link between Judaism and foreigner or 'outcast' capitalism is not Sombart's monopoly, as this notion is easily detectable in the works of many of his contemporaries, especially Max Weber (Oelsner 1962, 194, 202; cf. Grundmann and Stehr 2001, 266ff.). Among the voluminous literature on this issue, mention is due to Jacobs (1917), Davis (1997), Mell (2007), Bodemann (2014), and Swartz (2020), all of whom emphatically dispute Sombart's ideas on Judaism. Somewhat ironically, as early as 1917, Jacobs suggested that being well known for focusing his research on capitalism, Sombart should have been aware of the many inherent tendencies, namely the growing division of labor, which operated against him in controversies, making it virtually impossible for anyone to have sufficient scholarly attributes to master subjects so diverse as theology and economic history. Sombart's opinions unavoidably steered the debate towards these various fields, with opposite views being induced for each of them by experts each in his sector surpassing his knowledge. Davis' (1997 interesting and moving article surveys sources used by Sombart, namely Gluckel von Hameln's autobiography and Zevi Hirsch Ashkenazi's biography, to draw from these documents very different conclusions. The real, actually existing Jews arguably had patterns of values, attitudes and behaviors far removed from the squalid portrait of *homines economici* suggested by Sombart's depiction.

[11] Returning to Max Weber, it should also be noted that, contrary to the claims of Grundmann and Stehr (2001, 264), Weber adopted the position of enthusiastic support for the German war effort in the period 1914-18. More broadly, Weber saw in this event a "great and wonderful war" (Losurdo 1998, 8), which would morally rescue European peoples from the 'disenchantment' to which excessive rational

calculation and 'societal' tendencies had led them. The role-model for this reasoning appears to include a North American component, Weber's expression echoing the "splendid little war", as the US Secretary of State John Hay notoriously called the Spanish-American war of 1898.

[12] Sombart evidences some awareness of what, several decades later, came to be called the «trilemma of the international economy» (Rodrik 2007). It should be added, however, that his economic arguments were not taken too seriously by the Nazi leaders, who, whatever their purposes ('re-enchantment' of the entrepreneurial function, or others), were not indifferent to the issue of property, having carried out a large-scale campaign of privatization, indeed "reprivatisation" (*reprivatisierung*) of the economy (Bel 2010, 35).

[13] This view is to be contrasted with the diagnosis presented by Michaels (2008), who argues that such a notion was long ago reduced to a myth, utterly unsupported by facts. Berlin would comparatively be a "land of opportunity" for a US citizen born poor in Chicago in the early 21st century.

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