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# Werner Sombart's Longue Durée

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## Abstract

The work of Werner Sombart is often overlooked in the academic traditions of economics and sociology. It nevertheless deserves an attentive consideration, and a reassessment, concerning a number of important aspects: 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; the specificities of US political trajectory. Regarding all these aspects, a critical reading of Sombart's work may prove rather productive.

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## 1. Sombart within the traditions of social sciences

Werner Sombart (1863-1941) was a rather famous author in the early 20th century, having 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 recovered, but in limited and differentiated ways, by sociology, the history of economic thought, and economic history. This forgetfulness was partially due to his support of Nazism during the 1930s, but the problem is definitely not limited to that. The respective reasons are a possible topic for socio-historic research, as much as Sombart's work.

Talcott Parsons was undoubtedly the protagonist of Sombart's reception by the sociological tradition. He was granted a prominent place in the early essays, located alongside Weber in a famous 1928 article on the centrality of the category of «capitalism». Some years after, however, Sombart was already confined to a rather diminished position in 1937's *Structure* (Parsons 1968), falling after that into obscurity. Parsons presents him as a representative of the turn-of-the-century's «German historicism», his alleged theoretical vices being «empiricism» and «idealism». These accusations have dubious validity, arguably making more sense in terms of a sociology of academic life than regarding any strict history of ideas. Analogously to what Charles Camic wrote about Parsons' treatment of the Institutionalists, we may say that Sombart's exclusion from the sociological pantheon was less due to any «content fitness» than 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 so they 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), we detect in Sombart's writings: 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 the actions of individuals. Particularly, in his essay *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, there would then be a tendency to invest in individual upwards social mobility. He nevertheless recognizes the existence of collective action in the US, but mostly corresponding to ethnic groups, instead of social classes. Such facts would produce the absence of socialist ideals, Boudon's diagnosis confirming Sombart's. Boudon's ideas concerning the differentiation of conceptual fields for history and sociology are very debatable, and it is also doubtful that Sombart's work may be legitimately invoked in favour of any 'methodological individualism', but Boudon had the important merit of drawing attention to Sombart's work in a complimentary manner, as it deserves, particularly on this issue.

Within the ambit of the history of economic thought, Sombart was also mapped by Schumpeter (1986, 809-14) in the so-called Youngest German Historical School, alongside Max Weber and Edgar Jaffé. A disciple of Adolph Wagner and Gustav Schmoller, regarding the famous *Methodenstreit* Sombart's background was one of inclination for the inductive and historiographical faction, represented by Schmoller, as opposed to the group headed by Carl Menger, deductive and assuming the universal validity of economic categories. However, Sombart had supposedly been a remarkable author, with a holistic vision and an artistic ability to capture the general sense of realities, thus vastly surpassing his mentor.

Indeed, Sombart worked initially in the vicinity of Schmoller (his PhD supervisor), and became connected with the project of the *Verein für Socialpolitik*, intending a set of reforms officially aimed at strengthening the ethical aspects of the economy. This «ethical economy» mostly came down to the support of traditional forms of activity, particularly small

agricultural independent exploitations and the correlate group of value dispositions, Schmoller directly linking such reformism with his scientific activity. Near the turn of the century, however, Sombart (with Max Weber and others) came to support a modernized version of both academic research and social policy, thus becoming neatly opposed to Schmoller and those promoting the tenets of the «ethical school» of economics. Sombart and Weber instead argued for a clear separation between values and science, and so 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). Still in this 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, but his inclination went mostly for Marx's work, implying namely the notions of the economy as a system, and the objective, material compulsion so induced into agents' conducts<sup>1</sup>. This was largely responsible for his pioneer use of the category «capitalism» (Braudel 1983, 237) that in his work refers to a multiplicity of aspects: cultural, organizational and technical. In his famous *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* Sombart proceeded to its long-term periodization: pre-capitalist period, characterized by the predominance of handicraft and self-sufficiency production (approximately until the Renaissance), nascent capitalism (from the Renaissance until late eighteenth century), and high/mature capitalism (till the early twentieth century).

However, Marx was not the only relevant influence, Sombart actually deeming the emergence of a capitalist spirit more important than the mere accumulation of material resources. In other terms, «the genesis of capitalism was above all a 'psychogenesis'», an approach arguably incompatible with Marxism. Yet, 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/comprehensive approach to social realities, taking into consideration the meaning attributed by agents to their actions, and so also a psychological component, was thus assumed partly a correction, but mostly a complement for 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). By 1937, in a detailed exam of Sombart's work, Mortin Plotnik basically confirms this portrait: besides Sombart's personal brilliancy, «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 regarding this group of topics, it should be noted that Sombart ended up distinguishing three basic analytical models — «normative» (*richtende*), «ordering» (*ordnende*) and «understanding» (*verstehende*) —, accepting their combinations, but expressing his preference for the third. He actually promoted it as an alleged 'third-way' between the so-called «normative» and the «naturalistic» approaches. Therefore, officially aiming at a «value-free» attitude (a clear-cut distinction from Schmoller), at the same time he intended to go beyond a 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, explicitly considered a part of his sociology (Plotnik 1937, 65), was so officially an «understanding» one: basically in agreement with Weber's approach. These were a sociology and an economic analysis that took into account the meaning attributed by agents to their actions, and consequently the influence of values in social conducts, but simultaneously targeted a form of scientific knowledge supposedly free from value

implications<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. War and luxury

Also as Weber, Sombart was convinced of the importance of taking into consideration Europe's past in order to fully understand the size and meaning of what he called «modern capitalism», largely an analogous of Weber's «rational capitalism». Partly, this may in both cases be understood as the result of an attitude of fundamental conservatism: recent history means far less novelty than usually assumed, evoking what Hirschman (1991) called the argument of «futility» within his famous typology of reactionary rhetoric. Partly, too, this expresses an eminently Eurocentric colonial-imperial Zeitgeist: in Europe, and only there, could have flourished the social forms destined to rule the world (Blaut 2000), although this argument applies somewhat less to Sombart (see below).

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between Weber and Sombart. It is fair to say that Sombart's research comes down to an extended enquiry on 'the aristocratic ethic-cum-aesthetic and the spirit of capitalism'. This is crucially related to his assessment of two important social facts: war and luxury. If for Weber the kernel of the creative force of modern capitalism was religious, then the essence of Sombart's analysis becomes, by contrast, understandable saying that for him such origin was aristocratic: warrior and courtier. Hence two of his most important works: «War and Capitalism», and »Luxury and Capitalism». Among the three terms, war, luxury and capitalism, a fundamental affinity was posited. Sombart (1943) does not doubt that capitalism incites wars, but the most important causal relationship is for him the inverse one: wars induce capitalism, logically and psychologically, voluntarily and involuntarily: via increased public spending, a decisive creator of effectual demand; through education and discipline imposed by armies on large masses of peasants, previously accustomed to slower and 'natural' rhythms; by promoting the inventive and innovative spirit, the path from inventions to technical innovations shortened in war before the productive processes<sup>3</sup>.

He highlights in the European armies, since the 16th century: command unity, with rationalization and simplification of procedures; increasing need for rigorous quantification; generic drive for unlimited growth, corresponding to both the long-term tendency of armies and the intrinsic logic of capital. Likewise with the need for a disciplined proletariat, war being the perfect propaedeutic exercise for the rational industry of modern times. For Sombart, warrior virtues (discipline, diligence, patience, persistence, but also exact calculation, global vision, unified command and sense of timing) are practically the double of economic virtues, or rather vice-versa. They express a mixture of «burgher» and «entrepreneurial» components, according to his economic types (see below), the «burgher» element predominating at the low levels of hierarchies and the «entrepreneurial» one at the top.

According to Sombart, the armed forces were the first social sphere where the need for rigorous division and coordination of labour was massively imposed. They were subsequently copied by their supplier civilian industries, and then by the economy as a whole. Similarly, the existence and growth of military apparatuses created a standard consumer sufficiently patterned and predictable, in enough numbers to produce an amount of 'effectual demand' triggering an increased use of productive resources. It is appropriate to consider this an *ante litteram* «military Keynesianism»: a demand-side economic

approach, but emphasizing aspects relating not to a welfare, rather a warfare state. It is also distinctive because it underlines and praises the competitive component of consumption, an element inseparable from social inequality, while the Keynesianism of Keynes had a predominantly egalitarian leaning.

As for Sombart's emphasis on the theme of luxury, generically it corresponds to the narrative of Europe's Modern Age history highlighting the transformation of nobilities from warriors into courtiers. This fact, later referred by Norbert Elias (2000) to the «civilizing process», is directly associated with the genesis of modern state, reflecting the increased importance and social weight of monarchs and bourgeois groups, with the decline of traditional nobilities, thus made dependent from monarchs and reduced to 'nobilities-of-service'. The element that expresses hierarchy is so transferred to the consumption of refined goods. «Subjective luxury», or personal communication of each nobleman with his entourage, is abandoned, occurring what Sombart (1990, 106) calls «objectification of luxury», social relations becoming 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 is about proceeding «unhurriedly, without haste or precipitation» (1982, 20), acquiring only for limited needs. By contrast, capitalism, linked to a principle of «unlimited acquisition» (Parsons 1991, 7), is associated with artificiality, restlessness and compulsive change. But that's not enough to capture the notion of luxury. The traces of overabundance, ostentation and lust are also crucial, Sombart provocatively referring to luxury as the «legitimate daughter of illegitimate love» (cit. in Grazia 1996, 20), which would have in turn given birth to capitalism.

An important bundle of issues is so alluded. Colin Campbell, in his famous work on modern consumerism, generically refers to Sombart, alongside Veblen (1925), as authors who had tried to address the thorny question of how the middle classes were involved in performing such contradictory roles: «On the one hand, regarded as defying the aristocratic ethic, and on the other, as adopting it» (Campbell 2018, 70). In addition to Veblen's perspective (the wish «to be 'one of the boys', or a desire to 'dissociate oneself from the common herd'» – 2018, 93), which mostly seems to Campbell too simplistic, Sombart is presented as corresponding to a somewhat higher degree of sophistication in the treatment of this group of phenomena. Among the classical authors, only he would have 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), Tibor Scitovsky the only one among contemporary economists attempting to follow this line of thought. Beyond the sinuosity and ramifications of trajectories of post-puritanical ethics, there would thus be a nucleus of permanent dispositions (arguably close to what we might consider an unchangeable human nature), inducing perhaps inevitably the aforementioned «pleasure-sensuality-luxury complex» and the correlative set of consumerist drives.

Sombart's attitude leads him to underscore in his work the social activism of women, but, again in contrast to Veblen and several other authors of progressive or socialist leanings, it is not for him about dignifying them via labour or «parental instinct» (Loader, Waddoups, and Tilman 1991), but in the diametrically opposite way. In sharp contrast to those, Sombart chooses precisely to highlight the importance of favourites and cocottes. If luxury, more than working-and-saving, stimulated the development of capitalism, on the other hand the «triumph of women», as Sombart (1990, 105) designates it, corresponding to this «(old style) feminism» (Sombart 1990, 110), tellingly arrives via 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, considering that, as Grundmann and Stehr (2001) point out, it was largely through the inclinations corresponding to the so-called cultural turn of social studies, assigning greater importance to consumption than to production, and via the emergence of women's studies, that Sombart has regained some notoriety in more recent times<sup>4</sup>. In this context, the names must be mentioned of Mukerji (1993), Grazia (1996) and Roberts (1998), already referred in Grundmann and Stehr (2001); and more recently also Pomeranz (2000), as well as Armitage and Roberts (2016). The first authoresses are inclined to accept Sombart's theses as fundamentally valid, despite their obvious misogyny: more valid, namely, than Veblen's. In any case, whether the plight of research is 'cultural' or more related to economic factuality, referring to women's studies or with other perspectives and concerns, Sombart's name appears recurrently in literature about luxury. Simultaneously, though, an attitude of consistent scepticism is also identifiable, regarding the alleged stimulus so provided to capitalist activity. This was, particularly and notoriously, the case with Fernand Braudel (1981, 186; cf. Mukerji 1993, 439; Franchetti 2013, 138). Is Sombart's thesis really valid, Braudel wonders, or is it true that, until the innovations of the Industrial Revolution, the multiple forms of luxury were not a factor of economic growth, instead expressing 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 has significant nuances already in the work of Sombart's economist of reference on this subject, Richard Cantillon. For Cantillon a country's trade surplus, with the corresponding inflow of metal currency, would tend to cause a generalized increase of prices, and therefore a loss of advantages in the international market, the trade surplus thus being 'automatically' cancelled out. There would however be an important difference between countries where the surplus was acquired through the promotion of manufactures and navigation, and countries where the abundance of currency resulted from the discovery of mines in the colonies. In the first case, the good habits of the population would ensure that, flows and counter-flows considered, the overall balance of movements implied a consistent increase of prosperity, while in the second, if «the Portuguese nobility and others» (Cantillon 1952, 144) gained habits of excessive ostentation, which would then generalize to the entire nation given that «the multiplier is sociological» (Cantillon 1952, 36, footnote by Louis Salleron), there would be no progress in the overall cycle. Norbert Elias, although reasoning based on Mirabeau (who basically paraphrases Cantillon on this subject), stresses the importance of this idea of the possibility to transform what would otherwise be a simple cycle into a continuous upwards movement (Elias 2000, 39). However, for Cantillon the solution to the standoff resided in the support given to manufactures and navigation by «an able minister» (1952, 107), while Mirabeau and the Physiocrats oppositely favoured laissez-faire policies. In any case, according to Elias the outline of the economic analogue of the «civilizing process» (the continuous growth) had been drawn here.

Despite their affinities, though, Sombart is in this regard to be found with the authors for whom the ‘normal’ social trajectory is that of the cycle, not the continued progress. In many respects, his attitude is therefore one of acceptance of the inevitability of repetition, obviously including the inescapable component of decay. He sees in luxury a splendour: deadly, perhaps, but a splendour nevertheless. He is close to what John Robinson Jeffers’ famous poem expresses with a mix of resignation, bitterness and irony: «A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains: shine, perishing republic». This is fundamentally corroborated by Armitage and Roberts (2016), added by the recognition that Sombart had focused on aspects of the trajectory of societies to this day very hard to consider, including the tragedy of their inevitable decline and death. In that sense, his failure (if really a failure) is also essentially 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, we should also highlight the importance for economic development of the objectification of luxury, recognized particularly in the work of Kenneth Pomeranz (2000, 114ff.)<sup>5</sup>. Definitely positive from the perspective of continued growth, indeed crucial in the «great divergence», would arguably have been not any-and-all luxuries, but the «objective luxury» expressing the permanent search for increasingly exquisite patterns of consumption: of course, closely accompanied by the growing sophistication also of production processes.

### 3. A Janus-faced capitalist mentality

With this emphasis in the importance of war and luxury, Sombart points a dissenter path vis-à-vis the currents of social theory that, in Adam Smith’s trail, argued for the sociological affinities of businesses with peaceful tendencies and the famous working-saving-and-investing ethos. As a matter of fact, war and luxury merge in his analysis under the form of exaltation of hierarchy. This trait deserves highlighting, given on the one hand 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’.

Herf includes in the factors of Sombart’s reconciliation with modernity the aforementioned hopes regarding the ‘re-enchantment’ or ‘re-spiritualization’ of technology, as Sombart indeed clarifies, stating that his position was not one of

«cultural pessimism» (Herf 1984, 145ff.). There is, however, another important aspect in this story: the so-called 'entrepreneurial' element of business mentality, and everything associated with it. Sombart's «modern economic man», or bourgeois, is said to have two distinguishable components: that of the citizen, or burgher (*Bürger*), and that of the entrepreneur (*Unternehmer*). His approach is one of a characterology, aiming at identifying psychological types. The «burgher mentality» would correspond to the «holy economy» (supposedly detectable in the *masserizia* of Leon Battista Alberti, in 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence, basically with the same traits of Benjamin Franklin's industry-and-frugality), the morale of business (predictability, respect for the given word) and the calculating mentality that reduces everything to quantities, thus abolishing qualitative differences. The «entrepreneurial spirit», on the other hand, would correspond to acquisitiveness, as well as the inventive, conquering and organizing spirit. This is how, among the sources of «capitalist spirit», Sombart includes military campaigns, feudal property and privateering. It must be conceived as a result of 'enterprise' in everything referring to sense of opportunity, ingenuity, inspiration, organizational and innovative capacity, but also unlimited desire for knowledge (characterizing a supposed «Faustian soul»), inclination to disobey any rules, «will to power» (Sombart 1931) — up to pure and simple preying: we are dealing here with the psychology of a predator. The entrepreneur's temperament is «acute», «insightful», «ingenious», «endowed with a special fantasy, which Wundt calls combinatorial»<sup>6</sup>. If Franklin is mentioned apropos the «burgher mentality», so are Goethe and Nietzsche referred in this regard.

Obviously, it is the psychology of the entrepreneur that brings the bourgeois closer to European traditional aristocracies: warriors and courtiers. It is true that some of the traits usually referred to economic activities may prove hard to classify. For example, the trader (*Händler*), in part to be mapped on the 'burgher' side, may nevertheless be considered a component of the 'entrepreneurial' spirit inasmuch he is capable of inducing other agents into voluntary cooperation, more through the appeal to feelings than via arguments: authority (*Herrschaft*), therefore, rather than mere power (*Macht*), within Max Weber's analytical framework; and actually «charismatic» authority. This is what allows the businessman to both captivate his collaborators, whose performance he supplies with unity and telos, and persuade the potential buyers, inducing them to 'discover' new needs until then merely latent. Under many of these respects, Sombart's analysis approaches the 'Austrian school' of economics, particularly Friedrich von Wieser (Ebner 2000, 2005, 2006; Campagnolo and Vivel 2011).

It should also be remarked that the definition proposed by Sombart oscillates between the simple psychological characterization, the search for alleged «biological» foundations of the 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 an allegedly exceptional event, in the case of Sombart we deal (notwithstanding the aforementioned tendency for a cyclical idea 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 unto Ancient Age, in whose authors, for example Xenophon and Seneca, he finds «the idea of a rationalization of vital conduct», particularly related to the Stoics' notion of natural law, the legitimation of individual enrichment, the notion that time is scarce and



should be properly used, or even what he boldly designates as «burgher virtues, especially application and saving» (Sombart 1982, 234).

Noticeably, Braudel (1983, 568-580) expresses in this regard an attitude generally more favourable to Sombart's ideas than to Weber's, deeming the cultural genesis of the capitalist mentality related more to Italian Renaissance than to Protestant Reformation. Still, both had allegedly exaggerated the importance of causal relationships from culture to economic practices, rather than the opposite way, due to their common obsession with Marx (1981, 513; 1983, 401-402); and both had been Eurocentric, other societies, namely Asian ones, deserving much more attention (1983, 581ff.). Although Sombart was not totally wrong, he had also overstated the importance of double-entry bookkeeping (1983, 573-5), the degree of coherence of mercantilist policies (Braudel 1983, 542ff.), and generally the importance of state apparatuses as a source of capitalism (Braudel 1983, 549ff.). However, he was right, and in a crucial way, about the twofold character of the 'spirit of capitalism', captured by his burgher-entrepreneur duo better 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, Judaism

From Catholicism, especially Thomism, Sombart highlights the “rationalization of life” (1982, 246), associated with *liberalitas*, for the Scholastics the “economic virtue in a strict sense” (1982, 248), the just middle-way between *avaritia* and *prodigalitas*. In its rationalizing search, it must above all avoid idleness. Analogously, wealth would be for Thomism in principle a good thing, the Scholastics after the 13th century legitimizing also individual enrichment. Even the concept of capital (fertile, growing money) would also have been produced by the Scholastic of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The condemnation of usury itself is interpreted as an incentive to productive investment: distinct from the ‘indolent’ lender's attitude, and in this sense a propitiator of capitalism (1982, 243-260)<sup>7</sup>. Several of these arguments are certainly debatable, but it should be emphasized that Sombart was widely invoked by Amintore Fanfani when this one sought to demonstrate that, differently from what we might suppose by reading Weber, Catholicism had not inhibited the progresses of capitalism (Fanfani 2003)<sup>8</sup>.

In Protestantism Sombart sees basically a continuation of the work of the Scholastics, deepened by the intensification of religious feelings. As for the subtleties mentioned by Max Weber regarding «worldly asceticism», predestination, etc., he dislikes the strictly theological aspect of problems, claiming that these were details missed by the vast population. This pinpoints an important disagreement between the two authors. For the common believer, Sombart argues, post-Lutheran ethics were almost the same as the one previous to Reformation, although intensified by religious exaltation: industry, occupation with useful things, temperance, saving. However, he adds, the strengthening of restraints ultimately induced an important loss of the «artistic sensibility» (1982, 269) that in Catholicism had produced the inclination to magnificence, the «desire to do something great and splendid». Thus, with all the voluntary restrictions to consumption that it brought, Protestantism ended up delaying the development of capitalism. Moreover, freeing usury from restrictions hadn't necessarily positive consequences (see above). Nor did puritanical ethics exalt unlimited enrichment, just another one, restrained by the notions of fair price and balanced retribution of efforts. At this point, therefore, an attitude coincident with Thomism (Sombart 1982, 271).

Oppositely, that is one of the traits emphasized in Judaism. Jewish morality maintains, for relations within the ethnos, the principles of fair price; but regarding relations with Gentiles it adopts codes we are now accustomed to in economic life, each agent merely trying to proceed the most advantageous way. This idea of an absence of moral regulation of economic practices (an «anomy», in Durkheim's wording), may obviously be regarded with mistrust, this subject having been closely scrutinized, given the suspicions of anti-Judaism or even anti-Semitism, aroused above all by subsequent European history. However, it should be noted that Sombart's tone of discourse often approaches a laudatory attitude of the aforementioned Jewish ethic, precisely because of its allegedly pioneering traits.

The argument of moral deregulation also concerns loans: the Jew must lend without interest to one of his own, but may charge an interest regarding Gentiles. Moreover, the principles of Jewish ethics do not deviate from the pattern previously identified as a burgher mentality. Sombart suggests that the very notion of an abstract and mystery-free deity, as well as the correspondent variety of moral judgment, the idea of a careful measurement of both merits and failures of the individual believer, would have stimulated a quantifying (or 'accounting') and individualistic mentality (Sombart 2001, 143ff.). Hence precisely the explicit association of Judaism with the invention of double-entry bookkeeping (2001, 146-147). Actually, the system of measurement of the believer's moral credits and debts would even render possible to distinguish the component analogous to the investment from the section corresponding to profit, and in this sense it may be said that the Jewish morality had an intuition or a prefiguration of the very idea of capital (2001, 147)<sup>9</sup>. Simultaneously, each believer is judged according to his/her actions and by him/herself, merits and demerits referring to objective facts and thus all qualitative differences being ignored: therefore, we are induced into a 'law equal for all' in the religious sense, long before the modern era. Everything in Judaism thus seems to propitiate rationality, and chiefly capitalist rationality.

The importance of Jewish ethics in the creation of the capitalist mentality, and particularly that 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 fenced-off to their members. On the other hand, it is understandable that

from the perspective of foreigners social realities tend to resemble 'deserted', 'dead' — and therefore ready for quantification and manipulation. This statement is considered valid for several other minorities (Sombart 1982, 303-318), but according to him Judaism, as the mentality of the quintessential «people of the desert», thus observes a perfect affinity with capitalist ethics in its 'burgher' variant. He even endeavours (2001, 174-176) the detailed presentation of analogies between the mentality of 17th century Puritans in Great Britain and that of the Jews in general: Protestantism has only contributed to capitalism inasmuch it has sometimes resembled Judaism.

The prominence of this aspect is however circumstantial, Sombart keeping a notion of the birth of modern capitalism emphasizing the multiplicity of its causes. We should also note that the alleged sources of the capitalist spirit are direct and logical: Jewish ethic propitiates capitalist practices because it abolishes the notion of fair price and induces a quantitative attitude, late Scholastics because it authorizes individual enrichment, etc. The general tone of his analysis is simple and directly understandable, differently from what happens with Weber, for whom the nucleus of the problem would reside in the 'psychological' other than 'logical' consequences, and the causal nexuses were very subtle and oblique, capitalism being an unwanted result of Protestantism. The (partial) equivalent of what Protestantism represents for Weber is therefore Judaism, considered in perfect harmony with capitalist activities regarding their 'burgher' traits. For Sombart, as for most authors of the aforementioned «reactionary modernism» and even beyond them (think of Weber or Simmel), the predominance of quantitative and impersonal aspects ends up translated into the «disenchantment of the world», the objectification of social relations and the «iron cage». Since all this is often coupled with «the Jew», and although Sombart basically refers to this in parallel with Simmel's (1971) treatment of «the stranger», it is understandable that concerns about an anti-Jewish or even anti-Semitic bias occur.

Undeniably, Sombart flirts in several occasions with anti-Judaic tropes, such as the thesis that the Jews created the ghetto (2001, 167), the idea of their intrinsic nomadism or «Saharism», whether produced by selection or adaptation (2001, 229), or even the notion of a direct passage from the desert into the modern city, itself nothing more than a great desert (2001, 233). This occurs in a German academia with a tradition of recognition of the Jewish specificity, whether in an extolling way, as with Wilhelm Roscher, or (more often) with malevolent intentions. All this, of course, contributes to make Sombart's position uneasy. However, and recognizing his oscillations and possible inaccuracies, it seems reasonable to argue that his ideas deserve to be evaluated above all by the intrinsic merit of highlighting Jewish specificity, not so much because that was done with sympathy and/or dislike. What is undoubtedly extracted from Sombart's writings is the idea of a Jewish people who, precisely because of their condition of isolation (whether imposed by others or self-imposed), reinforced by the particular ethics that it segregated (supposedly a cultural fact, although biological-racial hypotheses were not discarded), became particularly inclined to 'burgher' attitudes: quantitative, rational and utilitarian. Within the usual sociological «community-society» antinomy, obviously the pole of «society»: producing rationality, but also disenchantment. Nothing else necessarily results from Sombart's analysis<sup>10</sup>.

## 5. Racism: the mismeasure of Sombart?

Perhaps it should be a factor for the reassessment of Sombart's work the fact that he considered Judaism very important

for the creation of modern capitalism, while with Weber basically Jews are depicted in the condition of a stateless people, thus producing a «pariah capitalism», which (alongside «pirate capitalism» and similar varieties) is left decidedly on the side of pre-modern realities. The relevance of these in the birth of «rational capitalism» would be null, or effaced by the comparative importance of Protestant ethic. The history of modernity would therefore be, according to Weber, shaped by a variety of strictly North-Western European religiosity, while Sombart recognizes initiative and importance to many more elements, within a much more varied sociocultural, ethnic and geographical palette.

This supposed irrelevance of Jews to the emergence of modern rational capitalism must be contextualized. It is fair to say that, regarding capitalism's links with religiosity, Max Weber, by positing a relationship of «elective affinity» between capitalism and Protestantism, basically proceeded to its symbolic integration in the German *Kultur*, thus obtaining its reconciliation with the imaginary of the 'popular community' and the 'organic' aspects. It is therefore understandable that Weber refers Protestantism to nascent capitalism and associates it with the ethics of professional work, the «vocation» and a general endeavour of «transfiguration of values». Briefly, he allots it a heroic meaning. By contrast, for Sombart the Jew (typically with a marketer or financial role) is predominantly external to the production processes and, being associated with a quantifying trait, is limited to the 'burgher' aspect and produces 'disenchantment'. Sombart, in sum, also reconciles capitalism with the *Kultur*, but in the opposite way, through the 'entrepreneur': inspired, associated with qualitative traits and the transmutation of values (cf. Loader 2001; Ebner 2000, 2005, 2006; Reinert and Reinert 2006).

Still regarding attitudes towards Judaism and the Jews, it should be noted that Veblen, in a 1919 article discussing their more-than-proportional intellectual contribution and the level of their intellectual performance, clearly above average, attributes these facts to a cultural «hyphenate» condition of a considerable part of that ethnic group. The brightest Jews, and also those more inclined to radicalism, would usually also be the most 'uprooted' ones. It would be this hyphenation, this hybrid belonging or partially foreign condition, with separation from the «idols» of the group of origin, however without full integration in any other group, to induce their success in «the uneasy guild of pathfinders and iconoclasts, in science, scholarship and institutional change and growth» (Veblen 1919, 36), which in fact leads him 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 that Veblen's reasoning oscillates between this strict argument, containing no allusion to «race» whatsoever, and the idea that Jews, globally considered, should themselves be taken as a «mixed race». It is true, Veblen acknowledges, that all European peoples are so to a greater or lesser extent. But Jews are no doubt exceptionally hybridized, and «these intellectuals of Jewish extraction are, after all, of hybrid extraction as well» (Veblen 1919, 37), miscegenation thus apparently a good thing.

These ramifications of Veblen's reasoning are hardly relevant in the context of this article: except to emphasize how widespread were, in this period, ideas related to the relevance of 'race', casually expressed without embarrassment, and also apparently without malice, by various authors and in very diverse contexts; and to highlight that the term 'race' is often taken as a mere synonym of 'nation'. In this regard, and referring to the strictly biological, anti-Semitic and racist drift, it should at least be mentioned that even in the last phase of his evolution, when he formally supported Nazism and tried to influence the regime's policies, Sombart publicly opined that the «Jewish spirit» was mostly a cultural reality, which had already been irreversibly disseminated throughout the world, regardless of what might occur to any 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 would be the cultural traits, biological elements something worth considering, but merely on a secondary level, as evidenced also by a tirade in *German Socialism* deserving consideration precisely because of its pathetic tonality:

«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).

On this group of topics Sombart is often judged harshly, albeit in various degrees: that is the case, inter alia, with Rammstedt (1988), Grundman and Stehr (2001), Bodemann (2014), and Kramer (2019). He is however completely exonerated by Iannone (2013), and also in Iannone (2015), Pisanelli (2015) and Protti (2015). It seems appropriate to gain some perspective on this issue, noting that these ideas are expressed in a cultural (European and North American) context where racist ideas have a big admittance, in fact being ideas generally accepted by both common sense and 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, xlili) «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<sup>11</sup>. It is also revealing that in the 1930s an author as Amintore Fanfani (2003, 156-7), concerning the greater or lesser propitiation of capitalism by various groups, after referring Weber's inclination on the need to consider heredity, argues with apparent seriousness and equanimity ideas of predominantly «dolichocephalic» and/or «brachycephalic» peoples being more or less capitalism-inclined, and in which phases exactly. Sombart's 'racial' ideas, no matter how interpreted, should therefore be treated *sine ira et studio*, situated in the time and the circumstances where they were exposed, avoiding both their moral 'whitewashing' and their exorbitant, decontextualized consideration.

## 6. The entrepreneur and the dynamics of capitalism

As a supplement to the three stages of his periodization of capitalism, Sombart concludes for the emergence of a «late capitalism», characterized by tendencies for cartelization, rationalization and increasing regulation, added by a 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) was supposed to be progressively eroded. The general economic vitality would, however, predictably diminish, under the threat of both the exiguity of markets and the scarcity of natural resources, given multiple ecological blockages. The therapy that is contemplated suggests a possible resurgence of features of times past, economic structures moving into a 're-agrarian' and neo-traditionalist way, Sombart's recommendations pointing to the strengthening and even reconstitution of a middle class of farmers as a fundamental support of the socio-political order. This was intended to promote a neo-patriarchal economy, with an increase of the population's fraction employed in the agricultural sector, and combined with an

intervention of public authorities reinforcing the principles of private property and hierarchy, always having as guiding criterion the prevalence of political considerations. At the same time, the autarchic tendencies would be reinforced: partly as a consequence of the inevitable 'power-politics' nature of international relations, partly as a result of the purpose to mitigate economic crises, considering these to be worsened 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 fascist or related regimes of the interwar period: traditionalism, *Führerprinzip*, neo-agrarian inclination, however restrained by considerations on international politics. Nevertheless (and besides his ideas on the social importance of the middle-class), it should be noted that, for example in the field of international trade, Sombart quotes Keynes with approval, regarding the assurance of a sufficient level of effectual demand. The state's regulatory intervention, which is still missing a «unified plan» in most countries («except in Russia», 1937, 287), should, in the name of both the efficacy of policies and the preservation of sovereignty, imply some degree of economic closure<sup>12</sup>.

More important than any circumstantial proximity to Keynes are, however, the affinities of Sombart's work with that of Schumpeter. Let us identify the main similitudes. First of all, 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 his work the crucial role of combining and unifying contributions of other agents, already identified by British political economy (land, labour 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). Actually, this is fundamentally the economic analogue of the *pouvoir modérateur*, which Benjamin Constant has contemporarily added to the classic tripartite concept of sovereignty. Say thus innovated in economic theory basically by importing from political theory an eminently 'decisionist' or 'Bonapartist' element (cf. Graça 2008, 482). In the case of Sombart, as in Schumpeter's, and given the increased importance of innovation, the entrepreneur's exceptionality is reinforced.

Innovation refers to all aspects of economic life: consumption patterns, techniques, products. The origin of such changes resides ultimately in the desire for social recognition through consumption, inevitably entailing a dimension of conflict. We are dealing here with the famous «heterogony of ends», suggesting simultaneously the primacy of *ágon* (the struggle) over *nomos* (the rule), and of the challenge made by others, compared to what is decided by each one: «heterogony» as the exact opposite of «autonomy». In addition to the common references to Wundt, from whose work Schumpeter (1976, 131ff.) explicitly picks the designation, one should also note here the probable inspiration by the model of conduct corresponding to the "duellists' society", *satisfaktionsfähige Gesellschaft*, to which Norbert Elias (1996, 51ff.) refers the most distinctive feature of the German version of the civilizing process. It all comes down to assuming the imperative of responding to a challenge set by others, under penalty of losing face, social respectability. Driven by the blind game of social interactions, innovation is therefore considered the result of a primarily non-rational inspiration, coupled with a drive for competition. The entrepreneur is everywhere a factor of paramount importance, given his abilities to unite, coordinate, persuade, and regenerate. In fact, he is the perfect analogue of Weber's charismatic leader, evoking also unmistakably the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, creator of new values and operating through a Dionysian «creative destruction». This aspect, later associated with the entrepreneur by Schumpeter, is perfectly identifiable already in Sombart's work along the

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

If Schumpeter's considerations about the creative and innovative character of capitalism are therefore easily identifiable also in Sombart's work, the latter became persuaded that, capitalism being threatened by democratizing tendencies, the search for distinction should decrease, the pace of economic growth also pointing to a slowdown. In his portrait of «late capitalism», therefore, the previous tropes of permanent dissatisfaction and perpetual movement eventually give way to the exactly opposite themes: routinization, objectification, etc. Sombart also cogitates with approval (and after the arrival of Nazism to power), about a 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; Iannuzzi 2019). Above all, however, the economic growth of European countries would supposedly be compromised by reasons of ecological blockage (depletion of natural resources) and by 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 'centre' of a world-system that Sombart, in 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, let us emphasize the importance of the rhetorical component in Sombart's diagnosis. The pathos of uncertainty and indeterminacy is certainly as much relevant, in the conclusion of *Der Bourgeois*, as the strict listing of the supposed factors of capitalism's loss of dynamism: it would presumably tend to soften and surrender to tiredness, yielding to the joint pressure of rentiers and money-lenders, the «increasing bureaucratization of firms» and the fall of fertility rates, an evolution from which «no national or religious enthusiasm» could deviate it. On the whole, a diagnosis that makes him assert, in 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 difference of attitude between, on the one hand, the alleged giant anesthetized by objectification and the iron cage (the heroically entrepreneurial capitalism alas enchained by Lilliputian or Philistine democracy), and on the other the convenience (later assumed) of domesticating capitalism, promoting the partial return to an agricultural past as a way to overcome the «economic age»: more regulation and cartelization, autarchy, predominance of a rural middle class, etc. In this second case, it is hard to avoid agreeing with Nicholas Varsanyi's argument that Sombart's reasoning becomes basically «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). Albeit in more moderate record, comparable considerations are produced also by Friedrich Lenger: it was deeply ironic that with 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

Again, however, and far beyond his possible ‘retrograde’ daydreams, or psychological regressions, there is undoubtedly a perennial content and a theoretical surplus in Sombart’s discourse, allowing him to be wholly our interlocutor. In fact, by asking the question of how to satisfactorily contain or ‘embed’ capitalism he unescapably addresses us and becomes our contemporary. In several recent texts, Wolfgang Streeck (2016) underlined the seemingly insuperable difficulty, everywhere and nowadays, of enduringly ‘domesticate’ capitalism, finding a compromise within some ‘mixed economy’ that could safeguard at least the fundamentals of democracy. It is yet to be found a form to prevent these arrangements from being wrecked by capitalism’s ‘viral’ tendency to untangle itself from all imaginable embeddedness or ‘incrustation’, expanding indefinitely into the entire social existence. Sombart, unlike Streeck, 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 so also with God (1937, 194-195). However, the awareness that «capitalism» is an entity with very deep dimensions, including the famous ‘Faustian’ inclination towards unmeasured ambition; and that this may perhaps be controlled, but not completely suppressed; and that this recognition implies trade-offs and choices, including political choices, some of them maybe tragic (in other terms, our collective cultural «polytheism» as Max Weber, following «the elder Mill» (2004, 22), once labelled it): this is something that Sombart’s writings still allows us to obtain easily and with plenty.

In this context, it makes sense to return for a moment, and in conclusion, to the discussions of *Why is there no socialism in the US?* Sombart’s thesis, referred to at the beginning of this paper, should be contrasted with Robin Archer’s (2016) opinion that the quintessential objection to his arguments is to be found in Australia. There would indeed be a very important group of common traits in the North-American and Australian socio-political experiments. Nevertheless, in Australia an important Labour Party was implanted proclaiming socialist ideals (basically like its British analogue), and so it would make sense to reopen the file of Sombart’s study. In his overall assessment, Archer rejects, for example, the ideas concerning the supposed specificity of industrial relations in the US (the alleged superficial generosity of North-American employers), but admits in contrast the existence there of more egalitarianism and a higher social mobility than in Europe<sup>13</sup>. However, he adds, the Australian case is extremely similar to the North-American, including egalitarianism and the presence of a frontier, that is, a huge mass of land available for distribution by white settlers. Why, then, the important difference of trajectories?

From Sombart’s opinions, Archer deems acceptable only the big importance of political machines and the exceptionally high levels of party loyalty, with the transformation of parties into «political churches» (2016, 476). The central explanation was supposedly located elsewhere, and it would imply taking into consideration: a) the manifold cultural diversity (ethnic, religious, etc.) induced by successive waves of immigration, much larger in the US and thus inhibiting labour solidarity in favour of other forms of collective action; b) police repression, which had also been much more intense in the North-American case, killing the possible germs of socialist ideas at the cradle and thus ‘salting the earth’ in the US (perhaps definitively) for socialism. Instead of deep background sociocultural reasons, the tools for the elucidation of US trajectory



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

As it turns out, it is not only about luxury, war and the religious sources of capitalism that Sombart's writings are stimulating and provocative, often raising a vivid intent to refute and overcome them. And this is most certainly the best homage that, one century away, may be made to any author.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The vicinity to Marxist views has arguably hindered Sombart's early academic career. He was also praised in this context by Engels, for allegedly understanding Marx much better than most of the contemporary German academic elite (Plotnik 1937, 33; Gioia and De Nardis 2015).

<sup>2</sup> 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 applying 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).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Merton (1938, 514-515), in the work where he famously extended to science the affinity relationship that Weber posited between capitalism and Protestantism, 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 latter periods. In a partially contrary sense, Fernand Braudel assured that manufactures were only very slowly replaced by factories (1983, 302), and that for example transports remained extremely difficult until very late: in Napoleon's time almost as in Caesar's (Braudel 1983, 357).

<sup>4</sup> 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).

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> Entrepreneurial traits are present in the chess player and the genial doctor: «The art of diagnosis permits not only to heal the sick, but also to succeed in the stock-exchange's speculations» (Sombart 1982, 209). Within Bergson's famous antinomy opposing *homme ouvert* and *homme clos*, the burgher's temperament matches the latter (Sombart 1982, 210). It is receptive, non-expansive; and valuing everything not subjectively, but objectively, he would never understand Cicero when the Roman stated that «what matters is not each one's usefulness, but what one is» (Sombart 1982, 210).

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

<sup>8</sup> For Fanfani, though, the problem was an immediately moral and political one: Catholicism had supposedly promoted industry and honesty in businesses; but it would be also unequivocally separated from the aspects of moral deregulation associated with capitalism. Protestantism's attitude had not been essentially different.

<sup>9</sup> Beyond its connection or not to Judaism, the question of the greater or lesser importance of double-entry bookkeeping has been the subject of interesting debates. Braudel (1983, 573-575) refers it, suggesting that Sombart had overemphasized its importance. Basil Yamey, based on whose work Braudel presents reservations, continues much later (2005) to deny validity to Sombart's position. Carruthers and Espeland (1991), for their part, appreciate above all the rhetorical element associated, or the rationalizing aspect: not exactly the promotion *stricto sensu* of a rationality of conducts, but the effect of persuasion and appeasement of moral objections via the ex-post formal 'balancing' of matters. Registering the various anti-and-pro-Sombart positions, Eve Chiapello (2007) has mostly words of appraisal for Sombart's thesis, the same going for John Ryan (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Be as it may, Sombart's theses on Judaism continue to induce controversy, constituting one of the reasons why he is not included in the sociological canon, according to Grundmann and Stehr (2001). 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), susceptible of being characterized as generically 'pro-Sombart', to be confronted with David Landes (1974), Barth Landheer (1951), Toni Oelsner (1962) and Paul Mendes-Flohr (1976), clearly mapped as 'anti-Sombart'. Gary Abraham (1988) has highlighted above all the proximity of Weber's and Sombart's views. Oelsner is particularly interesting, referring to Wilhelm Roscher the connection of Jews with the legitimization of interest, the invention of the bill-of-exchange and the protection of traders having involuntarily received stolen goods: all false associations, according to Oelsner. She nevertheless stresses that the link of Judaism with a foreigner or «outcast» capitalism is not Sombart's monopoly, being detectable in many of his contemporaries, namely Max Weber (Oelsner 1962, 194, 202; cf. Grundmann and Stehr 2001, 266ff.). Among the voluminous bibliography on this issue, mention is due to Jacobs (1917), Davis (1997), Mell (2007), Bodemann (2014), and Swartz (2020), all prone to suspicion. Somewhat ironically, as early as 1917 Jacobs suggested that Sombart, famous for taking capitalism as the central theme of his research, should be aware that many tendencies so inherent, namely the growing division of labour, played against him in controversies, making virtually impossible for anyone to have sufficient scholarship to master subjects so diverse as theology and economic history. His opinions would necessarily drag the discussion into these various fields, for each of them opposite views being induced, by experts each in his sector surpassing his erudition. Davis' interesting and moving article surveys sources used by Sombart, Gluckel von Hameln's autobiography and Zevi Hirsch Ashkenazi's biography, to draw from these documents very different conclusions. The actually existing Jews arguably had patterns of values, attitudes and behaviours far removed from the squalid portrait of *homines economici* suggested by Sombart's depiction.

<sup>11</sup> Still regarding Max Weber, it should also be noted that, contrary to what Grundmann and Stehr (2001, 264) claim, his position was one of enthusiastic support for the German war effort in 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 seems 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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).

<sup>13</sup> A view to be contrasted with the diagnosis presented by Michaels (2008). For the latter, this notion was long ago reduced to a myth unsupported by factuality. For a US citizen born poor in Chicago in the early 21st century, Berlin would comparatively be a “land of opportunity”.

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