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## Sombart's thought revisited

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### **The Life and The Economy in the Sombartian Analysis of Capitalism. Notes for a Bioeconomic Interpretation of Werner Sombart**

#### **Abstract**

The authors discuss the Sombartian analysis of capitalism from a bioeconomic perspective, paying attention to the relationship between people's lives and economy. The paper focuses on the influence of individual behaviors and values on the genesis and the stabilization of capitalism. The Sombartian analysis is discussed stressing the point that it offers interesting insights to understand the relationship between economy and the everyday life of the people: the spirit of capitalism, luxury and religious beliefs are examples of cultural phenomena from which economy cannot be separated. The thesis of the authors is that the Sombartian analysis through a sociological interpretation of history able to avoid any psychological reductionism puts life at the center of economy.

**Keywords:** Sombart, Biopolitics, Capitalism, Religion, Luxury

### **Classe operaia, roastbeef e apple-pie.**

### **Una rilettura di *Perché negli Stati Uniti non c'è il socialismo?***

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### **Working class, roast beef and apple-pie. Re-reading *Why is there no socialism in the United States?***

#### **Abstract**

In 1906 Werner Sombart, after visiting the United States, wrote a little book about the American working class and its political leaning toward non-socialist perspectives. *Why is there no socialism in the United States?* is written in a pamphlet style, without renouncing to the sociological investigation and the statistical interpretation. According to Sombart, the United States embody the most dynamic essence of the spirit of capitalism, based on the abundance of natural resources and the continuous improvement of a complete rationality in order to organise the industrial world. The American working class receives good wages compared to the German ones, and spends a great part of the salary for

domestic expenses, clothing and food. Workers are generally respected in American society, and their status allows them to hold even important political positions. Workers generally accept capitalistic values, and the existence of a two-party-system in the political field: both parties are engaged to dispute public seats in a permanent race for election. After one hundred and ten years, *Why is there no socialism in the United States?* represents a good starting point to analyse the reality of the American Dream: its cultural creation survived the world wars, the Great Depression, Cold War, generation, gender and ethnic conflicts. In the United States there is no socialism but “Americanism”. As Lipset and Marks (2000) argued, it’s a blend of antistatism, laissez-faire, individualism, populism, and egalitarianism. A blend that deserves to be revisited starting from this little precious book.

**Keywords:** Sombart, working class, socialism, capitalism, Americanism

### **War as social regeneration: Sombart from *The Quintessence of Capitalism to Merchants and Heroes***

Fabio Degli Esposti

p. 41

#### **Abstract**

The essay examines a particular stage of the life and scientific production of Werner Sombart: the years of the First World War. Most biographers of Sombart showed that the German scholar, during these years, remained essentially on the fringe of the debate that took place in Germany, as well in other countries taking part in the war, on the economic and social transformations induced by the conflict, and in particular, on the new role assumed by the State in directing the life of the economy and society. Published in 1915, *Händler und Helden (Merchants and Heroes)* should be primarily considered as a work of propaganda. It is a vicious attack on Britain, seen as the country that had produced a petty and materialistic conception of existence. The topics chosen by Sombart for his polemic, however, summarize many aspects of his previous works on the origins and development of modern economics, and even anticipate some of his reflections – later developed in the second edition of *Modern Capitalism* or in works such as *German socialism* – on the future and the fate of capitalism.

**Keywords:** Werner Sombart, Germany, First World War, War economy, Propaganda

### **Il capitalismo finanziario nei classici delle scienze sociali: Smith, Marx, Weber, Sombart, Veblen**

Guglielmo Forges Davanzati and Angelo Salento

p. 55

**Financial capitalism and classical theories of social sciences: Smith, Marx, Weber, Sombart, Veblen**

#### **Abstract**

The aim of this short paper is to illustrate the importance of the classics of social sciences for the understanding of the genesis and transformation of financial capitalism. In this framework the contribution of Sombart – to which this issue of the review dedicated – has a relevance at least equal to that of his most celebrated contemporaries.

Our hypothesis is that Sombart’s *Der bourgeois*, as well as other classics of sociological thought, can give noteworthy contributions to the understanding of the extraordinary power of social finance operators. We argue that the classics can be queried in two different ways. On the one hand, the classics are so to speak a repertoire of information: they offer, in relation to their time, what particularly qualified witnesses are ordinarily asked. On the other hand, the classics provide a set of indirect evidences: their conceptualizations are themselves affected by the spread of culture and habitus of financial speculation as well as by the emergence of a “financial specificity”, i.e. the genesis of a field of finance, with its own logic and its own relative autonomy.

**Keywords:** Finance, speculation, sociology, capitalism, Sombart

**Amore, lusso e capitalismo. Werner Sombart e la secolarizzazione dell'amore. Come la trasformazione dell'erotismo e del rapporto tra i sessi ha influenzato la nascita del nuovo spirito capitalistico-borghese**

Silvia Fornari

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**Werner Sombart And The Secularization Of Love. How The Transformation Of Eroticism And The Relationship Between The Sexes Has Influenced The Emergence Of The New Capitalist-Bourgeois Spirit**

**Abstract**

Sombart takes the view that changes in the “superstructure” (ideas, religions, and the “metaphysical”) anticipate changes in the “structure”. These, in turn, reinforce and accelerate change in social roles. This paper aims to investigate certain aspects of this complex issue, by offering an interpretation of the development of capitalism and the bourgeois spirit in relation to changes in the relationship between the sexes, beginning with the expansion of hedonic and luxury consumption.

Love and relations between the sexes thus become a privileged field of observation for the examination, through micro-interpersonal relationships, of changes relating to macro-social relations, in particular in societies where the social structure is founded on the institution of the “traditional” family. Sombart effectively highlights the differences between two visions of the world – in simple terms, one might say “pre-bourgeois” and “bourgeois” – and underlines how the birth of “free” and “illegitimate” love implies, at the social level, the emergence of a “new human type.”

**Keywords:** Secularization, Love, Relationship, Sexes, Bourgeois Spirit

**Sombart's *Der Bourgeois*: Economy and Politics in the *Spätkapitalismus***

Vitantonio Gioia and Fabio de Nardis

p. 95

**Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to analyze the work of Werner Sombart starting from his criticism of capitalism and of the bourgeois spirit. In the course of the paper we focus on the so-called conservative turn of Sombart and his gradual distancing from Marxist literature with which he had previously interacted intensively. Our intention is mainly to understand the relationship between the thought of Sombart and some key concepts, such as socialism, liberalism and democracy. As Sombart is essentially a scholar of economics, more than one interesting element can be found in his work in relation to his conception of the ethical state and organic community. We conclude the paper with an attempt to historically contextualize the thought of Sombart who is absolutely a product of his time. In the years when Sombart wrote and worked, the crisis of liberalism and individualism was a fact, discussed in the international scientific community by various scholars of socialist and social-democratic leanings but also by the theorists of liberalism, as well as by authors such as Schmitt and Gentile who explicitly joined Nazi-fascism.

**Keywords:** Werner Sombart, Crisis of liberalism, Organic community, Ethical State, Capitalism, Bourgeois spirit

**Foot steps of man, traces of thought. *Vom Menschen* of Werner Sombart**

Roberta Iannone

p. 117

**Footsteps of man, traces of thought. *Vom Menschen* of Werner Sombart**

**Abstract**

In his work – *Vom Menschen* – Sombart wonders “Who is man?”. This article tries to answer this timeless question, by revisiting some of the key points of the work. Sombart, as well as the author of

this present work, have a similar objective: to deal in scientific terms, not only with the human being but also with his body language, soul and spirit. The purpose is to portray “a human science with a critical edge”, a “science of rational comprehension”. A question arises in relation to the bond between body, soul, and spirit: do they harmoniously constitute man? Or, do they lead to de-humanization? (a certain deprivation of the constitutive essence of man). These key questions are addressed to the following subjects: a) ancestors, in view of which centuries of theoretical elaborations of fundamental anthropology are reviewed; b) *Erfahrungswissen*, which is the experience that leads to knowledge of facts and *Evidenzwissen*, or known evidence, which is the *a priori* knowledge; c) actions and reasons; d) the spirit.

**Keywords:** man/human being, science of rational comprehension, de-humanization, soul, spirit

## **Technology in Sombart’s sociology**

Gennaro Iorio

p. 129

### **Abstract**

This paper outlines Sombart’s thought in respect to technology. After describing the cultural context, the paper presents Chapter XXIX, entitled “The Spirit of Technology”, of his most important work *Modern Capitalism* (Sombart 1902/1972), but mostly we will look at an in-depth study done on the essay “Technology and Culture” of 1911, which Sombart presented to the German Sociology Society at its first congress. The conclusions will emphasize how useful a reflection on technology can be, so as to propose once again original excerpts drawn from the thought of a great nineteenth-century European intellectual.

**Keywords :** Technology, Modernity, Capitalism, Culture, Sombart

## **Talcott Parsons’ Early Essay on Capitalism. An American Interpretation of Werner Sombart and Max Weber**

Mariano Longo

p. 139

### **Abstract**

The paper analyzes Talcott Parsons’ early essay published in two issues of *The Journal of Political Economy* in 1928 and 1929. ““Capitalism” in recent German Literature: Sombart and Weber”, which introduces both Sombart and Weber to the American public. It represents a relevant moment in the development of Parsons as a sociologist. After discussing Parsons’ interpretation of both Sombart’s and Weber’s theories about the origin of Capitalism, the paper gives an interpretation of Parsons’ role in the establishment of Weber as a founding father of sociology and the relative irrelevance of Sombart as a sociological classic.

**Keywords :** Werner Sombart, Max Weber, Capitalism, Modernity, Sociological canon

## **Werner Sombart and his reception in Italy**

Simona Pisanelli

p. 155

### **Abstract**

This article intends to focus on the difficulty encountered by Werner Sombart’s works in gaining a hearing in various Italian intellectual circuits. As is well known, Sombart belonged to the German Historical School of economics, sharing with other scholars of that school the same problems in getting his work known in Italy. Our aim is to explain the reason for this hostile reception.

First of all, we will analyze the factors which generally hindered the spread of the German Historical School in Italy, recognizing in economists like Francesco Ferrara, Idealists like Benedetto Croce and Marxists like Antonio Labriola some of its strongest opponents. We will dwell on the cases of Gustav Schmoller and Max Weber, in order to give two representative examples of the slow and complicated Italian reception of methodological approaches and analytical perspectives which characterized the scientific experience of the German Historical School.

Secondly, we will try to show why Sombart was even less appreciated than other German social scientists, giving the reasons that attracted severe criticism from economists, economic historians and sociologists towards his interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of modern capitalism. Finally, we will show the reasons of the contemporary rediscovery of Sombart and of his works.

**Keywords:** Werner Sombart, German Historical School, Gustav von Schmoller, Max Weber, Methodology of Social Sciences, Italian economists.

## **Sombart and the Jews**

Mauro Protti

p. 183

### **Abstract**

This essay has the purpose of collecting and exposing in synthetic form the main issues which Sombart treats in his book *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, 1911. Sombart defends the view that the Jews have founded modern capitalism, inventing financial practices (such as credit instruments and security interests), thus easing the movement of money and investments (financial intermediation). In this they have been supported by texts (the Bible and its interpretative commentaries) and customary practices between people belonging to Jewish communities and strangers. The resulting form of capitalism is of a financial and commercial type, which Weber distinguishes from and opposes to the 'modern' form of capitalism, based on industry and rational production of goods, and determined by the typical character of Protestant ethics. The juxtaposition between Sombart and Weber sees the former arguing for a historical and conceptual articulation of capitalism that is more complex and articulated than the one posited by the latter. Weber believes that the 'bloc' formed by Jews, strangers and heretics (as opposed to Catholicism, that is, the Protestants) has founded capitalism in its original version, the Jewish form of capitalism, later supported by the English translation of the Bible, urged and authorized by James I, whose influence has powerfully affected the ideological construction of a 'historic' object.

**Keywords:** Modern Capitalism, Sombart, Jews

## **The Notion of Capitalist Evolution in Werner Sombart in the light of the Modern Critiques of the Evolutionary Conceptions**

Sandro Segre

p. 199

### **Abstract**

This essay reconstructs Sombart's evolutionary conception of modern capitalism, focuses on the different stages of capitalist development which Sombart has conceptualized, and evaluates this conception in the light of the current debate on the fruitfulness of the evolutionary accounts of social change. A perusal of Sombart's oeuvre has shown that Sombart's conception of the capitalist social and historical change anticipates modernization theories, while avoiding the fallacies of Merton's and Parsons' functionalism; for Sombart reconstructs the plausible motivations of the actors playing a role in historical change and pursues a multi-factor account of historical change.

**Keywords:** Sombart, modern capitalism, evolutionary notions of social change

## **Werner sombart e il lusso: da una torsione di significato alla sue derive**

Sarah Siciliano

p. 207

### **A Contemporary Perspective Werner Sombart's conceptualisation of Luxury**

#### **Abstract**

How does the “spirit” of capitalism and luxury read from a Sombartian perspective translate into a modern day context?

What legacy has this German scholar, so admired in life, but now almost forgotten, left behind? This paper reflects on what his theories can lend to contemporary analysis and what questions it can raise. The author illustrates how seeing modern day luxury through the eyes Sombart might be productive to understand and appreciate the recent consumer phenomena. The paper will focus primarily on the particular dynamics of the public sphere in an attempt to reflect and explore the cultural and political dimensions of the modern day world.

**Keywords:** luxury, innovation, dynamics, communication, public sphere, convergence

### **The debate between Weber and Sombart on the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism: Author Antikritiken as footnote**

Mariachiara Spagnolo

p. 219

#### **Abstract**

In 1904/05 the first edition of Weber's Protestant Ethics was issued, where the thematic framing is 'uncertain' and not yet completed: religion is linked to a certain kind of ethos (of the economic system) and of ethic (rational), the ethic of «ascetic Protestantism». Around the same years, Sombart outlines the expository path contained in Modern Capitalism, a detailed «picture of the general economic development», which seems to be a 'more serious' work – for its content and set of problems – when compared to the research conducted by his friend and colleague Max Weber. Both scholars view the question of the rise and development of capitalism as a rhythmic research: from the historic origins of the phenomenon, to the elaboration, synthesis and change of the economic process that becomes an autonomous and corrosive force in the modern stage. In the Sombartian discourse, however, the particular 'attitude' of the Protestant ethic as analysed by Weber can be regarded at most as one of the possible forms of heresy that justifies a certain approach (moral/punitive) to money – and not as the only movement which has roused and regulated the economic or capitalistic processes in the strict meaning of economic surplus, profitable and to be reinvested following entrepreneurial logics. Whereas, what the two sociologists have in common is not only the use of sources (almost identical), but the very concept of *Geist* and individual predisposition of the subjects who accept the modes of action of this ordering spirit that gives an ethical/psychological boost to men endowed with charisma or with particular energy.

**Keywords:** Religion, Werner Sombart, Max Weber, Modern Capitalism, Protestant Ethic

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