

Sombart and the Jews

Mauro Protti

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

Sombart’s masterly book dealing with the issue of “the role of the Jews in the construction of capitalism” arose from the need to make this theme explicit in short chapters that might leave room for in-depth analyses, after the quick (and fragmentary) discussion in *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, which proved to be provisional.

Two areas of interest can be used to present the same theme: the first concerns the ‘theory’ of a Jewish economy, in both the Torah and the Talmud, as well as in later texts, linked to the problems of the communities’ actual practice – this area would require a deep knowledge of Hebrew and of the texts, and Sombart did not possess enough of such knowledge, so that sometimes he made mistakes, thus jeopardizing the validity of his treatment. The second area has to do with the relation between the practice of economy and the role it played in the foundational (and developmental) moments of capitalism, and the historical weight that can be assigned to it. We may identify a third area of interest, related to the latter, which can be seen to constitute its basis, and which encompasses the new financial and credit ‘practices’ of economy,

e.g. the cheque or the bill of credit, which were to show a great vitality, although some doubt can be raised about the Jewish origin of such practices (as M. Weber did, by dating them back, not much credibly, to the ancient Germanic law). A more likely candidate for the production of such banking activity can be identified in the Florentine system of monetary credit economy. On the other hand, the economic dynamic rendered 'inevitable' some forms of extended payment, entrusted to the debtor's honesty and fairness, whatever name this practice would take in different cultures or linguistic and geographic areas.

The 'first area' may turn out to be decisive, since on one hand it relies on the sacred texts, while on the other on the factuality attested by a number of historical sources. Although existing, such sources have never been deemed 'interesting' if compared with the doctrine underpinning them. With the exception of Sombart's book, two other works seem to represent unavoidable recent reference texts: one by F. Raphaël¹, and one by J. Attali² – and others which are less wide and organized, or even older. We need to add, anyway, that this theme presents highly ideological implications, supported by a tradition of anti-Semitism which was rather lively during Sombart's times: in the late 1880s, the so-called *Berliner Antisemitismusstreit* (the dispute between F. Treitschke and Th. Mommsen, and other lesser known scholars) and, a few years later in Vienna, the similar attitude taken by K. Lueger, the anti-Semitic politician – who later would become the city Mayor – even if Franz Joseph I was able to 'stop' him twice, followed by the *Dreyfuss Affair*, a form of "patriotic" anti-Semitism that stirred France at the turn of the century and beyond. This anti-Semitic tradition shows to what extent, and following which modes, in the same period of time, the Jews were integrated in the society on an economic as well as social and cultural – somehow also political – level, so that we can provide evidence of the deep conflicts existing under the surface of a 'civil' society.

Certainly, the Jews were able to conquer respectable positions in society, yet by paying a high price, i.e. the detachment from their own religion: from Mendelssohn to Mahler, from Freud to Simmel, and others, many scholars were compelled to convert (mostly to Lutheran Protestantism) the moment they needed to be integrated in the faculty, the teaching or medical staff, or in other liberal professions. Here, I do not intend to outline a history of anti-Semitism, rather to offer a background to Sombart's research, by which he provided an answer (sometimes a little questionable) to the question on the role of the Jews in the history of economic development.

From the treatment of this issue emerges Sombart's substantial divergence from Max Weber³, who supported a 'rigid' version of the relation between religion

¹ F. Raphaël, *Judaïsme et capitalisme: essai sur la controverse entre Max Weber et Werner Sombart*, PUF, Paris 1982. See also the fundamental F. Langer, *Werner Sombart 1863-1941, Eine Biographie*, Beck, München 1994, esp. ch. 9 *Judaismus und Kapitalismus: Von der historischen Soziologie und Rassenanthropologie*, pp. 187-228, notes pp. 446-454.

² J. Attali, *Gli ebrei, il mondo, il denaro. Storia economica del popolo ebraico*, Argo Editrice, Lecce, 2003.

³ M. Weber, *Economia e Società*, Italian translation, Comunità, Milano 1968 (1961), Vol. I, sez. V, ch. 12, spec. pp. 596-607. For the questionable definition of the Jews as a pariah people, see: J. Taubes, "L'origine del popolo giudaico", pp. 209-222 in *Messianismo e cultura*, Italian translation, Garzanti,

and capitalism, by defending a position that excluded the Jews from the rise of modern capitalism, which he believed was based on the industrial production related to the factory, to the work on materials processed following technically organized and rationally structured manufacturing processes. Moreover, besides the manufacturing process, Weber also rationalized the professional relations involving the workers, who were no longer under the systematic protection of the corporations and were present on the labour market as independent subjects, therefore weak on a contractual level, which concerned their services and the social practices associated to them, as well as the wages given them by the company.

Therefore, a double rationalization of labour and production. As much rationality is easily found in the money or credit supplying of the company, representing the “signature” that guaranteed the legality, as well as the juridical and economic rationality of the factory. Defining or identifying the transition from a more urban than rural factory, where services were not well disciplined, to the organized manufactory involving the concentration of workers in one place and the standardization of labour relations and production, can be rather difficult. Likewise, identifying the transition from manufactory to factory, which occurred in different moments depending on the starting point and the place, can be equally complex. Here I don’t mean to retrace this process, rather, to determine the integration of the Jews in this process, which was historically exposed to stretched interpretations as in the case of dogmatic authors such as Weber, who excluded any participation of the Jews in the foundation of modern capitalism, limiting the sphere of their activity to commerce, or to lending money on pledge or personal guarantee.

This area has a lively documented history, continually enriched by news on its development: the small lender, by expanding his activity, would accumulate money enough for a quantum leap, thus granting a loan to the local lord or to his community. Without lingering on the rich records, we can direct our attention to this transition, on the makeup of borrowed assets, which would be used for the construction of a factory, as well as for the establishments of banks which could secure a constant flow of cash. Therefore, can we regard the activity of financial intermediation already as modern capitalism? Or was it simply the remainder of economic practices becoming increasingly marginal that need to be radically rethought of from the point of view of a capitalism based on factory production? Sombart’s stance, in our opinion, is more flexible in this context: more than wasting his time on detailed criticisms, he directed to Weber rather superficial, introductory remarks⁴, which strongly diminished either Weber’s theoretical impact, or his good sense in ascribing or giving credit only to the Protestants, the Calvinists in particular, for the supremacy of religion on the economic order of reality. This reality turns out to be unbelievably diversified in the financial scaffolding that supported it, which, when no one would have expected, would change into paper money, namely, into fiduciary relations, which decided on the lesser importance of metal in economic transactions and credit. Therefore, Weber’s refusal to see the Jew as a capitalistic undertaker seems to be strongly ideological and

Milano 2001, which refers also to Max Weber, *Sociologia delle religioni*, Italian translation, Comunità, Milano 1982, Vol. II, part III, “Il giudaismo antico”, pp. 363-780.

⁴ See F. Raphaël, *Judaïsme et capitalisme*, cit.

prejudiced: the Jew's 'capitalism' is more accurately dimensioned and replaced: the moment of credit occurred between commerce and industry as soon as the former moved beyond the local village market, stretching out towards "foreign" places of economy, and following practices and procedures that were rejected by the Catholic believer who would judge those who carried out such practices to be heretics⁵. The association Jew-stranger-heretic led to "dangerous relations" for the believers' health on the Earth and their salvation in the other world. Yet, this triad conceived differently of the role and the importance of religion practiced according to models that were quite different from Catholic hegemonic models, at least in the first historical phase of "non-modern" capitalism – "modern" as intended by Weber – who, in all this, was unable to grasp the subtle presence of "disenchantment" in preparation. The characters Weber quoted were marginal in the society (and times) they lived in; however, for this very reason they tended to "seep" out of its borders, which were made almost permeable by the systemic crisis that hit the social whole from within, affecting its institutions and the ritualized practices of both civil government and the church.

At the bottom of any heresy or (political and religious) foreignness rested the position of the Jews in the moment of creative reading of the Bible: it was here that even the canonical practices of strangers and heretics were found and justified, and on the Bible was based the more advanced capitalism of Weber's times – Sombart's investigation, published under the title *Why there is No Socialism in the United States*⁶, represents the most demolishing answer to the industrial "only" modernity, made of factories, privileged by Weber as the historical place of origin of a 'respectable' form of capitalism, a kind of *dignitas*, which is to be traced back to the sacred text translated into King James' Authorized Version of the Bible and presented as a sort of "Western Canon" of industrial manufacturing praxis. King James' version of the Bible had a dramatic function, even if it clearly represented a universalized, modernized and 'democratic' version of the original text (by now almost unintelligible to most people), turning out to be the background for Judaism in its more traditional versions, which adhered to the texts recognized as the only valid by the rabbinical tradition.

The nexus between Protestants who adhered to the official English version of the Bible and Jewish world shows how it constituted a handbook for education in modern economics for keen practising people, a foundational text justifying a strong relation between money and industry, well before one can talk in terms of 'modern' capitalism in a Weberian sense: in the best case, the interpret of reality was faced with a form of commercial capitalism; yet, quite often, it was only a predatory, or colonial, adventurous sort of capitalism, and always linked to war⁷. In the Thirty Years' War,

⁵ Cf. W. Sombart, *Il Borghese*, Longanesi, Milano 1978, pp. 185-7, and Id., *Il capitalismo moderno*, edited by A. Cavalli, Utet, Torino 1967, ch. 60 (Eretici), ch. 61 (Stranieri), ch. 62 (Ebrei), pp. 286-305. See M. Appel, *Werner Sombart. Theoretiker und Historiker des modernen Kapitalismus*, Metropolis, Marburg 1992.

⁶ W. Sombart, *Perché non c'è socialismo negli Stati Uniti?*, Italian translation, preface by A. Cavalli, Etas libri, Milano 1975 and the new preface by G. Martinotti, B. Mondadori, Milano 2006.

⁷ Id., *Krieg und Kapitalismus*, Duncker & Humblot, München und Leipzig 1913.

which ended a year after the Westminster Confession of Faith, the production of arms, swords and the first models of cannons, the employment of saddle horses and above all packhorses, military food supply (baggage trains) and so on, represented a fertile ground for a cynical form of capitalism, empirically efficient in producing commodities; an organization⁸ that moved beyond the manufactory, heading towards industry. Strangely enough, Weber did not note all this, whereas Sombart devoted important pages to those who supported these economic processes, the Jews, who during the negotiations Franco-Prussian War, in 1870, financed the military supplying and negotiated the ‘reparations’ between defeated (through Rothschild) and winner (represented by the negotiations by the same person who had financed Bismarck’s political-military project, the banker Bleichroeder).

I don’t think we need to underline the closeness between production and use of money and production and use of industrial goods: surely they are close but not the same thing, and generally it is not their presumed identity to be stated, rather the fact that modern industry took roots in and grew out of the financial system, becoming perhaps its inevitable outlet, just like money and *ad personam* credit, which intertwined with the exercise of international trade, well before the rise of modern capitalism *à la* Weber, even in the high Middle Ages, providing a monetary and credit basis for urban construction, international trade over land and rivers, or overseas, as well as in the Mediterranean basin (just remember the ‘Merchant of Venice’ as exemplary summary of 17th-century anti-Semitism rooted in these highly risky international trading practices over sea)⁹. Within the Mediterranean basin and along its borders were set up the first ‘financial’ communities of Jews who, bound by family relations, built close personal ties between Jewish communities, achieving their success and wealth thanks to the substitute for money, as a documentary evidence of the agreement, which would be honoured as an explicit credit obligation.

It is not clear whether this practice can be ascribed literally to the Biblical text, which asserted the lawfulness of the interest on money loan, and prescribed, however, that interests could be exacted almost exclusively from the ‘stranger’ – that is, from the alien with respect to one’s own community. To this end, see the recommendations on loan in Exodus XXII, 24¹⁰ and Leviticus XXV, 36/38¹¹, where one can read an outline of the ‘double moral’ for which the Jews would be blamed, although forgetting that any community distinguishes the rights recognized to the foreigner from the ones granted to its own members, which are preeminent, since they are recognized to those who belong to the same community; towards those who do not belong to it, the community has no obligation and no bond, which cannot be limited and repealed any time, according to the political and social circumstances that may occur. The Biblical passages mentioned, Sombart wrote, led him to conclude, “it

⁸ *Ibi*.

⁹ See the role of *Casa delle Compre e del Banco di San Giorgio*, Genova 1407, the collection of savings begun in 1408 is discussed in G. Felloni, *1407. La fondazione del Banco di San Giorgio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001.

¹⁰ Pentateuco e Haftarot, edited by Rav Dario Disegni, Giuntini, Firenze 1995, p. 129. (Exodus XXII, 25, in King James’ Version).

¹¹ *Ibi*, p. 209. (36-37, in King James’ Version).

is tradition that teaches us that usury must be practised among strangers” (*nokri*)¹², by granting them loans (W.S. in EVE II, p. 111)¹³ – even if another Biblical passage quoted by Sombart (Deuteronomy XXIII, 20)¹⁴ recommends instead a significant choice, where it reads: «unto the stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury, but not to your brother ».

This different attitude of a “community” (*mishpah*, the clan) towards another would be confirmed, for example, in the reflection suggested by F. Töennies, and reasserted by Weber – while Sombart took it for granted, when he considered the complicate (sometimes contradictory) articulation of localized economic practices, and their different ‘openness’ towards the stranger, that is to say, the foreigner, the occasional guest passing by any territory. Sombart underlined the role and importance of the Jews in the sphere of financial activities, by pointing out «that even before the era of modern capitalism, Jews showed a capacity for adopting its principles»¹⁵ (Weber wrote something similar when he asserted the existence of ‘capitalism’ – and capitalists – before capitalism, as he intended it, actually existed¹⁶: but we need to come to an understanding on the nature of Weberian ‘capitalism’, a problem I have already referred to). The position of the Jews in capitalism, in Sombart’s text is defined by founding it on an overtly individualistic mentality, according to which the single economic actor had to be accountable for his own actions exclusively to himself. This is understandable when one considers the estrangement of the Jew from the corporations, the fact of being explicitly excluded – and, consequently, the Jews ignored the bonds the corporations imposed on their members, namely, restrictive regulations on the type and quality of goods, which were standardized and with prices fixed by the corporation itself: the Jews were able to withstand competition by setting up small shops where they sold a variety of commodities at competitive prices on the market, with the possibility to offer discounts, or payments by instalments, to the customers, basing their trade on advertising (WS, EVE I, p. 201)¹⁷. Meanwhile, the building up of a complex and fragile money and credit mechanism was taking place, which was exposed to the roughness of those times: trade and production increasingly spread and diversified, according to produce and productive localizations, whose distance from one another imposed a high-risk trade. The difficulties in paying were attenuated by the adjustment of a credit dynamics, based on trust, and such trust would turn out to be an essential instrument for the stabilization of trade relations that

¹² *Nokri* is the term that defines the absolute stranger and is used in contrast to *Ger*, defining the stranger who resides temporarily and is protected by the law, while *Toshab* is a stranger with fixed residence.

¹³ W. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, Duncker & Humblot, München und Leipzig 1911. W. Sombart, *Gli Ebrei e la vita economica*, Italian translation, Ed. Ar, Padova, 3 voll. (1980, 1988, 1997). In this instance, vol. 1, p. 111.

¹⁴ Pentateuco and Hafterot, cit., p. 330.

¹⁵ *Ibi*, p. 211.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Protti, *Dello “Spirito del capitalismo” come “ideologia” (Improvvisazioni su un tema weberiano)*, in N. Salamone, *Razionalizzazione, azione, disincanto. Studi sull’attualità di Max Weber*, Angeli, Milano 2008, pp.90-105. In this short essay the author emphasizes the spirit of capitalism existing before the form of capitalism discussed by Weber in *Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism*.

¹⁷ W. Sombart, *Gli ebrei*, cit. vol 1, p. 201. The list of Jewish “prohibitions”, however, is far wider.

were no longer (or not only) based on personal acquaintance with the actors (producers, merchants, and carriers, who also managed investments in transport, occupied important positions in the market – often empiric such as the Lyon Trade Show). In other words, the social actors seen in their individuality, articulated their position by specifying their profiles, rereading and reworking the concept of “business risk”, which was restrained, limited, by incorporating the confidence of the operators in a document which testified objectively to a written commitment, and dictated its fulfilment, regardless of the person who presented the said document for payment (EVE I p.98 and following)¹⁸. Sombart provided a list of different credit instruments, such as, banknotes, endorsable bills of exchange, public debt bonds (redeemed from their personal nature, made deliberately anonymous), securities, that is, stocks and shares attesting a quota in a company owned by a holder. Sombart identified the first credit instruments in the Bible and in the Talmud (EVE, I p. 167, and somewhere else)¹⁹ – these texts refer to “bills payable to the bearer” to whom (in 1582) would be recognized the “legitimacy to start legal action”²⁰ if the commitment written in the document was not fulfilled by the debtor who had issued it.

Moreover, the Jews’ sharp inventiveness, Sombart underlined, allowed the “de-identification” of credit – rendered anonymous, it became simply functional to the transfer of wealth from a holder to another, thus enabling the conveyance of goods between economic actors, without hindering the business because of a temporary or structural, shortage (or lack) of ready cash (during the Middle Ages). The stock-exchange negotiations were also based on trustworthiness²¹, in particular term negotiations²²: in the Stock Exchanges there was a great number of Jewish business mediators or, more generally, “strangers” involved in the commerce of shares, and in the speculation related to the financial aspect of the industry. The Jews have always been accused of this lively activity and this charge has deeply distorted the social perception of their image. The statistic data confirm their predominance in stock exchange speculation activity and in bank financial activity, yet this information is not entirely ‘decisive’ and is often manipulated by the anti-Semites’ common and bitter argument, which has a long tradition initially based on religious anti-Judaism and, at a later stage, on a certain mediocre view in trading and financial economic practices.

Leaving the religious aspect aside, as it would require a rather articulated treatment, I intend to point out to some dimensions of everyday ‘ordinary’ anti-Semitism: in many pages Sombart reported the resentful attitude of the merchant who saw his business drastically downsized when coping with the innovative practices of the Jewish merchant, and the complaints of these traditional traders would be heard in the medieval towns as well as in later market places.

During the Thirty Years’ War, such grievances became even threatening, although, more than often, the local authorities hushed up the complaints by stressing

¹⁸ W. Sombart, *Gli Ebrei e la vita economica*, cit., 1 p. 98 and following.

¹⁹ *Ibi*, vol. 1, p. 167.

²⁰ *Ibi*, vol. 1, p. 119.

²¹ *Ibi*, vol. 1, p. 127.

²² *Ibi*, vol 1, p. 133.

the usefulness of the Jews for economic development. The same lords who, without any scruples, expelled the Jews from small towns (obviously seizing their riches with some specious justification), and who did not worry too much about calling them back shortly after by stating that the economy could not hold up without their financial contribution (such as investments and loans by the Jewish community). The same fear of the Jews, and the resulting hostility, were rooted in the set of knowledge of the individuals in the community. The administrator of the nobles was often a Jew, and almost always the physician and the surgeon were Jews. The predominance of Jews in the social competition represented a crucial problem when the needs of both citizens and country people were met with the scarcity of money and the difficulties in obtaining credit: it was almost exclusively the Jews who, by granting loans, provided for the necessities of closed economies, almost totally devoid of mutual productive relations, since the poor competition was regulated by a tradition which was by no means innovative. To these rather quick notes, we may add a consideration of a Weberian tone, suggested by Heinz Ludwig²³, who believed that the collective stereotypy that raged against the figure of the Jew could be associated with a typization of the figure of the Jew advanced substantially by Sombart. This typization means that the Jew described in Sombart's pages bears all the signs of an excessive work on the image of a social actor, by which his 'ideal' character is diminished (in the sense of the typical ideal of Weber's methodology), thus producing a deformed image of the Jew, and depicting him with caricature strokes: the iconography²⁴ in art and in literature shows images which support this statement with plenty of material. This social stereotypy permeates the descriptions of the basic features of the Jew, who was hardly considered as a non-problematic subject that appears in paintings from the Middle Ages onwards; and in these paintings the Jew practises professions which tend to stigmatize him: the money changer, the small money lender, the usurer, even the pedlar, the lower level merchant who does not show the positivity exalted by the corporations.

The same notion of the Jews as a 'pariah' people put forward by Weber²⁵, who was by no means an anti-Semite, but who recognized a people's situation of serious

²³ H. Ludwig, "Sombart and the Jews" in J. Backhaus (Ed.), *Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Social Scientist*, Metropolis, Marburg 1996, pp. 205-10.

²⁴ Cf. G. Ferri Piccaluga, "Ebrei nell'iconografia del 400" in *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, third series, Vol. 52, N. 2/3, 1987.

²⁵ On this idea, see M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, p. 599 (on the double moral of the pariah people) and p. 493 and sq. For other questionable considerations, [after-dinner chats and bleary Sunday reflections?], p. 506, on "pariah intellectualism", linked to 'devout' Jews' intellect – and so on, talking nonsense: «The forms concerning credit instruments and capitalistic associations [...] are not of typical Jewish origins. They are much more likely [?] to have been Syrian-Byzantine institutions of common Oriental law deriving from Babylon. (...) Other forms [which ones?] were in part Occidental and medieval creations, and at least in part [again: which one?] with some specifically Germanic infusions of influence», p. 598. Isn't it too much to imagine Arminius or his grandson writing a check? A reply by F. R aphael, "Die Juden als Gastvolk in Werk Max Webers", pp. 224-260, in W. Schluchter (Hrsg.), *Max Webers Studie  ber das antike Judentum*, Surkhamp, Frankfurt a.M., 1981, a negative comment on Weber on the concept of pariah, see, Julius Guttman, "Max Webers Soziologie des antiken Judentums", first edition in a journal 1925, now in Schluchter pp. 289-326, and E. Otto, *Max Webers Studien des antiken Judentums*, Mohr Siebeck, T bingen 2002.

social, almost ontological, marginalization, which was even justified by a fine theologian such as Jacob Taubes²⁶, testifies to an activity of ‘advanced typologization’, often shared by several scholars still today. Sombart himself was charged of anti-Semitism probably because he had extremized his work on typology²⁷, in a context that was unable to realize that his was just a methodological operation and did not imply his complicity with the Nazi ideology.

Surely, although Sombart’s dissertation contains some extremely questionable – if not quite deplorable – passages (especially in vol. III), it does not mean that it can be easily dismissed as a gesture of condescending scorn. We must not forget that his book, *the Jews and Modern Capitalism*, at least until the 1930s, and even later, was regarded as a pro-Semitic text, also (strangely?) by a number of Jewish students who attended his lessons either at Breslau, or later at Berlin, as well as by English-speaking readers²⁸. The only test that creates a sort of curious unease is the short *Judentaufen*²⁹, a booklet collecting numerous memories of Jews who often converted for economic or socially justified reasons.

To this booklet we may add some unacceptable pages (from any point of view, also in their scientific style), contained in *Deutscher Sozialismus*³⁰, a later opportunistic text published in 1934, which represents an awkward and unconvincing attempt to reconcile his own social philosophy with Nazism: this happened after Sombart had shut down the journal *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, a gesture made so as to prevent Nazism from appropriating the glorious institution, as had already happened to other journals which had submitted to the regime, a choice that brought to the indignant decision of the German university circles (expressing convinced and hostile opinions still today) to distance themselves from him. We need to say, however, that his last 1938 publication, *Vom Menschen*³¹, is a wide treatment of philosophical anthropology, supported by sound historical/literary documentation, which does not contain any deferent attitude towards Nazism, or criticism of the Jew in particular (quoted only once in positive terms). An image of the Jew described in decisively appreciative terms can be found in the above quoted *Why there is no socialism in the United States*, published in 1906. Sombart’s answer to this curious question coincides with the belief that the USA had already reached the highest level of capitalism and that it was theologically founded on ‘Weberian’ assumptions. Here, however, the

²⁶ J. Taubes, “Die Entstehung des jüdischen Pariavolkes” in K. Engisch, B. Pfister, J. Winckelmann, *Max Weber*, Berlin, Duncker-Humblot, 1996, pp. 185-194.

²⁷ W. Sombart, *Deutscher Sozialismus*, Buchholz u. Weißwange, Berlin-Charlottenburg 1934, Italian trans. *Il socialismo tedesco*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1941. On this issue, cf. F. Reheis, “Return to the Grace of God. Werner Sombart’s Compromise with National Socialism”, pp. 173-191, and also R. Rieß, “Werner Sombart under National Socialism, A first Approximation”, ibi, pp. 193-210, both essays in J. Backhaus (Ed.), *Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Social Scientist*, cit.

²⁸ W. Sombart, *The Jews and modern capitalism*, with notes by M. Epstein Fisher/Union, London 1930, American Edition Free Press, Glancoe 1951 with a new introduction by F. Hoselitz, same text with introduction (pp. XV-CXXV), by S.Z. Klausner, Transaction, New Brunswick, London 1987.

²⁹ W. Sombart, *Judentaufen*, G. Müller Verlag, München 1912.

³⁰ Id., *W. Sombart, Deutscher Sozialismus*, cit.

³¹ W. Sombart, *Vom Menschen. Versuch einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Anthropologie*, Buchholz & Weisswange, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1938. Cf. also the Introduction by R. Iannone, *Umano, ancora umano. Per un’analisi dell’opera “Sull’Uomo” di Werner Sombart*, Bonanno, Roma-Palermo 2013.

Protestants took the place of the Jews, as it were, in the construction of the explanation, reproducing and exalting their economic ideology, which was rooted and justified by referring to the Bible, a text to which the Protestants constantly resorted, willing to display their familiarity with the text without necessarily being assimilated in their practices to the Jews. Actually, the alleged hostility towards the Jews, identified as significant exponents of capitalism, was not specifically addressed to them, but involved *all* the actors of that gigantic productive mechanism that is capitalism itself, towards which Sombart did not spare a disdainful attitude, which found its justification in the firm belief that it showed the worst side of society, that is, the deliberate capacity to exploit those who work (not only by taking advantage, almost casually, of the occasions that arise for the business magnate), those who are in a socially exposed position, economically insubstantial, culturally deprived and religiously manipulated in a situation of minority and exclusion. Yet this attitude was referred also to a certain “nostalgia” (*Sehnsucht*) for the community, and this highly justifies Sombart’s hostility towards a mechanism/system, capitalism, which was definitely established.

Such exclusion is doubled in the case of the Jew who took part in a wide project of social claim which might overcome this shared marginality, so that the ‘pariah’ Jew did not play the game, did not yield to some theological demand condemning him, all the more so to an anti-Judaism based on unreliable texts (Maupassant’s account attests to the selectivity of an ‘unmotivated’ recalling and to a vague context to refer to), grounded in manipulated memories of uncertain and unverifiable events. Christian theologians had stigmatized ‘Christ’s murderers’ for centuries; yet, in their condemnation of usury, they proved narrow-minded and resentful, devoid of that tragic greatness they claimed, and, when dealing with the economic practices of the Jews, they were profoundly extraneous to a historical context characterized by essential changes³².

The Jews had spread in a basically agricultural society – with just a few traces (with some documented exceptions) of urban settlements – articulated in small trading and some forms of handicraft, and were gradually able to build a dynamic expansive economy, capable of producing wealth (although concentrated in limited sectors of the population). The Jews were competitive, and their trade involved the invention of practical mathematics; they were skilled at exercising a constant and rational control of resources, at using and employing money, credit, and making investments which were not only financial, and were first poured into commercial and later industrial economy, rooted in their creative genius. Such furious productive dynamic would bring about a sort of social response in a minor key, and of an imitative type: the creation of *ad hoc* banks (e.g. Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 1476) aimed at demolishing or limiting Jewish financial operations was not as strikingly successful as the institutional bodies of the Church had expected, while apparently the

³² Cf. B. Nelson, *The Idea of Usury. From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1949, Italian translation, *Usura e cristianesimo*, Sansoni, Firenze 1967, esp. “Introduzione” pp. 19-25 and ch. 1, pp. 27-51. In note 3, p. 21, Nelson questions Sombart’s stance on the meaning of the deutereconomic precept in the Middle Ages, while he considers Weber’s pages in *PE* as “interesting observations”.

great Florentine bankers (Strozzi, Medici, and others) were never affected by Jewish competition.

Sombart did not discuss German anti-Semitism in the period after the First World War, feeling a certain unease which, around 1930, would become a real problem that he was unable to solve: an explicit admiration for the Jews (since its publication, and later, in the early 1930s, in England and the USA, his book on the Jews and economy was considered as a pro-Semitic text)³³, and an unbearable unease about a modern, capitalistic world, which declared sarcastically the end of ‘human’ relations that were still cultivated in the last pockets of communities becoming increasingly marginal.

While studying capitalism, Sombart was simultaneously engaged in its demolition by weakening its justification, thus depriving it of its content: the same fate awaited the Jews, seen by Sombart as authors, or co-authors, of capitalism, since they shared its ‘coldness’ and a calculating mind which could reduce a lively social reality to numeric dimensions and abstract figures. Strangely enough, this Sombartian path distanced him more and more from the strong core of the analysis he had carried out in 1813, so that his work fell back on less significant issues: from names that attested the detachment of the Jews from their roots, or the displacement from their world; the same detachment that for centuries has supported the sometimes integrative, and more often marginalizing, processes of the Jew and his society. The text on the future of the Jews³⁴ still represented a praise to their productive and economic qualities, to their entrepreneurial capacities translated into a political project, yet this praise was tempered by the hope that Zionism, a political and social movement Sombart approved of, sharing its intentions and advocating the transfer of the Jews to the East (“Everywhere but not in my garden”), and represented a sort of revocation of a positive judgement that Sombart had expressed clearly in his book on *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*. As if to say: I can feel admiration for the Jews but can also admit that I never found them likable.

Too much has been said about Sombart’s alleged anti-Semitism; there are a number of publications highlighting and stigmatizing it, even when his anti-Semitism may be ascribed not so much to racial or social hate, as to the colloquial stupidity of everyday speeches on the Jews. The same academic setting where he grew up fomented bewildering discourses, totally below the mental qualities of those who pronounced them, and certain unfortunate remarks are not likely to be found in published works, rather in letters written to friends and colleagues, in memories of ‘awkwardness’ and in social association (sometimes unavoidable, such as in official academic events) with disgraceful persons. Nonetheless, in his most controversial book, *German Socialism*, there are no manifestly anti-Semitic expressions, or statements leading to similar behaviours, supported by a racial choice translated into politics. Sombart’s figure is so contradictory and, to some extent, unreliable, in some instances compromised by forced, or politically induced, questionable choices, which, however, would have an impact on his scholarly figure³⁵. In a 2001 article, *Why Is*

³³ Cf. W. Sombart, *The Jews and modern capitalism*, cit.

³⁴ W. Sombart, *Die Zukunft der Juden*, Duncker & Humblot, München-Leipzig 1912.

*Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?*³⁶, the two authors reply by remembering this Sombartian matter that was nothing to be proud of – but already in the 1960s there was a denigrating attention towards him³⁷ mostly from a political point of view, and also recently at least one shrill voice deploring him has been raised: the voice of the already quoted Attali, who proposes an incredibly superficial analysis of Sombart's work (using the same hostility he addresses to Weber). Without neglecting his careless and unacceptable political drifts, I think that the time has come to analyse his work with the seriousness and accuracy that, in our opinion, he deserves. The names of authors or editors of works on Sombart, such as Cavalli, Segre, Backhaus, Lenger, have opened up the way for a consideration *sine ira ac studio* of his work, in which I appreciate the secular spirit, the width and depth of a researcher's look, able to come to terms with great adversaries such as Weber.

Bibliografia

Appel M.

- *Werner Sombart. Theoretiker und Historiker des modernen Kapitalismus*, Metropolis, Marburg 1992.

Attali J.

- *Gli ebrei, il mondo, il denaro. Storia economica del popolo ebraico*, Argo Editrice, Lecce, 2003.

Felloni G.

- *1407. La fondazione del Banco di San Giorgio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001.

³⁵ Sombart retired in 1931, but kept a private teaching position (*Privatdozent*) until 1938. When the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie and the Verein für Sozialpolitik were forced to close down, respectively in 1933 and 1936, Sombart lost his position as President of both associations, and was compelled to operate a cultural and political retrenchment. In 1933 he was accepted as a member of the Akademie für Deutsches Recht and in 1934 published *Deutsches Sozialismus* (here cited at the note 27), in which he declared himself not hostile (*nicht feindlich*) to Nazism (cf. the Preface: Vorwort, p. XII; Italian translation: *Il socialismo tedesco*, cit., p. 7). Still in 1934, Sombart assented to the appeal addressed to the German scientist to join the Hitler movement (*Aufruf der Deutschen Wissenschaftler hinter Hitler*). His was perhaps a decision he could not help making, given Germany's political context of those days. Nonetheless, the Nazi regime made him a marginal person anyway; for, besides other reasons, Sombart published in 1938 his work *Vom Menschen*, which was – as told before – anything but deferring to the regime or anti-Semitic. On these events see in the work by F. Lenger (which was already cited in note 1), the chapter XV, pp. 358-387, notes at the pages 495-504; see also the introductory work by O. Rammstedt, *Deutsche Soziologie 1933-1945*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1986. There is however a very large bibliography on German sociology between the two World Wars.

³⁶ R. Grundmann, N. Stehr, *Why is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?*, in *Journal Classical Sociology*, vol. 1(2), 2001, pp. 257-287.

³⁷ W. Krause, *Sombarts Weg vom Kathedersozialismus zum Faschismus*, Rütten & Loening, Ost-Berlin, 1962.

Ferri Piccaluga G.

- "Ebrei nell'iconografia del 400" in *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, third series, Vol. 52, N. 2/3, 1987.

Grundmann R., Stehr N.

- *Why is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?*, in *Journal Classical Sociology*, vol. 1(2), 2001, pp. 257-287.

Guttman J.,

- "Max Webers Soziologie des antiken Judentums", first edition in a journal 1925, now in Schluchter pp. 289-326.

Krause W.

- *Sombarts Weg vom Kathedersozialismus zum Faschismus*, Rütten & Loening, Ost-Berlin, 1962.

Langer F.

- *Werner Sombart 1863-1941, Eine Biographie*, Beck, München 1994, ch. 9 *Judaismus und Kapitalismus: Von der historischen Soziologie und Rassenanthropologie*, pp. 187-228, notes pp. 446-454.

Ludwig H.

- "Sombart and the Jews" in J. Backhaus (Ed.), *Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Social Scientist*, Metropolis, Marburg 1996, pp. 205-10.

Otto E.

- *Max Webers Studien des antiken Judentums*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2002.

Nelson B.

- *The Idea of Usury. From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1949, Italian translation, *Usura e cristianesimo*, Sansoni, Firenze 1967, esp. "Introduzione" pp. 19-25 and ch. 1, pp. 27-51.

Pentateuco e Haftarat, edited by Rav Dario Disegni, Giuntini, Firenze 1995, p. 129. (Exodus XXII, 25, in King James' Version).

Protti M.

- "Dello "Spirito del capitalismo" come "ideologia" (Improvvisazioni su un tema weberiano)", in N. Salamone, *Razionalizzazione, azione, disincanto. Studi sull'attualità di Max Weber*, Angeli, Milano 2008, pp.90-105.

Rammstedt O.

- *Deutsche Soziologie 1933-1945*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1986.

Räphael F.

- "Die Juden als Gastvolk in Werk Max Webers, pp. 224-260, in W. Schluchter (Hrsg.), *Max Webers Studie über das antike Judentum*, Surkhamp, Frankfurt a.M., 1981.

Raphaël F.

- *Judaïsme et capitalisme: essai sur la controverse entre Max Weber et Werner Sombart*, PUF, Paris 1982.

Reheis F.

- "Return to the Grace of God. Werner Sombart's Compromise with National Socialism", pp. 173-191.

Rieß R.

- "Werner Sombart under National Socialism, A first Approximation", ibi, pp. 193-210, both.

Sombart W.

- *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, Duncker & Humblot, München und Leipzig 1911. W. Sombart, *Gli Ebrei e la vita economica*, Italian translation, Ed. Ar, Padova, 3 voll. (1980, 1988, 1997), vol. 1, p. 111.

Sombart W.

- *Judentaufen*, G. Müller Verlag, München 1912.

Sombart W.

- *Die Zukunft der Juden*, Duncker & Humblot, München-Leipzig 1912.

Sombart W.

- *Vom Menschen. Versuch einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Anthropologie*, Buchholz & Weisswange, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1938. Cf. also the Introduction by R. Iannone, *Umano, ancora umano. Per un'analisi dell'opera "Sull'Uomo" di Werner Sombart*, Bonanno, Roma-Palermo 2013.

Sombart W.

- *Deutscher Sozialismus*, Buchholz u. Weißwange, Berlin-Charlottenburg 1934, Italian trans. *Il socialismo tedesco*, Vallecchi, Firenze 1941.

Sombart W.

- *The Jews and modern capitalism*, with notes by M. Epstein Fisher/Union, London 1930, American Edition Free Press, Glancoe 1951 with a new introduction by F. Hoselitz, same text with introduction (pp. XV-CXXV), by S.Z. Klausner, Transaction, New Brunswick, London 1987.

Sombart W.

- *Il capitalismo moderno*, edited by A. Cavalli, Utet, Torino 1967, ch. 60 (Eretici), ch. 61 (Stranieri), ch. 62 (Ebrei), pp. 286-305.

Sombart W.

- *Perché non c'è socialismo negli Stati Uniti?*, preface by A. Cavalli, Etas libri, Milano 1975 and the new preface by G. Martinotti, B. Mondadori, Milano 2006.

Sombart W.

- *Krieg und Kapitalismus*, Duncker & Humblot, München und Leipzig 1913.

Sombart W.

- *Il Borghese*, Longanesi, Milano 1978, pp. 185-7,

Taubes J.

- "Die Entstehung des jüdischen Pariavolkes", in K. Engisch, B. Pfister, J. Winckelmann, *Max Weber*, Berlin, Duncker-Humblot, 1996, pp. 185-194.

Taubes J.

- "L'origine del popolo giudaico", pp. 209-222, in *Messianismo e cultura*, Garzanti, Milano 2001,

Weber M.

- *Economia e Società*, Comunità, Milano 1968 (1961), Vol. I, sez. V, ch. 12, spec. pp. 596-607.

Weber M.

- *Sociologia delle religioni*, Comunità, Milano 1982, Vol. II, part III, "Il giudaismo antico", pp. 363-780.

Weber M.

- *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, p. 599, p. 493

