

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

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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

Introduction

A hundred years after the publication of *The Quintessence of Capitalism*, Werner Sombart continues to attract the interest of sociologists, economists, and historians. This is especially true for Italy, where interest in his work has only subsided even following the Second World War¹, when Sombart has generally lost the centre of the stage in the history of social and economic thought. Though there might be several reasons for this, a plausible one appears to be his entanglement with the Nazi regime, however real or, we shall see, apparent.

As Sombart claimed on the occasion of his 1933 visit to Pisa, fifty years after being a student at that university, he saw himself as an historian, an economist and a sociologist². Historians, particularly economic historians, are indeed indebted to Sombart for his long-time reflection on the origin, rise and future of capitalism, which was actually the main theme of his life as a scholar.

¹ To name but three, let us mention, in chronological order: Ragionieri 1960; Barbieri 1964; Rizzo 1974. Notice, however, that several studies have been published in the last two decades, e.g.: vom Brocke 1987; Backhaus 1996; and, importantly, Lenger 1994.

² Sapori 1944, p. 16.

Unlike his father, who was both a successful farmer, industrialist, and a politician (a member of the Prussian Landtag first and of the Reichstag later), Sombart never took any active part in politics. However, at some points he was bound to play a political role, especially at some crucial times in German domestic and international life. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, when a lively debate arose among the German Social-democrats on Edward Bernstein's "revisionist" thesis³; or, several decades later, when he tried to influence the economic choices of National Socialism, giving his version of what socialism should mean for Germany. But with no success, we may want to add.

In these brief reflections, however, we would like to concentrate on other years, also of great importance: the years of the First World War. The Great European War, long-awaited and imagined by generals, politicians and intellectuals of the great powers, came at an especially crucial time in Sombart's work. These were the years in which he had just published his preparatory monographs to the second edition of *Modern Capitalism*, on which he had been working for years. For those who deal with military matters the obligatory reference is to *War and capitalism (Krieg und Kapitalismus)*, even though the two best known monographs are *Luxury and capitalism (Luxus und Kapitalismus)* and, crucially, *The Quintessence of capitalism (Der Bourgeois)*, to which we will return later.

Sombart and the War

Contrary to Chief of Staff plans and public expectations, the conflict that begun in the summer of 1914 proved to be quite "new": that is, it didn't turn out to be a series of huge pitched battles and massive bloodshed, intended to lead to a quick victory of either party. The war became instead an exhausting trench warfare, where the human factor slid in the background and the material one came to the forefront. Already in the autumn 1914 war had become an economic war, in which the efficiency of industrial equipment and the ability to mobilize all the resources of the economic system to meet the needs of war production became of utmost importance. At the same time, the government had to maintain adequate standards of living for both soldiers at the front, and civilians at home. Thus, the final outcome of the conflict was determined by the sheer fact that Germany and its allies weren't able to meet this double challenge adequately.

It is very interesting to note that the various belligerent countries, although starting from different institutional and economic situations, adopted rather similar solutions in terms of organization of the war production, the supply and distribution of raw materials, the control and rationing of food resources. As some scholars have observed, modern economies were usually able to cope with this task much more effectively than the most backward ones⁴.

³ Lenger, pp. 88-93.

⁴ Broadberry, Harrison 2005.

It is worth highlighting that it was a gradual process, proceeding by trial and error. It went on for the whole duration of the war, and was therefore accompanied by a lively debate in the public opinion of the belligerent countries on the most appropriate solutions to be adopted. Moreover, the discussion also concerned the convenience of retaining at least part of these new organizations in the hard phase of transition from war economy to peace-time economy, and, perhaps, even after the restoration of “business as usual”.

As is only natural, the debate also attracted the attention of the German public opinion: The *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, the prestigious journal of historical, economic and social studies directed by Werner Sombart, Max Weber and Edgar Jaffè, soon became one of the most important loci of discussion, and a fundamental observatory on German war economy. It published several monographs on the economic effects of the war and, importantly, a long and well-documented column, the *Sozialpolitische Chronik*, edited by its editor-in-chief, Emil Lederer⁵. However, it is important to note that from 1914 to 1919 the journal didn't publish any contribution by Sombart on the issue. Additionally, there is no mention of the publication of *Merchants and Heroes (Händler und Helden)*, Sombart's fierce anti-British propaganda pamphlet⁶.

Though, as suggested by his correspondence with Max Weber, at that time Sombart was no longer comfortable in his position of co-director since he disagreed with the line and views taken by the magazine⁷, the silence is still quite strange. One would indeed expect to find Sombart at the forefront of the debate on the changes occurred in the economies of the belligerent countries, and particularly in Germany, due to the compelling needs of war.

Although we cannot go into detail, it is worth mentioning in this regard the creation, following the proposals put forth by the leader of the AEG Walther Rathenau⁸, of the *War Raw Materials Department (Kriegsrohstoffabteilung)* in autumn 1914, or the creation of special agencies responsible for the resolution of other crucial issues for the war economy: for instance, the *Weapons and Munitions Procurement Office (Waffen- und Munitionsbeschaffungsamt, Wumba)*, or the *War Office of Food (Kriegsernährungsamt, Kea)*, later part of the *War Office (Kriegsamt)*⁹.

The debate on the war economy saw the passionate participation of economists and sociologists, such as Alfred Weber, Max's younger brother, or Johann Plenge, that is, many of Sombart's friends and colleagues: as we have seen, it stretched to include discussion of what would have been the future economic order of

⁵ Degli Esposti 2008; also, Zunkel 1974. Emil Lederer, who moved to the United States after 1933 because of his Jewish origins, is best known for his essay about totalitarianism, *The State of the masses* (1939).

⁶ Sombart 1915.

⁷ Max Weber to Werner Sombart (30 July 1915), in *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, Band 9 (Herausgegeben von Gerd Krumeich und M. Rainer Lepsius): *Briefe 1915-1917*, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 2008, pp. 79-81.

⁸ Rathenau 1916. It is the text of a long lecture delivered in front of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft 1914” in December 1915.

⁹ For more, see the seminal work Feldman 1966.

the German State and, more generally, of capitalist economies¹⁰. Taking part, however, were not only social scientists, but also top figures from the world of economics, entrepreneurs and company managers. To take one well known example, consider Walther Rathenau's reflections as *The new economy (Die neue Wirtschaft)*, published towards the end of the war. They are only part of a wider discussion, comprising e.g. "Prussian" solutions put forth by one of the chief managers of the AEG, Wichard von Moellendorff, in his 1916 work, significantly entitled *The German communitary economy (Deutsche Gemeinwirtschaft)*¹¹.

Sombart, however, seems to keep away from the debate. Of course in those years he was probably working on the second edition of *Modern Capitalism*, certainly not a work on current political issues. *Merchants and Heroes* seems to have been his one and only attempt at contributing to the debate on the future of German economy and society. At best, however, the pamphlet went unnoticed, at worst, it was pushed aside as a fiasco: in his book *The liberation of nations (Die Befreiung der Nationen, 1917)*¹², Karl Kautsky, the leader of the German Social Democracy, dismissed the pamphlet as "a booklet that has earned the palm among the burlesque performances of our scholars". As we have seen, this was also the attitude held by the magazine for which he was an editor-in-chief.

Intellectuals with the helmet

Admittedly, the negative attitude of Sombart's contemporaries (not only Kautsky, but also Max Weber, among others)¹³ is largely well-grounded. Several parts of Sombart's pamphlet are frankly irritating, in spite of an often obviously corrosive and brilliant style, to be mostly found when expressing a harsh criticism of English culture and society. Our focus, however, is on cultural equipment behind Sombart's controversy and on the last section of the pamphlet, particularly the passages in which he addresses the consequences of the war, analyzing the opportunities that were opening up to Germans.

It is immediately clear that Sombart "went to war" in the same way as many other European intellectuals of his time did: with the "weapons" at their disposal, bending them to the needs of the moment. For example, Sir Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes took leave of his readers in *His Last Bow* (1917) capturing a dangerous German spy, not without having first passed him fake war plans, further damaging the enemy. To quote another example from popular fiction, take the British sailors of *The*

¹⁰ Winkler 1974.

¹¹ Rathenau 1917 and 1918; von Moellendorff 1916.

¹² Karl Kautsky 1917, pp. 39-41. About in the same terms had also expressed the most important magazine of Italian socialism, «Critica sociale», which talking about the ongoing war as the "war of Nietzsche", observed that Sombart believed this interpretation perfectly founded: «Vi furono e vi sono però anche dei tedeschi, che si sono appropriata la tesi degli inglesi: solo che per essi è gloria quel che per gli altri è infamia. Anche un notissimo economista di Berlino, parlando di eroi e di mercanti, oppose l'eroe nietzscheiano al mercantilismo inglese, Federico Nietzsche a Herbert Spencer». Sacerdote 1916, pp. 10-12.

¹³ See the already cited letter by Max Weber: *Max Weber to Werner Sombart (30 July 1915)*.

Land That Time Forgot (1918) by Edgar Rice Burroughs (or, importantly, his slightly flattering inclusion of Americans in a story that takes place in 1916, that is when the United States were still neutral). The man who created Tarzan shows them at war with the evil and treacherous German submariners in a remote island inhabited by dinosaurs.

Changing literary register and zooming in on Germany, we may recall the reflections on the relationship between culture and civilization in the *Gedanke im Kriege*, by Thomas Mann. The great German writer saw *Kultur* as not meant to be opposed to barbarism: indeed – he wrote provocatively – *Kultur* was often “elegant savagery”. *Kultur* was cohesion, style, form, attitude, taste, a particular spiritual organization of the world which was characterized by adventurousness, wildness, sometimes even profanity; it was bloody and frightening. *Zivilisation*, by contrast, involved reason, explanation, morality, skepticism: in short, spirit. And spirit was civil, bourgeois: it was the enemy of passions, anti-heroic, often anti-ingeniousness.

As for the *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*), the title might seem self-deprecating, but it was not so. According to Mann, politics fully belonged to the sphere of civilization: it implied belief in democracy, abstractness and individuality-denial. Being non-politic meant being undemocratic, but Mann was not afraid to embrace these positions.

Georg Simmel in his *The war and the spiritual decisions* (*Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen*, published in 1917 as a re-elaboration of a series of conferences held in autumn 1914) also reiterated themes already treated in his most celebrated work, *The Philosophy of Money* (*Philosophie des Geldes*, 1900). In times of peace – wrote Simmel – individuals relied mainly upon themselves, while relationships and social conditioning seemed to have a minor role to play. Conversely, with the exceptional conditions raised by the war, these strong ties emerged clearly: individuals felt part of a supra-individual entity, and responsible for it. After so much uncertainty and confusion, with the war individuals finally found new forms of integration in the social space. This way, the war had proved to be almost providential to counter the clear emergence of an increasingly materialistic “mammonism”¹⁴.

From pre-war works to *Merchants and Heroes*

And finally returning to Sombart: how does *Händler und Helden* reflect his previous production? Is there very little of it or not?

Surely there is a lot, but we shouldn't look into the above mentioned *War and Capitalism*. This is surely a study of great depth, well documented and providing annotations of great interest on the role of war and modern military structures and on the development of capitalism. It is a book that an historian of economics can still read with profit.

Others, instead, are the references which we'd better look into: in particular, studies such as *Why is there no socialism in the United States* (*Warum gibt es in den*

¹⁴ Koester and Watier in Mommsen 1996.

Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?, 1906), *Culture and Technique (Kultur und Technik*, 1911) and, of course, *The Quintessence of Capitalism (Der Bourgeois*, 1913). These are essays in which, few years before the war, Sombart developed an openly critical position against modern capitalism and its developments.

It is our opinion, however, that there are also several substantial differences. The reflections in *Why is there no socialism in the United States* show a firm line of continuity regarding the aspects of massification and flattening caused of capitalism. These were primarily seen in the country that had reached cutting edge growth of a society dominated, in an apparently unchallenged way, by this economic system:

«Without doubt and as often recognized, life in a capitalist milieu accustoms the mind to reduce all transactions in the sphere of economic life to money or to para-economic relationships, as is a requisite of this type of economic organization; that is, one takes monetary value as the criterion of measurement, particularly in the evaluation of things and of people. It is evident that, when conduct of this kind becomes adopted and continues for generations, sensitivity for merely qualitatively determined value must gradually diminish. As far as objects are concerned, feeling is lost for anything that is merely beautiful or perfectly formed – that is, for anything which is specifically artistic and which cannot be defined, measured or weighed in quantitative terms. When evaluating things Americans demand that they be either functional and pleasant (as implied by the word “comfort”) or obviously expensive. Their taste for things of material value is borne out by the fact that all décor in the United States is overdone; this applies to everything from ladies’ clothes to the reception areas of a fashionable hotel. If the amount of money that something costs is not immediately evident, then, without more ado, one includes the numerical money-value in one’s allusions to the valued object. “Have you seen the \$ 50.000 Rembrandt in Mr. X’s house yet?” is an often heard question».¹⁵

Or:

«In New York I was present at a mass gathering where a match being fought out as far away as Chicago was transmitted live to the expectant crowd by telegraph as it was going on. The excitement was based only on the tension of wondering which side would win. It is the function of betting to increase this tension: by this the whole activity of sport is again cheerfully reduced to pure cash terms. Can one imagine betting in a Greek stadium? Certainly not. What above all else made everybody happy there was joy both in unquantifiable individual achievement and in personal beauty and strength, and these can be valued just as much in the loser as in the winner. Likewise, would betting be conceivable at a Spanish bull fight? Of course not».¹⁶

¹⁵ Sombart 1906, pp. 10-11 (English edition).

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 12.

Reflections that, resumed again in *The Quintessence of Capitalism*, would have then reappeared in *Merchants and Heroes*, with the simple replacement of England for the United States.

Turning now to the question of the relationship between culture and technique, Sombart's position seems to be more controversial. To mention at least some points, it is clear, for instance, that some of the reflections already made in *Technology and Culture* regarding the social use of technology, and, importantly, the dangerous effects of technology on human life, were taken up again and further developed in *Merchants and Heroes*.

The civilizations of the past, Sombart observed, despite having developed innovative technologies, had not applied them in a systematic way: perhaps out of laziness, but in many other cases out of deliberate choice¹⁷; an attitude which was then lost, in a childlike belief, typical of the modern man, that if something was possible, it had to be made. This is a concept implicitly stigmatized by Sombart in *Merchants and Heroes*, when he spoke of the "wonders of technology" created without knowing what they would be used for. The same idea is confirmed many years later, in a much more radical way, in *The German Socialism (Deutscher Sozialismus)*, 1934), notably in the pages where he called for tighter State control on technological innovation¹⁸.

In his lecture on technique he pointed the finger at two other aspects, later taken again into consideration in *Merchants and Heroes*, in an even more controversial way: first, Sombart complained about the strong fascination with technical achievements, such a strong fascination led to the complete overlay of technical progress and progress.

«Wenn beispielsweise wie in unsrer Zeit die technischen Errungenschaften mit besonderem Nimbus umkleidet werden, wie die Jugend sich den literarischen Idealen ab-, den technologischen Problemen zuwendet: wenn "Fortschritt" mit technischem Fortschritt, Kultur mit technischer Kultur gleichgesetzt wird».¹⁹

Of course the needs of the economy could not be neglected, and it was also true that not all young people could become men of letters. Nevertheless they had to be aware of the fact that the real purpose of their lives was not the simple creation of material goods: their purpose was in fact to take part in weaving the divine tapestry of the life²⁰.

The second point that cannot go unnoticed is that in *Merchants and Heroes* what becomes the cornerstone of the deprecated "English spirit", is the relationship

¹⁷ Sombart 1911, p. 317.

¹⁸ Werner Sombart 1934 (we quote from the Italian edition, *Il socialismo tedesco*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1941; anastatic reprint Padova, Il Corallo, 1981, pp. 300-315).

¹⁹ «So when, as in our times, the achievements of the technique are surrounded by a particular halo, when the youth turns away from literary ideals to approach to technological problems, when the "progress" is equated with technical progress and culture to technical culture». Sombart 1911, p. 327.

²⁰ Sombart 1915, p. 122.

between technology and comfort. Sombart had spoken in these terms in the last pages of *Technique and Culture*:

«In den Bereich der persönlichen Kultur gehört auch zum Teil die Beeinflussung der Ideenrichtung und der Werturteile [...]. Ich erinne beispielsweise an den immer allgemeiner werdenden “Sinn für Komfort” der unsere Zeit charakterisiert. Hier wirkt die fortschreitende Vervollkommnung der Technik bestimmend in dem Sinne, daß sie unserer Bequemlichkeit fröhnt und unsere Bewertung in der Richtung des geringsten Widerstandes abdrängt. Wenn wir gern in einem “modernem Hotel” mit amerikanischen Zuschnitt wohnen und schließlich lieber darin wohnen als in einem alten italienischen Palazzo oder im “Elefanten” in Brixen, so bedeutet das: daß uns am Ende eines langen Wandlungsprozesses die Toilettenverhältnisse wichtiger erscheinen als die Raumverhältnisse in dem Hause, das uns beherbergt; daß wie die Oede des amerikanischen Kastenhotels eher etragen als einem schmutzigen Abort in dem stolzen, alten Kloster».²¹

But if *comfort* was considered as a typical evolution of the whole Western world, after the outbreak of war *comfort*, by then, associated with *sport* – meaning, in this view, sport corrupted by a purely numerical, monetary assessment – was identified as a specifically English product; or, better, as the English “poison” that was spreading out into the rest of Europe, also in Germany. If it had not been for the “miracle” of the war, it would have irreparably corrupted even the “chosen people” in the contemporary world²².

The Quintessence of Capitalism, Merchants and Heroes and the fate of capitalism

A very similar process – namely the transfer of judgment developed on the capitalist societies as a whole to the specific case of England, also took place with the reflections carried out a few years before in *The Quintessence of Capitalism*; more precisely, the second part of the work, devoted to the sources of the capitalist spirit. While outlining the multiplicity of elements behind the spirit of capitalism, Sombart wondered if this spirit also had a biological basis: that is, if there were people whose personal peculiarities made them particularly suited to a capitalist behavior.

²¹ «To the sphere of personal culture belongs also, in part, the influence [of the technique] on the ideological tendencies and the value judgments [...]. I could remember, for example, the increasingly widespread sensitivity for comfort which characterizes our age. Here the increasing sophistication of the technique acts decisively as to indulge in our laziness and diverts our assessment in the sense of least resistance. If we prefer to live in an American-style “modern hotel”, and we end up staying more willingly there than in a old Italian “Palazzo” or at the “Elephant” of Bressanone, that means that, at the end of a long evolution, the good repair of the toilet appears to us much more important than the spatial relationships of the home that is hosting us; and we endure more easily the desolation of the American-style anonymous big building, that an unclean toilet in an old, austere convent». Sombart 1911, pp. 339-340.

²² Sombart 1915, pp. 99-117.

Partly because of the “power of the blood” (an aspect that, in his opinion, was of great importance), partly because they could be transmitted as part of a system of education – no matter whether formal or social – these peculiarities had then spread over the social body. If in paleo-capitalism it was the entrepreneur that, within certain limits, built capitalism, at one point it was capitalism to take over, creating a type of entrepreneur from which it was difficult, if not impossible, to escape.

According to Sombart, the features of the capitalist spirit were therefore based on hereditary, physical and spiritual “predispositions”. There was no need to ask how the individual had purchased, or rather, inherited them: you rather had to underline the fact that they brought a particular man to act instinctively in appropriate ways.

Obviously the “predisposition” to capitalism was not evenly distributed within a group. Moreover – and we now come to a crucial point – there were various types of disposition: some people had entrepreneurial audacity, others the ability to calculate quickly, others a tendency to be thrifty²³.

Acknowledging the existence of a greater or lesser predisposition of individuals to act in a capitalist way, was it possible to identify the people who embodied this same spirit to a greater extent than others?

The answer, for Sombart, had to be yes; and it was furthermore possible to identify which was the specific contribution of each people to the rise of the capitalist spirit. In his view, almost all European peoples had a propensity for capitalism, but in some of them – the Celtic peoples and even some Germanic tribes, particularly the Goths – it was weaker, whilst in other this “primitive predisposition” (*Ur-Veranlagung*) was much more developed. Here, it was possible to distinguish peoples with a special inclination to violent enterprise, and peoples more inclined to commercial – basically peaceful – activity. The former were the *heroic* people, the latter the *merchant* people. Among the heroic people were to count first of all the Romans, whose influence was especially strong in Italy and in some regions of France, Spain and Germany, that is, the regions conquered by the Roman legions. Among the Germanic tribes were to count the Normans, the Lombards, the Saxons, the Franks, the influence of which, interwoven with that of the Romans, could be seen as functional to the bold enterprises of the Italian Maritime Republics, and, later, of the British and the Germans. We might want to argue that Sombart, like many of his German contemporaries, believed that the great Italians of the past owed their greatness to their German ancestors²⁴. But obviously we want to make another point here: namely that in *The Quintessence of capitalism* Germans and Britons were in the same lot among the “heroic” peoples.

Among the peoples that were to count in the mercantile type, the ones that was more likely to achieve profits through contractual and peaceful transactions were the Florentines, the Scots – those of the Lowlands, whilst those of Highlands remained predominantly Celtic – and the Jews. The first ones because they descended, at least in part, from the Etruscans, and therefore from the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, the largest merchant peoples of antiquity. As for the Lowland Scots, we have to consider that the coasts of the country had been colonized by the

²³ Werner Sombart 1913.

²⁴ For instance, this is argued by Woltmann, 1905. For more on this point, see Mosse, 1964.

Frisians, a population famous for its ability in trade; this might as well explain the peculiarities of the Scots and, therefore, their differences compared to the British, who had been influenced first by the Romans and then by the Saxons and the Normans.

Lastly, as the Jews already had this peculiarities when they settled in Western Europe: according to Sombart, not only they had been a merchant people from the very beginning, but they had also been a merchant people at the *quasi-pure* degree²⁵.

Capitalism had been created by both sets of peoples: however, while in *The Quintessence of capitalism* the English were considered to be a heroic people, in *Merchants and Heroes* they became a mercantile people; indeed: the merchant people *par excellence*.

The basic features of English capitalism had already been brought to the fore by the reports of foreign travelers of the early modern period, and were later confirmed by the ensuing philosophical work, which culminated in contractualism, where the descriptive name itself clearly selects “mercantile” as a property of the referent. The English “philosophers”, from Bacon to Spencer, were nothing but economists, supporters of a flat and materialistic vision of existence. And this eudaemonistic vision has gradually percolated into the hearts and minds of other civilized peoples due to the English world-wide hegemony.

The war had brought this steady poisoning process to an end, and, in this sense, it was indeed to be seen as a *miracle*²⁶. What would have happened to Germany after the war, which, of course, would come to an end with a triumph?

Sombart’s answer is closely related to his reflections on the fate of capitalism, dating back to the pre-war period and continued in the pages of *Merchants and Heroes*: here, albeit not systematically, it is possible to trace elements of Sombart’s postwar work.

Recalling the period before the war, Sombart stated that for the keen minds those years were characterized by a growing *Kulturpessimismus* that followed from the growing coarsening of modern existence. Back in *The Quintessence of Capitalism* we can find a clear expression of this at first sight hopeless situation, past the point of no return. However, though worried, Sombart did not sound too pessimistic:

«And when the capitalist spirit has lost its power of expansion, what then? That does not concern us here. Possibly the blind giant may be condemned to draw the wagon of a democratic civilization; possibly it may be the Twilight of the Gods and the god will have to be restore to the caverns of the Rhine. Who shall say?»²⁷

The war had changed everything: the State had placed the economy under its control and technique – of course, especially the military one – had been placed at the service of the supreme need of the country.

²⁵ Sombart 1913, pp. 159-173 (Italian edition).

²⁶ Sombart 1915. See in particular the first part of the book (pp. 9-50), devoted to the English “merchant spirit”.

²⁷ Sombart 1913, p. 359 (English edition).

The future would not have led to the dismantling of capitalism: Sombart was fully aware that the capitalist mode of production had an incomparable efficiency and a great ability to adapt to the new conditions. Yet, the persistence of other economic sectors based on different organizations and, above all, the renewed role of the State, which would have been played even after the end of the war, left open the concrete hope that a victorious Germany could return to devote itself, in full security, to cultivate those spiritual virtues that made its essence completely different from that of all the other peoples on earth²⁸.

These are, we may want to say, the conclusions to which he came, about ten years later, in the third and last volume of *Modern Capitalism*. When Sombart first hinted at these conclusions during the war, they seemed rather out of date, and such as to place him in a state of isolation. He was most definitely isolated from “moderate” intellectuals such as Hans Delbrück, Friedrich Meinecke and, obviously, Max Weber, who, in the debate on the German war aims, believed in the necessity of some sort of compromise peace and a comprehensive reform of German domestic politics. But he was also isolated from the Pangermans, who equalled the security of the country with substantial territorial gains and German hegemony in Europe and worldwide: and these territories should have gone well beyond Dover, Malta and Suez, which Sombart saw as a guarantee for the security of Germany. This was probably the reason why, twenty years later, the nazi official newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, claimed that the “German socialism” conceived by Sombart was something very different from Adolf Hitler’s National Socialism²⁹.

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²⁸ Sombart 1915, pp. 120-131.

²⁹ Lenger, pp. 373-375.

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