

Review of: "Werner Sombart's Longue Durée"

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Joao Graca's article introduced me to someone I know little about: Werner Sombart. He is plainly a figure I should know about. So, I welcome the article---I enjoyed reading it..

On an organisational matter, and as a matter of taste, I would have liked a bit more stage direction. Each section of the paper picks out a contribution or aspect of Sombart's work and then, through later contemporary references, Graca indicates how Sombart's idea in this respect might still resonate. I would have preferred a clear statement of the contemporary issue/debate in social science at the beginning of each section so that I could more easily appreciate from the outset what Sombart's contemporary contribution/interest might be. For example, the discussion of the aristocracy could have been preceded by a quick tour of where we stand on the question of whether aristocratic elements are necessary for capitalism or how their continued presence reflects an imperfect bourgeois revolution.

Likewise, does capitalism provoke war or peace? Similarly, a quick sketch of where the current debate stands on 'What is the contribution of religion to capitalism?' could have usefully preceded the discussion in the section on 'Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism'.

This organisational approach would, I suspect, also have helped address the difficult issue of how to place Sombart's racism, and his apparent support for the Nazi party. There is little on the latter in the article beyond a mention, but there is a section on racism in Sombart. This largely historicises it. Sombart may or may not have been representative of the age in this respect, but, for me, this matter is not especially interesting. What is interesting to know is: what are the contemporary debates over the category of race, and how might Sombart's work contribute (if at all)?

I have a couple of queries on matters of substance. The first concerns the discussion of the role of the aristocracy in capitalism. It surprises me to find no mention in this of the US and the argument of De Tocqueville. Did Sombart overlook De Tocqueville? Apparently, he did not overlook the US as there is brief discussion in the conclusion of Sombart's explanation of why there was not socialism in the US---so it is surprising that Sombart did not engage with De Tocqueville on the aristocracy and De Tocqueville's abiding concern with its absence in 'America'.

The second is a tendency to locate the characteristics of and tensions within capitalism at the level of individual psychology (e.g. the section on the 'Janus-faced capitalist mentality'). The character of capitalism, to my mind, arises in part from characteristics of individual psychology (which can have complicated cultural and functionalist origins) but they also come from the emergent properties of its rules and institutions.

