

Review of: "Werner Sombart's *Longue Durée*"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I rescued my copy of Sombart's *Der moderne Kapitalismus* from a builder's skip outside London University's Senate House library, to which it had been condemned along with a load of other books; walking by one evening I found readers rummaging for texts to save from oblivion.

This valuable article, one of rather few recent ones in English, performs a more substantial rescue operation, summarising Sombart's very prominent sociological career and his evolution from Marxism to German nationalism and eventually national socialism. A direct contemporary of Max Weber, Sombart, like Robert Michels, who moved to Italy and embraced fascism, exemplifies a broader shift which should concern us as scholars and citizens.

Sombart's books, including at least one from his Nazi period, were promptly translated into English; the late Arthur Mitzman (1973) placed him appropriately alongside Tönnies and Michels; Veblen, as Graça notes, is another relevant comparator. Much of Graça's article focuses on Sombart's more substantial work on the origins of western capitalism; Sombart's surely excessive emphasis on the role of Jews, while shared by many of his scholarly contemporaries, takes on a sinister aspect in the light of his later politics. On the other hand, his stress on the need for a cultural and psychological approach to capitalism was shared by Georg Simmel. More recently, the emphasis on war and luxury in relation to capitalism has been echoed by major recent work such as that of Hans Joas on war and Colin Campbell, following Veblen, on consumerism. Sombart's 1906 book on the (continuing, *pace* Donald Trump) absence of a substantial socialist movement in the United States was revived in an English translation in 1976 and more recently has inspired an interesting comparison with Australia.

Graça's sensitive discussion rightly avoids obsessing over the question when Sombart, to put it crudely, moved to the dark side. Grundmann and Stehr (2001: 261) suggest that already 'around 1903' he was losing patience with Germany and then with the proletariat. Germany was however rehabilitated at least by 1915, when his *Händler und Helden* contrasted the heroic Germans with the money-grubbing English. (To be fair, WW I did not bring out the best in many sociologists.)

Graça follows Grundmann and Stehr in asking why we largely abandoned Sombart while continuing to read the equally nazi Heidegger. This is I think misplaced: Heidegger is, for better or worse, central to modern philosophy in a way in which Sombart is not similarly indispensable in the history of sociology. He remains however a figure who deserves the attention which this article gives him, notably for bridging the gap between economic and sociological analysis which Graça addresses in passing (See e.g. Therborn 1976).

References

Grundmann, Reiner and Nico Stehr (2001) 'Why Is Werner Sombart Not Part of the Core of Classical Sociology?' *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Volume 1, Issue 2, Jul, pp. 257-287.

Mitzman, Arthur (1973) *Sociology and Estrangement. Three Sociologists of Imperial Germany*. New York: Knopf.

Therborn, Göran (1976). *Science, Class and Society*. London: Verso.

Note:

A few stylistic details:

At n4, 'attention' would be better than 'notoriety', which is pejorative in English.

Sec 7: 'to enduringly'