

ON PARADIGMS AND THE PURSUIT OF THE PRACTICAL: A RESPONSE

I am grateful to Charles Bergquist for his consideration in sending me a draft of his review essay, thus giving me an opportunity to reply in the same issue of *LARR*. It is in many respects a perceptive commentary that raises some useful questions about the book. Nevertheless, some of the comments suggest an imperfect grasp of my intended message, perhaps because of a failure on my part to make it sufficiently clear. On some important points he reads things into the book that are not there; and other points that are in the book seem to be missed in Bergquist's reading of it. I therefore would like to clarify some of these matters, both for those who may read the book as Bergquist has and for those who may choose to rely upon his commentary for their knowledge of the book's contents. I also will attempt to say something about some of the general issues he raises.

In order not to burden *LARR* excessively, I will not deal with all of the points in the commentary that beg for clarification. In particular I will leave for another occasion a full discussion of the question of the character of the differences between Conservatives and Liberals in nineteenth-century Colombia.¹ This note will deal with (1) the role of values in social action and the way in which the book treats them; and (2) the utility of the dependency paradigm in understanding internal structural barriers to development in nineteenth-century Colombia.

ON VALUES

Bergquist perceives a certain inconsistency in my approach to values. On the one hand, as he correctly observes, I do try to show how geographic, economic, and social structures mold social values. On the other hand, he notes that after describing a process of economic change, the book ends with a statement on the persistence of aristocratic values. From this he concludes, incorrectly, that the book represents an affirmation that modern values are "*the essential prerequisite for development*" (my italics). Similarly, Bergquist sees the book as affirming the developmentalist view that all good things come from the developed world and that development consists simply of absorbing them. While I can see how the material in the book might have led Bergquist to these inferences, the fact is that he is ascribing to me views that are not asserted in the book. Both on the role of values in my analysis and on the general question of development as diffusion he has oversimplified my views and has sought to commit me to much more extreme positions than I would have taken.

While my preference is to explain things in terms of geographic, economic, and social structures, one cannot simply dismiss the role of cultural

values in the functioning of societies. At the very least, values mediate between structures and social action; they are the means by which structures shape and inform social behavior. There also is an obvious relationship of reciprocal reinforcement between structures and values. Thus, values are “important” even from a materialist point of view. If values were not important, why would there be so much emphasis on changing values, as well as social structures, in the Chinese and Cuban revolutions? These examples also serve to make the point that emphasis on the need to change values need not necessarily imply that the new values must be “Western.”

The really sticky question is whether and to what degree values can be said to be generated and sustained independently of economic and social structures. My disposition, as announced in the book, is to see them, in a general way, as a reflection of economic and social structures. But there is enough variability in human behavior to induce a certain caution about dogmatic proclamations on this point. One of my criticisms of the formulations on Latin American values made by Lipset and others, in fact, is that they fail to recognize the variations in value structures within Latin American societies or the value dissonance within individual Latin Americans.²

In any event, values—even if in a general way formed by social structures—are certainly important in shaping human action. As Bergquist discovered, the book fundamentally is about values and attempts (in this case, only partially successful) to change them. The problematic of upper-class Colombians’ trying to alter social values without changing social structures is the central theme of the book—though the problem of incorporating scientific knowledge and technical skills is intertwined with it. What I am saying in the book, and what underlies the passage about continuing mandarinism that Bergquist quotes, may be summarized as follows: (1) elite efforts to absorb elements of science and technology and to create a technical elite were doomed until there existed an economic structure that made the science and technology relevant; and (2) despite the absorption of science and technology in the context of the post-1880 economy, fundamental alterations in attitudes toward work and occupation did not occur because the economic changes did not significantly change Colombia’s aristocratic social structure. Thus, in the end, the “ideal of the practical” pursued by members of the elite in the nineteenth century has remained partially unrealized.

Unfortunately, I did not manage to articulate the second point as briefly and directly as I have here. And, as the mass of material on the first argument is much greater than that on the second, the latter, for many readers, may get lost in the shuffle. Nevertheless, despite the quantitative weight of the first theme, the second does run through the book. The theme is stated in the “Introduction” (p. 8) and treated elaborately in chapter 2, “Learning to Work,” which focuses on the ways in which status considerations defeated elite efforts to interest upper-class youths in the mechanical arts and, along with economic obstructions, also hampered efforts to train lower-class youths.³ Later chapters discuss the ways in which status considerations along with economic ones encouraged the continuing orientation to legal-political careers and the development of an engi-

neering profession along legal-bureaucratic lines. That the book concludes on the note that social structure was a continuing barrier to the fulfillment of aspects of the ideal of the practical should not then have been so surprising.⁴

This is what the book says, or in any case what I tried to say. Now to what it doesn't say. Bergquist alleges that despite all of my emphasis upon structures, I ultimately "accept" the "assumption central to the [development] paradigm, that modern values constitute the essential prerequisite for development." Here Bergquist reads into the book something that is not there. The book certainly is about efforts to change values. But that does not necessarily make it an affirmation that values are *the* essential prerequisite for development. Even if I gave values greater priority than structures (which is not the case), I would not associate myself with the kind of bald, monistic proposition that Bergquist seeks to attach to me. The whole tenor of my work has been in the other direction; that is, it has stressed the relatively greater importance of material factors (geography and classical economic factors), as opposed to values, in determining economic behavior.⁵ This book makes some concessions to the idea that values have some importance as an influence on economic action, but it continues in the same line of giving priority to geographic structure and the classical material factors. The fact is, as Bergquist notes but then seems to deny, the book is a critique of that school of developmentalists that sees in value change *the* solution to underdevelopment. One of its arguments is that those values are formed not simply by social structures but also by geographic and economic conditions that themselves influence the social structures. A second proposition is that Colombia's economic growth depended upon changed economic circumstances, over which Colombians had little control.

One problem with Bergquist's interpretation of the role of values in my analysis lies in his apparent assumption that, because I have chosen to write about the Colombian elite, I necessarily share their assumptions.⁶ In fact, as I tried to make clear, I believe that the goals of the elite, as they conceived them—that is, changing values without changing social structures—were substantially unattainable. That is why the book was entitled *The Ideal of the Practical*. That I have written about frustrated efforts at value change does not mean that I believe such efforts might have constituted *the* solution.

Paralleling Bergquist's assertion that I see values as *the* essential prerequisite for development is the suggestion that I accept the developmentalist assumption that the only way to advance is through the absorption of "Western" things. Once again this is an inference that is understandable given the subject matter of the book but that does not accurately depict my position. The book is indeed about efforts to incorporate science and technology as well as about attempts at value change. And I will confess that I consider them important subjects. But that is quite a different thing from asserting that they are *the* keys to development, that the Western way is the only way, etc. The fact is that the book was shaped fundamentally by the concerns of the Colombian elite themselves. I did not decide *in vacuo* to write a book about value change and technology transfer in nineteenth-century Colombia. Rather the topic, the problem, leapt at me from the pages of letters written by members of the elite in the

middle of the nineteenth century. The book, to a considerable degree, plots their preoccupations and follows their agenda. To write about a problem that preoccupied men of the time is not necessarily to assert that they were correct in their approach. Thus, I must deny the conclusion that the book represents an affirmation that all the answers must come from the more developed countries of the Western world.

On the other hand, I do believe that the incorporation of modern science and technology is of considerable importance. And, without assuming the stance of moral superiority of the developmentalists of the 1950s and 1960s, I do think that *some* good things have come to Latin America from other parts of the Atlantic world. To view the impact of the Atlantic economy and culture on Latin America either as entirely benign or as entirely detrimental is to push us toward a not-very-helpful oversimplification in thinking about problems of development.

ON DEPENDENCY

I would agree that some points in dependency analyses might have been inserted fruitfully, but perhaps not in the ways or with the results that Bergquist suggests. Some of the perspectives offered by Stanley and Barbara Stein might have been incorporated into the discussion of the background of Colombian economic and social structures. Such an analysis, as applied to New Granada, would emphasize the degree to which the viceregal economy was organized around the production of gold for export, with both Indian and African slave labor mobilized for this purpose. It should be noted, however, that colonial New Granada is at best a mixed case for the argument that economic dependence induced social stratification and hence aristocratic values. Only a small part of the colonial population was engaged in the export economy, either directly in the production of precious metals or indirectly in the production of textiles or foods consumed in the mining regions. Most of New Granada's population in the eastern cordillera and a great part of it in the Cauca region were engaged primarily in an economy of local subsistence. Significantly, rigid social stratification and aristocratic social values were more pronounced in some static (not to say autarchic!) economic areas (Cundinamarca, Boyacá), while social stratification was less rigid and aristocratic social values less pronounced in some areas directly or indirectly activated by the gold economy (Antioquia as gold producer, Socorro as producer of cotton textiles sold to Antioquia and elsewhere). Thus the relationship of dependency to hierarchic social structures and values obstructive of productivity may be other, or at least more complex, than Bergquist imagines.

I also have some doubts about the implications of economic dependency in the republican period. The question is not whether economic dependency existed but what its meaning was. To attribute the "fiscal restraints and political turmoil" of the pre-1880 period to the nation's "being wrenched more tightly into the orbit of an industrial capitalist system" overextends the causal significance of economic dependency. Presumably the argument would be that un-

balanced imports, by draining the country of exchange and undermining local artisans, produced economic depression and thus “fiscal restraints and political turmoil.” Such an assertion would have some merit for the period before 1850. But one should note that the depressed conditions of the pre-1850 period were not necessarily inherent in the external relationship. The economy was drained and the government was strapped in part because the country was such a weak exporter, something more usefully explicable in terms of specific economic and geographic causes (topographic structure, population distribution, transportation costs, availability of markets, etc.) than in terms of the easy abstraction of dependency. Further, political disorder most commonly originated in areas not effectively linked to the export economy (like the Cauca Valley) and was least to be found in those that were most effectively engaged in the export economy (like Antioquia). The inclination of the dependency school would be simply to describe places like the Cauca Valley as the tail end of the dependency chain, the ultimate sufferers of exploitation by “monopoly capitalism.” At least as important as such categorization, however, is understanding *why* the Cauca Valley was in such a situation. The “whys” have a lot more to do with geographical circumstance than with either foreign machinations or the impersonal pressures of the Atlantic industrial economy. Finally, it was Colombia’s relative success as a coffee exporter after 1870—the culmination of her entry into dependency—that provided the fiscal strength, the economic integration, and the economic opportunity that permitted the ultimate establishment of political order in the twentieth century.

Bergquist is correct in emphasizing the negative social consequences of the developing export economy in increasing elite control of resources and income inequalities. I would like to note, however, that at an early point the book does discuss the effect of growing foreign trade and foreign contacts in accentuating the social distance between the upper and lower classes (p. 38). That the question is not reintroduced in the brief epilogue may be regrettable but is less significant of attitude than Bergquist suggests. It really is a product of the structure of the book. My discussion of the social realities is concentrated in one introductory umbrella chapter; from that point on, they are a given, and while later references to the effects of social structure occur, most of the descriptive material deals with the direct effects of economic and political conditions on the absorption of science and technology. The result is that while the negative effects of the export economy in increasing class distance are discussed early on in the book, its positive effects in making possible the construction of railways and partial economic integration are more emphasized toward the end. This structural characteristic of the book, I fear, has misled Bergquist into believing that my view of the export economy is entirely positive. In fact, I am more inclined to view it in terms of a balance sheet, with certain gains and certain losses. In any event, the change in class relationships in the nineteenth century was one of degree within a long-established system of social demarcations.

I should add that the social impact of the export economy may have been more complex than Bergquist suggests. Although the matter has yet to be studied systematically, we have a general idea that the richest were more enriched,

the poorest more impoverished. At least we know that unskilled workers in regions not actively engaged in exporting were adversely affected, as price inflation far outran the modest increases in their wages. We do not have much information as yet, however, on other segments of the society. We do not know much about the possible gains of middle- and lower-class groups that were actively engaged in the export economy, particularly small coffee producers after 1880, and a growing urban middle (white collar and skilled worker) sector. While these middle groups certainly did not attain notable economic or social strength, one wonders to what degree they would have existed without the economic growth produced by the coffee economy, the consequent construction of railways, and the partial economic integration of the 1880–1930 period.

Bergquist points to the impact of the export economy on one sector about which we know something. When he speaks of “the destruction of indigenous technology” and the elimination of “just those skilled artisans and small-scale manufacturers” who are “in short supply” in the twentieth century, he apparently is referring to the decline of domestic weaving of cotton textiles in Socorro province as well as to the vicissitudes of artisans producing luxury products in Bogota. This point is unconvincing. In the first place, the displaced weavers were hardly using “indigenous technology”; they were using outmoded European technology. More to the point, it is hard to see what the ladies engaged in cottage weaving have to do with the development of mechanical skills in the modern sector. Might these women, if through economic autarchy somehow maintained in their late colonial prosperity, have been the progenitors of a new army of ironworkers and machinists? More likely they represented an economic dead-end and thus really an irrelevance to technological modernization.

The preceding commentary implicitly raises the question of what acceptable or healthy development might mean within the dependency framework. Presumably such development would be of a kind that does not produce or intensify marked economic inequalities. It is unclear, however, what such a pattern might have looked like or how it might have been achieved in the nineteenth century. A sweeping egalitarian redistribution of land was not in the cards, given the control of the state and most resources by the aristocracy created in the colonial period. The more conceivable measure referred to by Bergquist—the protection of local artisans and weavers—would have been feeble in effect. With regard to the weavers it would have been doomed to failure because of the increasing gap between factory and hand textile productivity. One confronts then a choice really of conventional technical development with its attendant social costs, or no or little technical development, with social costs that could have been worse and just as inevitable. The social elements required to carry out a radical egalitarian revolution were lacking; and even if such a social revolution had occurred, the problem of increasing technological disadvantage would have remained.

The point I am making here is that, whatever one’s paradigm choice, the historical analysis of underdevelopment must have as its first requirement the close study of the structural realities. The principal theme of my work has been that because of certain structural characteristics it was historically impossible for

Colombia to follow the same route of capitalist development as the United States. In that sense, those developmentalists who view underdevelopment simply as a failure of will are wrong. But those who adhere to the dependency paradigm also need to attend to the same real constraints imposed by geography and other economic factors. Given the real limitations of the Colombian economy, what would some hypothetical revolutionary approach to development have produced? It might have produced more social equality but also an equal or worse technological backwardness.

I wrote this book as an attempt to illumine past failures, not as a prescription for future development. (The economic conditions of the nineteenth century and of the twentieth century are, after all, not the same.) Apparently, however, there will be those interested in reading it as a prescription. If I have to make one, it is that, taking closely into consideration the real economic constraints, we apply a good dose of skepticism to all of the major solutions that have been proposed. One implication of my study may be that in order to develop economically Latin American societies must undergo social revolution, for only with social revolution will the necessary change in values, and the general mobilization required for development, occur. But to agree to that proposition is not to agree that such revolution would take care of all of their economic problems. Even a revolutionary Colombia, like a revolutionary Cuba, would have to face the substantial limitations imposed by its resource base, size of market, and other hard economic realities. Given these realities, revolution might reduce social inequalities yet leave most Latin American countries still subject to a very considerable external economic and technological dependency.

As these comments indicate, I remain a skeptic with regard both to the dependency matrix and to those schools of thought most prominently identified with the developmentalist paradigm.⁷ Each of these approaches offers some useful perspectives but none is entirely satisfactory as a mode of explanation. The solution, for me at least, does not seem to lie either in embracing the one paradigm or in "standing it on its head," as Bergquist, along with many others, would urge us to do. Any analysis, of course, must work from a certain set of assumptions that will determine the modes of analysis to be used and the relative emphasis they will be given. But, for an historian (as opposed to a political activist), it is neither necessary nor very helpful to treat analytical paradigms as secular religions to which it is necessary to give exclusive commitment. The more sensible procedure is to attempt to use the insights that both perspectives help to develop, and not to delude ourselves into thinking that either one has all the answers. In short, my plea is for close analysis of the mechanics of social and economic processes rather than a too easy reliance upon abstract models.

In this eclectic spirit, let me conclude by concurring with Bergquist that the book, despite its lack of adherence to the new orthodoxy, does offer a good deal of material usable in dependency analysis. For example, in its discussion of the development of Colombia's engineering profession, it outlines economic and social reasons why the new technical elite was capable of importing tech-

nology but not of generating much technical innovation on its own. That, as it happens, is one of many subjects of interest to both paradigms.

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NOTES

1. In an earlier contribution (LARR 7, no. 2 [Summer 1973]:59), Charles Hale interpreted my effort at a behaviorally organized analysis of the Liberal-Conservative split in New Granada as implying "that these terms had little ideological content." (Actually, I made no such implication but simply put ideology to one side in order to focus on a social analysis of behaviorally defined groups.) Now, Bergquist perceives me to adhere to a much sharper ideological division than I would accept. One can distinguish a number of different ideological tendencies in nineteenth-century Conservatives and Liberals—some of them admirably stated by Bergquist. But it is important to recognize that individuals in both bands did not always behave consistently with the dominant ideological framework usually ascribed to each group. In particular, the views of both Conservatives and Liberals altered over time and according to circumstance, with members of both groups often expressing similar attitudes or adopting similar positions at given points in time. Thus, for example, on the question of labor discipline, discussed in *The Ideal of the Practical*, a number of Liberals adopted the "conservative" stance during the economic stagnation of the 1830s, while many Conservatives gravitated to liberal free market views on other matters during the post-1845 export expansion.
2. See Seymour Martin Lipset, "Values, Education, and Entrepreneurship," in Lipset and Aldo Solari, *Elites in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 3–60.
3. Chapter two ends on the following note: "Few of the nineteenth-century elite's efforts to instill a work ethic and practical skills in upper- and lower-class youths were successful. . . . The elite could not prevail against the values inherent in the structure of the society, particularly as they fundamentally believed in the continuance of that structure and many of its values" (p. 79).
4. It should be noted that the passage quoted by Bergquist also firmly ties the persistence of aristocratic social values to the continuance of a markedly hierarchic social structure. One would not guess this from the segment he quoted, however, as he has omitted the preceding references to social structure. The complete passage is as follows (pp. 241–42):

Colombian values have shifted as the country has moved toward industrialization, but they have not changed fundamentally. Industry has become much more important in the economy and in Colombian conceptions of the nation's future. . . . But while industrialists and university-educated technical experts are highly respected, they continue to operate in a society marked by deep class cleavages. Lower-level technicians and manual workers still lack status. Consequently, the high-level experts remain rather distant from the processes of production. Many manufacturing enterprises are weakened by lack of close direction from their elegant administrators, who form part of a bureaucratic culture rather than a shop culture. And it is doubtful that any member of the upper class or of the struggling white-collar group would consider overhauling a motor even as a hobby. As mandarinism persists, so too does its corollary, technical weakness at the middle and lower levels. Much of Colombia's upper class is now technically trained but still affected by aristocratic values.

5. See particularly "Commerce and Enterprise in Central Colombia, 1820–1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1965); "Foreign and National Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century Colombia," *Business History Review* (Winter 1965); and "Significación de los antequenos en el desarrollo económico colombiano: un examen

crítico de las tesis de Everett Hagen," *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* (1967).

6. The problem of confusing my views with those of the elite appears in another way. In this case Bergquist attributes to the elite a conclusion that I intended to be understood as my own. In his summary of elite motivations Bergquist says "concerned Colombians . . . recognized the geographic and social obstacles to technological progress and sought to attack the problem of what we today call underdevelopment through the only feasible means at their disposal, through fostering technical education for workers and elites." The words "recognized" and "only feasible means at their disposal" imply a degree of consciousness that I did not intend to convey. In saying that technical education appealed to upper-class Colombians as a relatively cheap and manageable way to break out of economic backwardness, as contrasted with more difficult tasks such as road building, I was making essentially the same point as that made by Tulio Halperin Donghi with regard to the construction of fancy cemeteries in post-Independence Spanish America (*The Aftermath of Revolution in Latin America* [New York: Harper and Row, 1973], p. 91): that limited financial resources tended to make such cheaper gestures toward "modernization" especially appealing. In making this point I did not intend to imply, nor do I think Halperin did, that the elites were necessarily conscious of having made a choice of this kind.
7. The McClelland-Hagen school places excessive weight on psycho-cultural factors; the Rostow approach gives insufficient attention to institutional (political, social, cultural) problems and in general suffers from a notorious excess of optimism.