

# INCOMPLETE INDUSTRIALIZATION: An Argentine Obsession\*

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The subject of industrialization has become almost an obsession with Argentines. The image of a belated, weak, incomplete, and truncated process of industrialization has become associated with the frustrated destiny of Argentina. At some moment in its history, the country must have taken a wrong turn and, squandering opportunities, set off on a perverse downhill, an inexplicable turn in the first place, and not only for those who think of the country as being richly endowed. In the search for some explanation, the issue of industrialization has always occupied a central place in the debate.

In this article, we will examine the literature generated in history and the social sciences in Argentina on this topic, particularly on the initial period of industrial development between 1880 to 1930, which witnessed the fastest expansion of the national economy. Our analysis will center specifically on the texts from within the academic community that began to define itself in Argentina in the 1950s and reached its height in the 1960s. This community—the fruit of the professionalization of some disciplines, the accelerated development of others, and the creation of a shared space in universities and institutions—became a source of inspiration for new ideas and interpretations concerning the Argentine past and present.

Many of the works of historical and social analysis that we rely on today were written and published in the context of this academic and professional community. Most of the studies dealing with the industrialization process during the period of export-led growth were produced during these years, and even today discussion of that process cannot ignore the issues raised by this literature. This body of work undoubtedly defined a “problematic.” Our main object in this article is to explore how this problematic was posed and what were its terms, scope, and limita-

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tions. To these ends, we will analyze the group of texts that contributed to defining this problematic.<sup>1</sup>

A hasty reading of these works would confront two opposing visions of industrial development in Argentina. The first is the vision of those who pointed out the limits of industrialization and found its continued development impossible within the parameters of the system. The opposing view was asserted by those who judged industrial development, as it had occurred, as the optimal outcome of the export-led pattern of economic growth.

Positions expressed this baldly are not easy to find in pure form. Nor do either of these views seem today to be the only one or the most valid. It is instead a matter of paying attention to the nuances of a research agenda that has not exhausted the issues that it raised. Exploring the causes of these limitations might allow analysts to undertake again the search for answers to the questions that we all consider essential, in addition to incorporating the answers arising from a temporal perspective different from that in vogue in the 1960s.

#### THE ANTECEDENTS OF A DEBATE

Preoccupation with the subject of the origins of Argentine industrialization did not originate with the studies published in the 1960s. Many of these works' interpretations and proposals can be found in earlier studies and arguments. Even at the beginning of the stage of export-led growth, the question of what productive role was being sought for Argentina was raised in public discussions.<sup>2</sup> Soon, however, the extraordinary expansion in agrarian activities<sup>3</sup> did more than any discussion or project could do to create a sense of optimism that was shared by nearly every leading sector in the country. The path followed by Argentina in exploiting its comparative advantages seemed to make progress a reality, and the issue of industrial development ceased to be a topic of discussion at that time.<sup>4</sup>

The euphoria of the expansion and faith in progress were to find their critics soon enough, and the spirit of the age, as well as some of the changes that Argentine society was undergoing, was questioned from a variety of perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in the area of economic structure, it was not until the writings of Alejandro Bunge and the group that coalesced around his *Revista de Economía Argentina* (established in 1918) that a voice of warning was sounded about the prevailing model. Bunge and his followers believed that they were detecting signs of stagnation in the Argentine economic structure, which they judged to have overspecialized in raising cattle and crops on the pampas. In their view, only diversification into other products, encouraged by the state, could reverse the situation, particularly in the area of industrial production.

Thus Bunge launched a line of thinking whose influence can be traced not only in the economic policies of the 1930s (Raúl Prebisch was one of his followers) but in the policies designed in the 1940s: during the military government (in the Consejo Nacional de Posguerra) and in the first stage of Peronism (the author of the first five-year plan was another Bunge disciple, José Figuerola). Moreover, in the broader sphere of Bunge's ideas about Argentine society, favorite themes like his preoccupation with the country's low demographic potential or with its imbalances, today form part of the Argentine common sense of truths that are accepted and transmitted but rarely questioned.<sup>6</sup>

After Bunge's precursory analysis, it was the crisis of 1930 that stimulated politicians and essayists to fully incorporate the question of Argentine industrial development into the agenda for discussion. From this time until the beginning of the 1940s, two sources of thinking can be distinguished within this discussion. On one side, the state agencies and corporate and interest groups were looking at the present and the future in a debate over the scope of a process of industrialization that appeared increasingly necessary (see G. Di Tella 1986). On the other side, thinkers and essayists began to search the preceding era for the causes of what increasingly came to be perceived as the beginning of the Argentine decline. This search, although grounded in divergent theoretical and ideological perspectives, led to the issue of industrialization. A consensus emerged that was critical of crop- and cattle-raising Argentina, which in accepting its role as Great Britain's junior partner in the international market, had renounced all possibility of industrial development.<sup>7</sup>

Although these works constituted the general antecedents of the debates of the 1960s, a few other pieces of research were elaborated in the 1940s and 1950s that directly influenced the interpretations and proposals developed in the academic community in the 1960s. On the one hand, in a cultural climate greatly different from the one that was to begin in the late 1950s, Adolfo Dorfman and Ricardo Ortiz made decided advances in systematically investigating topics dealing with the Argentine economy and industry.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Latin American economists in a broader setting associated with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) were proposing to take a new look at the region's problems, and their studies made the subject of industry a central focus. Several studies became standard reference works on the development of the problematic under discussion here.

### *The Engineers*

When discussing the history of Argentine industry, two works must be cited. One is Adolfo Dorfman's *Historia de la industria argentina* (first published in 1942), which sketches the panorama of the develop-

ment of Argentine industry up to 1930. The other standard work is Ricardo Ortiz's *Historia económica de la Argentina* (first published in 1955), which covers the entire economic history of the country but devotes several chapters to industry.<sup>9</sup>

Neither Dorfman nor Ortiz was a historian by profession. Rather, from their perspectives as experts in other disciplines, they sought to go back over the past in order to comprehend the present. Dorfman asserted, "To situate an event historically in itself implies revealing most of its hidden causes." His purpose was "to find out what had happened for the purpose of establishing the course of social evolution in all its aspects" (Dorfman 1970, 10). The very possibility of that evolution was not doubted because scholars were guided by the conviction of an inevitable progress leading humanity through successive stages of growing development, a scheme in which industrialization represents a decisive step forward. Dorfman began to search for complete comprehension of a process that he understood to be already in full march, while Ortiz verified that the crisis of 1929 had stimulated an effective transformation that had already been built into the objective conditions of the Argentine economy. The journey through the past, then, had the goal of seeking those evolutionary lines that, when followed meticulously, could illuminate the present reality.

The questions that oriented these scholars were broad in scope, but after choosing the path of systematic description and following it scrupulously, they could not seem to find in this approach the answer to their concerns. These concerns were satisfied, in contrast, by preconceived notions, producing a certain disjuncture between the partial conclusions arising from the point-by-point analysis of the various subjects being covered and the general affirmations about the conditions of Argentine industrial development. This literature's greatest value is found precisely in that analysis: the review by branch, scrutinizing censuses and statistics produced by the state and some private institutions and also secondary bibliography (data on levels of production and consumption, capital and technology, labor and employment); the exploration of policies followed by various governments in monetary, fiscal, and tax matters, and their supposed effects on national manufacturing; and the references to the characteristics of the internal market and its changes.

To go beyond this description into interpreting the significance and limitations encountered by Argentine industry in its development is no simple task, and in this case, both authors resorted consistently to an external setting to resolve this problem. Influenced by the views prevailing at the time, especially in the Argentine leftist tradition, concerning the feudal character of the Argentine countryside and the existence of a dominant reactionary sector of large landholders prior to 1930, Dorfman and Ortiz concluded that these settings had precluded a dynamic indus-

trial development during the era of the great expansion in farming and livestock activities. Ortiz, an orthodox Marxist in his conclusions although not necessarily in his partial analyses and methods, postulated a basic opposition between landowners and industrialists in the typical Marxist style of that period: "the struggle for industrialization has thus been . . . the struggle for the democratic transformation of a way of life" (1974, 550). Dorfman, however, was more cautious and found an association between agrarian production and industry, in that the latter was born linked to the former. Thus he referred not to a contradiction between the two but to a subordination of industry, which had been relegated to a secondary plane, like "un niño nacido fuera de época" (Dorfman 1970, 234).

In addition to reaching these conclusions, which were actually prior convictions, these two books searched and processed information that would later be used time and again by experts, politicians, and researchers. The books also reviewed a series of topics that would later form a basic agenda of issues reappearing in subsequent studies of the history of industry in Argentina.

#### *The Economists: A Latin American Paradigm*

During the 1930s and 1940s, economics as a discipline had developed pragmatically in most Latin American countries, starting with particular necessities that led economists to undertake novel schemes of political economy. The 1950s experienced a vigorous impulse on the theoretical level coming from ECLA (created in 1948 and directed by Raúl Prebisch), with the formulation of a new interpretation of the region's problems that led to a genuine theory of development. This new focus on economic problems achieved enormous influence among scholars as well as among politicians in the region.

Strongly influenced by the Keynesian paradigm, the ECLA economists nevertheless developed a new theory that was grounded strongly in their analysis of Latin American reality and history. In short order, this focus began with a critique of theories of economic growth and international commerce, demonstrating to what extent the international division of labor had favored the countries of the center—the manufacturing countries—over the countries on the periphery. The latter countries had suffered the consequences of the deterioration in the terms of trade as well as the disadvantages of a lack of industrialization, a decisive process not only for improving these countries' position in the international marketplace but especially for advancing in technical fields and consequently in productivity.

Industrialization could only be achieved through a series of measures that the state ought to set in motion in order to counteract first the

attempts of the developed economies to maintain the old scheme that had guaranteed their privileged position and then internal obstacles (particularly those arising from traditional groups) concentrated in an agricultural sector that was inefficient and backward. Development now appeared to be "a consequence of politics, not . . . a natural evolution,"<sup>10</sup> and therefore a central role was assigned to state policies and planning for reforming and regulating the private sector. In this process, the state and the industrial bourgeoisie appeared as allies facing the traditional sectors and the countries of the center, a scheme curiously similar to that being posited by some Marxist intellectuals.<sup>11</sup>

In the Argentine case, ECLA started with a given: the slower growth of the Argentine product per capita from 1930 on in comparison with the previous period. This relative stagnation of the economy was attributed to factors that were structural rather than merely circumstantial, the most notable being insufficient accumulation of capital.

Given this diagnosis, the objective that should have been achieved to overcome the situation consisted of increasing the rate of annual growth above the levels reached before 1930. The means proposed for achieving this goal was favoring the growth of the so-called dynamic industries (oil, iron and steel, chemical, machinery, vehicles, paper, and cellulose) as well as transportation services over agriculture and the vegetative industries (food crops, textiles, wood, leather, and the like). This goal would require a rigorous state policy placing priority on investments, a certain amount of participation by foreign capital, a policy of import substitution aimed as much as possible at intermediate goods, and the stimulus for bringing technology to agriculture (see ECLA 1958, 1959).

The influence of ECLA thinking on the governing teams in various Latin American countries led to the launching of industrialization programs based on mechanisms proposed by development theory. In the Argentine case, this influence seems to have been rather minor, and the process of import substitution by local production, which began in the later years of the crisis of 1930, cannot be strictly attributed to projects inspired by ECLA proposals.<sup>12</sup>

In the intellectual and academic sphere, the ECLA focus had deep repercussions in the social sciences in Argentina, with many studies being written that acknowledged this perspective. Moreover, the basic studies carried out by ECLA provided rich source material for analyzing the past and present of societies in the region that, as we will see, has been utilized frequently by scholars.

Grounded in the general formulations set forth by ECLA and inspired by the original versions elaborated by Aníbal Pinto and Celso Furtado, Aldo Ferrer published *La economía argentina: las etapas de su desarrollo y problemas actuales* in 1963.<sup>13</sup> Deeply worried about the stagnation afflicting the Argentine economy, just when the entire policy of

import-substituting industrialization had begun to show its deficiencies, Ferrer was convinced that "in order to penetrate deeply into the analysis of the causes of the current situation, it is necessary to transcend the short term and delve deeply into the past." According to his conception, such a search consists of distinguishing the historical stages of the formative process of the Argentine economy, stages when the economy had functioned according to defined guidelines that must be traced and described. Ferrer proposed then to detect "the behavior of the economic system in its distinct historical circumstances" (1963, 11). His approach was thus to begin by delimiting those stages, then analyze their characteristics in terms of economic functioning as well as the processes that contributed to their transformation.

To accomplish his goal, Ferrer did not follow the traditional scheme found in Ortiz of systematically describing the sectors of the economy based on aggregate data by category. Rather, Ferrer elaborated an interpretation of each stage grounded in the analysis of macroeconomic variables, paying particular attention to those emphasized in the ECLA paradigm. Aggregate demand, gross domestic product, income distribution, savings, investment, and terms of trade became the key indicators, while development, stagnation, and integration became the decisive categories in this history. It was a highly coherent overall exposition that culminated in a somber diagnosis and an exhortation to apply new policies in order to ensure changes that would lead Argentina into a stage of integrated industrial economy.

Precisely because of the role that industrialization is called upon to fulfill in any economy aspiring to independence, development, and technical progress, the trajectory of the industrial sector in Argentina was a subject that concerned Ferrer throughout *La economía argentina*. He stressed the stage after 1930 because he believed that it was the economic policies set into motion following the crisis that had not favored integrated industrial development. Regarding the export-oriented economy (1860–1930), Ferrer did not devote much space to studying the characteristics of industry, emphasizing instead that its expansion was severely restricted throughout this stage. The idea reappeared in his book of a clear opposition between agrarian interests (represented by the landholding sectors and those closely linked to foreign interests, especially British interests) and the interests of national industry, which had been relegated to secondary importance. In this way, although Ferrer began by using other paradigms, his conclusions eventually coincided with Ortiz's hypotheses about the role of the landowning class. Ferrer not only affirmed their influence before 1930 but pointed out that their "ongoing influence on economic thought and political action . . . constituted one of the basic obstacles to national development" in the period that followed (Ferrer 1963, 115).

DEFINING A PROBLEMATIC

Ferrer's *La economía argentina* and the ECLA studies soon became part of a debate that was nevertheless to adopt a different outlook from that defined by economists' political and technical concerns. Actually, about that time a new sphere of intellectual production was taking shape in Buenos Aires, a specifically academic space where historians and social scientists were to develop their task of research and discussion according to their new and shared rules of the game. In this new setting (which remained influential until the early 1970s), studies and investigations were carried out on the social and economic structure of Argentina. This research produced a set of books and articles that remain unequalled in quantity and quality by national research in the social sciences in any other decade. This literature somehow bears the imprint of the community from which it originated—despite the heterogeneity of the authors' diverse ideological, political, and scientific orientations—and it reveals a recurring pattern of questions, terminology, and even common methods.<sup>14</sup>

Both the academic community and intellectual production were deeply marked by the highly conflictive political reality and the tension-filled climate of ideas that were pervading the times in various ways. Attempting to explore the complex web of these relations, however, would exceed the bounds of this article, which seeks instead to follow the internal paths in the academic community that led to the defining of a problematic.

From this perspective, how were subjects and concerns being delineated? Undoubtedly, the literature produced during this period carries the imprint of the theoretical and methodological models then in vogue. Continual up-dating was one of the distinctive features of the academic community, where one always had to be up to the moment on the discussions holding sway in the most important intellectual centers of the West. But it was not simply a matter of replicating or copying foreign debates, and prestigious figures like Gino Germani contributed from the start to endowing the unfolding effort with a creative and innovative dynamic.

Influences came from heterogeneous sources, and the polemics among followers of various schools of thought played a significant role in academic life. The major impact arose simultaneously from various sources: the development theory elaborated by ECLA, the sociology of modernization, and the various strains of Marxism (see T. Di Tella 1980, Palma 1978). But as Tulio Halperin has pointed out, "The profound heterogeneity of these influences did not prevent their effects from being unexpectedly coincidental: sociology contributed the problematic of modernization, economics that of development, diffuse Marxism that of the rise of the capitalist order; they represented three ways of approaching a single process . . ." (Halperin Donghi 1986, 497).



The interest in determining the ways in which societies advance (toward modernization, development, or capitalism), and therefore in studying the indicators of transformation, was accompanied by a looking backward to detect in the past the stimuli and obstacles to that process. Thus history came to occupy a relevant place in the studies made during this era, and while social scientists encroached without much warning on historical topics, some historians affiliated fully with the new community, bringing their skills and their biases into the discussion. The period from 1880 to 1930 in particular was scrutinized again and again because it seemed to hold more than one secret about the current structure of Argentine society.

These coinciding opinions about what to look for and where to look also resulted in a consensus on the more specific topics that should be broached. The topic of industrialization became one of them because this process represented a milestone in the transformation of societies, regardless of which paradigm a study might employ. Thus it came about that most of the works referring to Argentine industrial development, especially its history, were written between 1964 and 1973 by social scientists and historians from the academic community who devoted individual studies to the subject or included it in texts dealing with some broader problematic.

At the beginning of the 1970s, however, a change in paradigms began to superimpose new foci of interest on those that had held sway in the academic community. But the analysts who quickly adopted the new paradigms based their statements on critiques of the issues then under discussion in order to advance their arguments. In this way, some approached the subject of the origins of Argentine industrialization by adopting neoclassical stances while others chose to look through dependency lenses.

In analyzing this heterogeneous body of work, by authors with diverse ideologies who adhered to different theoretical currents and employed varying disciplinary perspectives, one discovers that they nevertheless shared common concerns and questions. Moreover, despite the fact that their explorations of the universe under scrutiny were accomplished with distinct methodological approaches, they ended up using an informative and instrumental arsenal that limited the field of investigation to a set of common points, which were repeated in all cases. Finally, although these authors differed in their conclusions, the terms of their disagreement defined a circle that offered very few options.

### *The Questions*

The most general question pervading all the studies that focused on the era between 1880 and 1930 was, what were the conditions, scope,

and limitations of the industrial development experienced in Argentina during these years? This question was asked by those interested in the period itself as well as by those who viewed it as an antecedent to be searched for the origin of certain processes that developed after the crisis. This interrogatory was not formed in a void, however, but was closely linked to the larger debate about the profile that Argentina had adopted during that period and its consequences for the country's future. In sum, then, by broaching the problem of industry prior to 1930, analysts were trying to discover how the economic model based on using comparative advantage in the international market (in this case, basing production on exploiting agricultural resources) affected the development of the industrial sector in Argentina.

To resolve this question, three topics were proposed for analysis: the evolution of the manufacturing sector in terms of internal structure, relative weight in the economy, and rate of growth; the socioeconomic characteristics of the industrial entrepreneurs or sector of the bourgeoisie linked to manufacturing production, according to the different terminologies then being used; and state policies that may have affected industrial development. Although diverse polemics have arisen around these topics, they practically exhaust the universe of problems being covered more or less systematically by this bibliography.

Can one actually speak of the beginning of an industrialization process before 1930? Or was it that the manufacturing activity observed until then was only an isolated phenomenon, not a link in the theoretically defined chain culminating in the establishment of an integrated industry? This was the central preoccupation underlying the debate over the first topic (the evolution of the manufacturing sector), a concern that disintegrated into limited discussions over questions such as which were the periods of expansion versus stagnation or recession, or what degree of concentration can be observed in the various sectors throughout the period.<sup>15</sup>

The last question is closely associated with the second topic regarding the characteristics of industrial entrepreneurs, which has yielded a gamut of interpretations arising from different ways of responding to four basic questions. Was there an industrial bourgeoisie in Argentina before 1930, and if so, was it a homogeneous or fragmented sector? To what extent were its interests (those of the entire bourgeoisie or of a single sector) different from and antagonistic to those of the oligarchy (landholding, agro-export, or whatever it is called)? What relationship did it establish with foreign capital? Finally, was the industrial bourgeoisie weak or strong in political and economic terms?

As for the third topic of state policies, the main concern has been to determine whether successive Argentine governments (characterized by various authors according to their respective conceptions of the state

during the period under study) promoted, ignored, or discouraged industrial development. In seeking an answer, all analysts resorted to studying fiscal, exchange, and especially tariff policies, and although the information that they reviewed was the same, their results were entirely different, as will be discussed.

These three major topics gave rise to different combinations according to the specific objectives of each study. The emphasis on one or the other subject undoubtedly depended a great deal on the focus and analytical framework that were adopted in each case.

### *Methodologies and Analytical Tools*

The body of texts chosen is certainly heterogeneous from the point of view of the theoretical frameworks and methodologies utilized. Ranging from the strictest Marxism of some (Cimillo et al. 1973) and the post-Keynesian neoclassicism of others (Díaz Alejandro 1970) are the rest of the studies that generally recognized a broader heterodoxy. Even in the case of those who adopted canonic approaches like the Rostow model used by Di Tella and Zymelman or the staple theory that guided Geller, they generally chose at some point to distance themselves prudently from these models in order to delve into the peculiarity of the case at hand (compare Di Tella and Zymelman 1973 with Geller 1970).

The search for answers to the common questions, which began with different frameworks and favored various spheres and categories of analysis, led nevertheless to the discussion of a rather restricted set of questions. Most of these issues were already present in the pioneering works on the history of industry before 1930. What were the reasons for these limits?

Obviously, the fact that the studies took off from the same initial questions contributed to delimiting the field of investigation. But it did not have to block the search for alternative paths of response, given the use of diverse approaches to the same problems. A more effective limitation was created by the kind of information that was used in all cases, which showed a surprising homogeneity.

For example, in treating the first topic concerning industrial evolution, all the studies based their argumentation on the analysis of aggregate data by branch or sector on quantities produced, the number and characteristics of the firms (workers employed, capital, power), share of GDP, foreign investments—data not too unlike (and at times exactly the same as) those used by Dorfman and Ortiz. To these data were added the series elaborated by ECLA, particularly those referring to the evolution of the gross domestic product and investments. In sum, these studies generally used aggregate information, and on this level, they did not generate new evidence because they worked with data produced by others.

On topics like commerce, demographic evolution, and immigration, historians at this time were making a great effort to collect and systematize data series and to develop primary research (see Halperin Donghi 1986). Meanwhile, on the topic of industry, their incursions were only marginal and exhibited a style similar to that of sociologists and economists. As for the latter, the urgent need to formulate interpretations of the past that would allow them to make headway in studying the present made reasonable their decision to resort to already available information on the past. It is probable that they did not perceive the extent to which this decision would limit the boundaries of the discussion.

Of course, the available information was organized differently in each case, according to the criteria, categories, and variables involved in each analytical framework. But as information that had already been produced, it involved certain earlier frameworks and therefore turned into a tool that limited the possibilities of trying original approaches to established problems. Perhaps this point helps explain why those who insisted on the importance of capital accumulation did not attempt to study the formation of surplus on the microeconomic level. It may also explain how clear adherence to the neoclassical synthesis did not lead to formulating models in the style of those proposed by the new economic history.<sup>16</sup> Thus different points of departure did not lead to different paths of research: tackling the evolution of Argentine industry by paying attention to the factors of supply and demand, the logic of capital, or relations among aggregate demand, savings, and investment did not result in different explorations of the universe under scrutiny.

For example, the treatment of the formation of industrial capital was based on a limited set of aggregate data on gross investment, investment of national and foreign capital (in a sector and at times by branch), distribution of capital within the sector according to type of enterprise, and some scattered information about credit channeled toward industry. On the topic of technology (a key subject both for those concerned with the development of productive forces as well as for those who see the central issue as the optimal use of factors, modernization, or development), the panorama was even more discouraging. Only information about the use of power by branch and type of enterprise was utilized, as well as some data on the importation of machinery. The situation improved a bit in the area of analyzing labor or the work force on the larger scale of labor-market conditions and on the more specific level of labor employed in the secondary sector. But in no case, not even in this last category, did studies go beyond making very general observations about the distribution of labor by branch, the number of workers per enterprise, salaries (based on series that were not very reliable), and to a lesser extent, hierarchies.

This kind of information made it difficult to prove any hypothesis

on the process of concentration, changes in productivity, variations in the income-yielding capacity of enterprises, and similar subjects. Thus the interest of each study ended up depending entirely on the varying abilities of authors to make use of the same materials in elaborating suggestive arguments and conclusions that were not limited to corroborating the studies' points of departure. In any case, all these studies had to rely to a great degree on the presuppositions and major arguments of their respective theoretical and analytical foci.<sup>17</sup>

This trend is even more salient when reviewing the treatment of the remaining two major topics, those dealing with the industrial bourgeoisie and public policies. As will be shown, in both cases, divergent interpretations have arisen that have occasioned intense polemics. But the origin of these differences cannot be found in either the initial questions or the paths taken in seeking answers. Rather, the differences resulted from the manner of marshaling the arguments and were grounded firmly in the original frameworks of each author. For example, in discussing the tariff policies of the various administrations during the period, although analysts started from the same scarce data (dispositions on customs taxes, appraisals, and information about industry during the period), opposite conclusions were drawn. For some authors, the tariff policy discouraged national industry, but for others, stimulated it, at least during certain periods. Very few studies took the time to explore the question in a more nuanced way.<sup>18</sup>

### *Interpretations and Debates*

The major differences among the various studies become most evident in the realm of interpretations. Employing the same questions and similar tools of analysis, scholars constructed different versions that were firmly based on previous theoretical stances, on global schemes that oriented the arguments. In this area, the discussion was doubtless neither exclusively nor mainly academic but political and ideological. The answers to the questions about the origins of industrialization talked about the past but also about the present and the future of a society in which the political conflicts seemed to sharpen daily. We will make no attempt to explore that dimension of the discussion, but we will try to synthesize its terms in the narrower realm of interpretations of the historical process. Reordering the various statements according to this criterion will undoubtedly diminish the polemical burden of the various arguments, thus allowing the stridency of some debates that agitated the intellectual environment in Buenos Aires to be perceived in mute form. Conversely, it will become possible to see how many conclusions were shared by those participating in a heterogeneous and conflictive academic community, yet one that must have recognized some common denominators.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, Argentina was building a productive structure that allowed the country to use its comparative advantages in an expanding world market that would soon incorporate Argentina fully as a producer of raw materials and food and a receiver of manufactured goods, capital, and labor. The extent to which this process limited the possibilities of Argentine industrial development was the major preoccupation of all the works being analyzed here. The central controversy arose between those who believed that the industrialization process had been seriously weakened from the outset by the obstacles it had to face during the era of export-led expansion, which was hardly favorable to the expansion of manufacturing, versus those who argued that no contradiction existed between farming and industry and that the problems in this area did not necessarily go back to the era culminating in 1930.

The first perspective positioned itself within the pro-industrialist tradition of Bunge, ECLA, and Ferrer on one side and that of Dorfman and Ortiz on the other. This view found its theoretical sources of support as much in the sociology of modernization and development theory as in a Marxism that had not yet registered the impact of dependency polemics.<sup>19</sup>

What are the major arguments of this position? Briefly, adherents of this perspective argued that in the period from 1880 to 1930, some development took place in manufacturing in Argentina, but it was severely limited by various factors. First, this development occurred only in certain branches—food, clothing, and construction—and did not proceed along the path of broadening into other branches that were “heavier” and more capital-intensive. Second, the growth of these sectors was subject to constant fluctuations in the case of export industries (meat-packing plants, mills, and so on) due to oscillations in the external market, and in the case of manufacturing for internal consumption, due to constant competition with imports. Finally, this development was uneven and dispersed, built on a broad base of small enterprises in most of the branches, and exhibited a high concentration in exports. Not all the studies agreed about which were the periods of expansion and stagnation or about the degree of concentration observed in the sector, but all shared the concern about the general limitation within which industry functioned.<sup>20</sup>

Regarding the causes that would have led in this direction, the works agreed on a set of factors, although each study chose to emphasize one factor or another. Basically, an economy oriented so decidedly toward farming and livestock production for export would have concentrated its resources in the areas linked to that main interest. Moreover, the fact that the model was based on the international division of labor implied a tacit acceptance (and often, an explicit one) of the import role of manufactured goods coming from those countries with the comparative advantages to produce them. Consequently, industry could have counted on neither the

internal resources necessary for achieving sustained growth and systematic deepening nor the incentives necessary to stimulate those processes. The previous institutional framework (particularly the system of landholding) had become a hindrance as well, with the state orienting all its policies toward favoring the agro-export model while ignoring or even discouraging industrial development. Protectionism was discarded, and exchange and tariff policies were generally designed to look after other interests. The times when measures with that bent in fact acted as protection barriers for a particular branch were viewed as coincidences of little significance, more the result of fiscal preoccupations than of any interest in promoting industry.

In a society oriented in this manner, the sectors that were economically, socially, and politically dominant would have been those linked to the agro-export interests, and their influence would have been decisive in sustaining and nurturing the model. According to this perspective, industry would not have been part of the main interests of that oligarchy, and its development would have been left in the hands of different entrepreneurs. This sector would have formed a feeble bourgeoisie made up of foreigners (immigrants successful in capitalist careers), who would have struggled to make their industries grow in an unfavorable environment, finding scant receptivity in the political parties of the times.

But the landholding oligarchy would not have remained totally on the sidelines of industrial development and, with its ally of foreign capital, would have had strong interests in the expansion of industries linked to exportation. In this sense (and following an argument already put forward by Dorfman), some authors discovered a vein of fragmentation among the industrialists: on one side, a powerful and concentrated few closely associated with the agrarian sectors; on the other side, all the rest, genuine members of an industrial class who had interests antagonistic to the oligarchy but were politically and economically weak.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, the industrial bourgeoisie appeared to be a key sector for any project of development, modernization, or capitalist expansion, and the arguments in this sense meshed well with formulations coming out of the most narrowly political sphere.<sup>22</sup> In effect, the project that based the possibilities for transformation on the alliance between workers and the national bourgeoisie was, with differing emphases, common to Peronism, developmentalism, and communism between the late 1930s and the early 1960s.

The second line of interpretation of Argentine industrial development before 1930 seemed to challenge the first on nearly all points, beginning with the general affirmation that no contradiction would have existed between agrarian expansion and industrial growth. Two radically distinct paradigms served as the basis for this interpretation in its variant forms: on one side, the neoclassical synthesis, crystallized in a work

written outside Argentina that had major repercussions in the local setting; on the other side, a version of Marxism strongly influenced by the dependency debates.

Departing from an empirical given—that a positive correlation had existed between agrarian development and industrial growth prior to 1930—first Díaz Alejandro and then other Argentine authors grounded their arguments in the staple theory of growth to enunciate their hypothesis that the key variable in industrialization had been the expansion of demand, provoked precisely by the increase in income that resulted from the development of the export sector. In its most optimistic version, this interpretation came to the conclusion that the economic model prevailing at the time had made optimal use of the factors and that therefore no opportunity had been wasted, as Cortés Conde once asserted (1969), nor was there any great delay, as Di Tella and Zymelman postulated (1973).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, neither the institutional framework nor official policies were obstacles to industrial development. In the case of tariff measures, they had actually exerted a net protectionist effect on certain manufacturing sectors, although this outcome did not imply explicit policies of industrialization. By applying the staple theory as well, however, Lucio Geller (1970) demonstrated some limitations on industrial expansion, identifying and analyzing the factors of profitability that might have decisively influenced the behavior of the sector until 1914.<sup>24</sup>

The topic of the social sectors involved in this process did not greatly interest these authors, but it became the crux for those who analyzed the subject from a Marxist perspective in either of its two main variants. For those in the Trotskyist tradition, a single class had gained control of the economy—agriculture, industry, commerce, finances—in close concert with foreign capital. To prove this hypothesis, numerous elaborate studies in the 1960s were dedicated by a group of intellectuals associated with the review *Fichas*, directed by Milcíades Peña. This group made a systematic effort to analyze Argentine socioeconomic reality by debating researchers like Gino Germani and Guido Di Tella and political essayists like Abelardo Ramos. The theme of industry figured centrally among their concerns, especially regarding the period after 1930, and their major proposals on the problems preceding the great crisis were couched in terms of the issue of the bourgeoisie. On this point, their discussion covered fully all versions postulating the existence of an industrial bourgeoisie shaped from below by the growth of business sectors of immigrant origins, an idea that had been defended by old Marxists like Ortiz as well as by the most up-to-date sociologists like Cornblit (compare *Fichas* 1964 with Peña 1974).

The second stance was clearly defined within the dependentista currents that were feeding the academic (and political) debate in the early 1970s. This perspective in all its variants questioned the interpretations of



the Argentine past that had been elaborated under the influences of more traditional Marxism, functionalism, and development theory. It employed instead a perspective that favored analysis of the limits imposed on development of productive forces in countries like Argentina by "the monopoly that was exercised by the bourgeoisies of the imperialist countries" (Cimillo et al. 1973, 177). This view postulated that the native oligarchy and metropolitan bourgeoisie had formed a solid bloc that allowed no possibility whatsoever of forming a national bourgeoisie. From this perspective, any industrial expansion that appeared was the result of decisions and actions taken by that bloc, according to the strategic interests of the imperialist countries.<sup>25</sup>

These two versions, which were based on Marxist tradition but recognized different developments, discarded the possibility that an industrial bourgeoisie can convert itself into a decisive class of transformation. In the first perspective, the reason was that the bourgeoisie was considered to be a homogeneous whole, and change can only come at the hands of the proletariat; in the second view, because there is no possibility whatsoever under dependent conditions like those prevailing in Argentina that a national bourgeoisie or a project of autonomous and integrated capitalism could ever develop.

Moreover, from the perspective of both the Marxist versions, and also according to the neoclassical interpretation, the period between 1880 and 1930 lost interest: for the neoclassicists, because the problems appeared later (basically, with Peronism); and for the Marxists, because that period was no different from the rest in terms of the central antagonisms that determine history.

#### THE LIMITS OF AN UNFINISHED DEBATE

We have reviewed the most influential works in the debate over the history of Argentine industry up to the crisis of 1930. The discussion revolved around those who were pondering a key problem in the country's history: its truncated industrialization. The 1960s brought new perspectives for reconstructing different images of the past that gave industrialization a central place. Thus we are not talking here about an isolated debate. This era was marked by the creation of a professional and intellectual field of research and debate in the social sciences and history. It was a time of economic expansion, imbued with the generalized optimism that was pervading the world and Argentina in the 1960s. This era of secure faith in the capacity of societies for transformation and progress reflected the undiluted influence of various strains of thought but was still based firmly on this certainty.

Shared questions and concerns stimulated the study of Argentine society and its history. On the subject of Argentine industrialization, the

result was a set of divergent interpretations of a universe narrowly delimited by the questions asked. But the discussion ceased before it had finished, probably because it could only go on producing more of the same arguments with the tools available. Thus the estimates of the economic indicators on which many of these studies were based were not revised. Nor did researchers undertake a search of the primary sources that would have allowed them to line up new evidence. Adding to the limits in information were those arising from interpretive frameworks that emphasized the search for answers to the great questions of the moment and thus made it difficult to find more specific paths. It is therefore not surprising that researchers did not undertake studies of the different branches of industrial production, or that no one recognized the need to write the histories of firms in order to be able to analyze accumulation strategies, technological developments, changes in productivity, or labor problems on a microeconomic level.<sup>26</sup>

These were the limits of the works produced during the 1960s. The paths that were explored afterward had other points of departure and other goals. We have already seen how history lost interest for economists, sociologists, and political scientists. For some of them, the history of Argentine industry prior to the 1930s could be summarized as an industrialization process almost autonomically linked "to take advantage on an international scale of its natural resources" (Sourrouille 1980, 2).<sup>27</sup>

During the 1970s, new paradigms and realities also put an end to the certainties and the optimism of the 1960s. The economy entered into the world crisis. Argentine industry stagnated following the decade of its greatest growth. The myth of development via industrialization collapsed. Adding to all this, censorship and repression nullified all possibility of continuing the intellectual debate, although the pertinence of the debate itself had already been questioned by those who were convinced that the moment for action had arrived.

The 1960s were left behind in the social sciences as well. The discussions of those years now seem lifeless. Yet, the questions raised continue to prevail, and as often happens in an academic community subject to harsh ruptures and discontinuities, the debates were left behind without having really achieved closure or found entirely satisfactory answers to the questions posed. To them have been added questions that arise from a new national and international context. For example, it seems natural today that the possibilities of external markets for a specialized industry should arise as a topic of discussion. If this trend implies a clear awareness of the limits of the autonomous model committed to the internal market, the obstacles to abandoning it appear no less evident—a range of obstacles from the requisites of investment and technology to the very access to international markets. In any case, the feasibility and convenience of these options are part of a current debate. If exploring new paths

is evidently necessary to answer these new questions, it is also necessary for rethinking the older questions. In this way, perhaps we Argentines can convert our obsession with an industrialization that never happened into a convincing explanation of why it did not.

## NOTES

1. The texts produced during the 1960s in the academic community emerged from a sphere with vague boundaries, which has caused us to make inclusions and exclusions that may be arbitrary. We have chosen those studies that we consider the most representative in the broad influence achieved in their particular disciplines. We have included works with varying degrees of specificity, and although our analysis focuses on those who have studied the problem of the origins of industrialization, we have also included some texts dedicated to more recent periods in Argentine history, works that nevertheless have directly influenced definition of the terms of the debate over the industrialization process. Two of the texts chosen, Díaz Alejandro (1970) and Geller (1970), were not produced in the Argentine academic community but influenced it decisively. As for the works of Milcíades Peña, although they could be more precisely located outside academia, they had major repercussions on it and have been cited and discussed by various major works of academicians. The complete list of works chosen to represent the production of the academic field includes these works: Mario Brodersohn (1970), Elsa Cimillo et al. (1973), Oscar Cornblit (1967), Robert Cortés Conde and Ezequiel Gallo (1973), Roberto Cortés Conde (1965, 1969, 1974), Dardo Cúneo (1975), Carlos Díaz Alejandro (1965, 1970), Guido Di Tella and Manuel Zymelman (1973), *Fichas de Investigación Económica y Social* (1964), Ezequiel Gallo (1970), Lucio Geller (1970), Eduardo Jorge (1971), Juan Llach (1972), Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero (1971), Milcíades Peña (1974), Mónica Peralta Ramos (1972), Alberto Petrecolla (1968), Ruth Sautu (1968), and Javier Villanueva (1969, 1972). We have excluded analysis of texts that were published later or outside the Argentine academic community, having therefore less effect on it. See, among others, Randall (1978) and Cochran and Reina (1962).
2. The debates over protectionism and industry in the nineteenth century took place within that context. See Chiaramonte (1971) and Panettieri (1983a, 1983b).
3. The term *agrarian* is used throughout this article as the English equivalent of *agropecuario* and thus denotes both farming and livestock activities.
4. For example, the Unión Industrial Argentina, created in 1887, acted as a pressure group representing certain sectors of industry, but the questions it raised never became totally incorporated into the public debate. See Cúneo (1975) and Freels (1970).
5. After the turn of the century and especially during World War I, the climate of criticism was expressed in the spheres of culture and politics as a strong attack on liberalism (although not necessarily on economic liberalism) and on materialism, often taking nationalist stances at the outset. On these topics, see Romero (1983) and Rock (1987).
6. Bunge's ideas were reflected in *La nueva Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Kraft, 1940) and in other articles published in the *Revista de Economía Argentina*. A complete bibliography may be found in Llach (1985). On Bunge as an influential figure, see Llach (1985), Imaz (1974), and Rapoport (1984).
7. Literature written from this perspective abounds. As an example, see the works of Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz.
8. Both Adolfo Dorfman and Ricardo Ortiz were active members of an intellectual community that resisted authoritarian attacks by the government via institutions outside the official structure, such as the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores.
9. Dorfman's 1942 study is cited here in the revised 1970 edition; Ortiz's 1955 work is cited here in the 1974 edition.
10. On the influence of this paradigm, see Fishlow (1985). For analysis of the various paradigms in economy, see Drucker (1981), and for an example of the paradigm concept applied to historiography, see Cannadine (1984).

11. On ECLA, in addition to the bibliography produced by ECLA and works by Prebisch, see Fishlow (1985), Palma (1978), Rodríguez (1986), and Pinto (1986).
12. In actuality, part of Prebisch's ideas came from his contact with Argentine economic reality prior to the crisis of 1930. Prebisch had occupied the post of Director General of the Banco Central de la República Argentina between 1935 and 1943 and was a professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires between 1926 and 1948. See Sikkink (1988) and the comments accompanying her article.
13. Aldo Ferrer's *La economía argentina* could also be considered part of the literature produced in the 1960s within the academic community. But we have considered it instead as an antecedent to that body of work in order to emphasize its close link with ECLA thinking. See Ferrer (1963). Ferrer had taken courses taught by Prebisch at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. See Sikkink (1988, 110).
14. From the mid-1950s on, an academic community began to establish itself in the social sciences in Argentina, particularly in Buenos Aires. This community differed from the traditional spaces in its own rules for validation and prestige. Institutionally, this environment of research and debate was supported by certain pockets of renewal created in the universities, where new disciplines like sociology and economy were operating as dynamic centers, but also in places that developed outside the official orbit, particularly in the Instituto Di Tella and the review *Desarrollo Económico*, whose name is truly a symbol of that era. This academic community reached its apogee around the mid-1960s, and in 1966 it was forced to confront the final collapse of all renewal efforts in the university that followed the installation of the Onganía military regime. Yet the late 1960s also witnessed the dissolution of that unified space as the result of two trends: on one hand, the very relevance of a specifically academic community was questioned from within and without; and on the other, the homogeneity of this community was destroyed by the proliferation of institutional boundaries, instances of legitimation, and regulations. The coup of 1976 was to put a bloody end to these processes, and in what came afterward, the continuities are considerably harder to detect than the ruptures.
15. See, for example, the discussion over the "delay" summarized in Llach (1985, 28–35).
16. Exceptions exist, of course, like the attempt made by Petrecolla (1968) to analyze the textile industry according to a narrowly neoclassical model.
17. For example, in the case of industrial concentration, Ruth Sautu (1968) and Eduardo Jorge (1971) reached opposite conclusions from those of Di Tella and Zymelman (1973), despite the fact that they all started with similar sources.
18. In the first case, the clearest examples are Di Tella and Zymelman (1973), Cornblit (1967), and Cortés Conde (1965). The second case is exemplified by the works of Díaz Alejandro (1970), Gallo (1970), and Villanueva (1972). The most nuanced works are those of Sautu (1968), Geller (1970), and Jorge (1971).
19. See Cornblit (1967), Cortés Conde and Gallo (1973), Cortés Conde (1965, 1969), Di Tella and Zymelman (1973), Jorge (1971), and Murmis and Portantiero (1971). The last work studied the period after 1930 but nonetheless adhered to this version for the period before 1930.
20. See notes 14 and 16.
21. Cortés Conde (1965) and Jorge (1971) in particular stressed this point.
22. Obviously, this point was not enunciated in this way by the political actors.
23. Compare with Díaz Alejandro (1970). Roberto Cortés Conde has pointed out the revaluation among Argentine intellectuals of the 1970s of the thinking of writers like Friedrich List, the famous prophet of industrialization and German unification in the nineteenth century. Yet according to Cortés Conde, there was a perceptible change in his own viewpoint on these problems starting with the publication of his study on Hispanoamérica (compare Cortés Conde 1974).
24. Among the texts that grew out of this current (in addition to Díaz Alejandro 1970), are Gallo (1970), Cortés Conde (1974), and Villanueva (1972). See also Geller (1970), which emphasizes as one important restriction on Argentine industrial development the limited range of natural resources, a theme that recurs throughout the literature but has not been analyzed by others.
25. This discussion ties in with the debates over imperialism. See Braun (1973a, 1973b).

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26. Studies exist by category and major enterprise for the period after 1930. See Katz (1974) and the studies of the Programa BID/CEPAL/CIID/PNUD cited in Katz (1987).
27. See Sourrouille (1980), p. 2. The abundant bibliography on Argentine industry after 1930 lies outside the bounds of this article. See, among others, Katz (1967, 1969), Mallon and Sourrouille (1973), Diamand (1973), Dorfman (1983), and Felix (1971).

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