

THE ANATOMY OF "AUTONOMY"  
(WHATEVER THAT MAY MEAN):

A Reply

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Would I be wrong in detecting a whiff of *odium scholasticum*? I am clearly not popular for poking fun at the language of modern social science, but I remain utterly unrepentant. It reminds me too forcibly of Section E, Umbugotology and Ditchwateristics, of Dickens' Second Meeting of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything. But worse, in my paper I "ideate" some fanciful notions on autonomy.

My instinct is not to spend time on the Steins' objections to the second part of my paper. The argument needs a surer hand. But the first part treads heavily on their private patch. The Steins have kindly supplied the reader with a bibliography of most of my writings (and of much else besides). With the aid of this rich bibliographical display, I would simply refer the reader, if he or she should continue seriously to doubt my view that Spanish America, for the first half century of Independence, was effectively "beyond the periphery," to the first part of a book of mine on *Latin America and British Trade, 1806–1914*. I am not being dismissive. No one with the slightest knowledge of the commercial and financial writings of the day can be in any doubt on this point. The reason is blindingly obvious. "Buy from them that buy from us" was the slogan of the *Sociedad Rural*, in a happier age. But what happened if they did *not* buy from us?

I am aware that the patience of our readers is wearing thin. But perhaps I might be permitted to single out a few points which seem to me unhistorical in the Steins' approach, although I am told that "British pragmatism" is "the victim of conceptual poverty" (which can only mean, I suppose, that Britons have the unscholarly habit of preferring to test their theories against the facts).

I find it unhelpful to be supplied with figures without some notion of their relative importance. The Steins explain that the annual average for Mexico's exports of precious metals, 1825–49, was 8.8 mil-

lion pesos. These exports were to all countries. Mexico had little else to export, and even if a further five million pesos (£1 million) were smuggled, the Republic was left with scant basis for a healthy foreign trade. The argument that the impact of Britain on the economy of Mexico was critical to its growth is unsustainable.

Then, it is dangerous to generalize on such a narrow, regional base. Big themes deserve wider knowledge. In a resounding phrase the Steins declare that “the principles of free trade [for the 1820s, I understand] draped the midwife of national sovereignty in Latin America—and they were printed on British cottons.” The meaning is obscure, but for the general historian the argument is not improved by the fact that Britain became a convinced free-trader only in the 1840s.

Finally, the Steins employ many statistics, some better and more informative than others. But nineteenth-century statistics are dangerous playthings and cannot be used without a strong injection of common sense. The observation (Stein, note 6) that “Latin America received 86.5 percent of the volume of U.S. imports of British domestic exports, 1820–49” is misleading. The years of the 1820s were a period of intense excitement in Latin American trade, followed, after the financial crisis of 1825–26, by a dismal slump. They constitute an unrepresentative decade for comparative purposes. If, on the other hand, we were to compare the volume of British domestic exports to the United States and Spanish America for 1831–50 inclusive, we would find that the total for twenty years was £163 million to the United States and £59 million to Spanish America. If we took these figures over another decade (1851–60), during which Spanish American trade was beginning to make more headway, the result would be a further £193 million to the United States and £54.5 million to Spanish America.

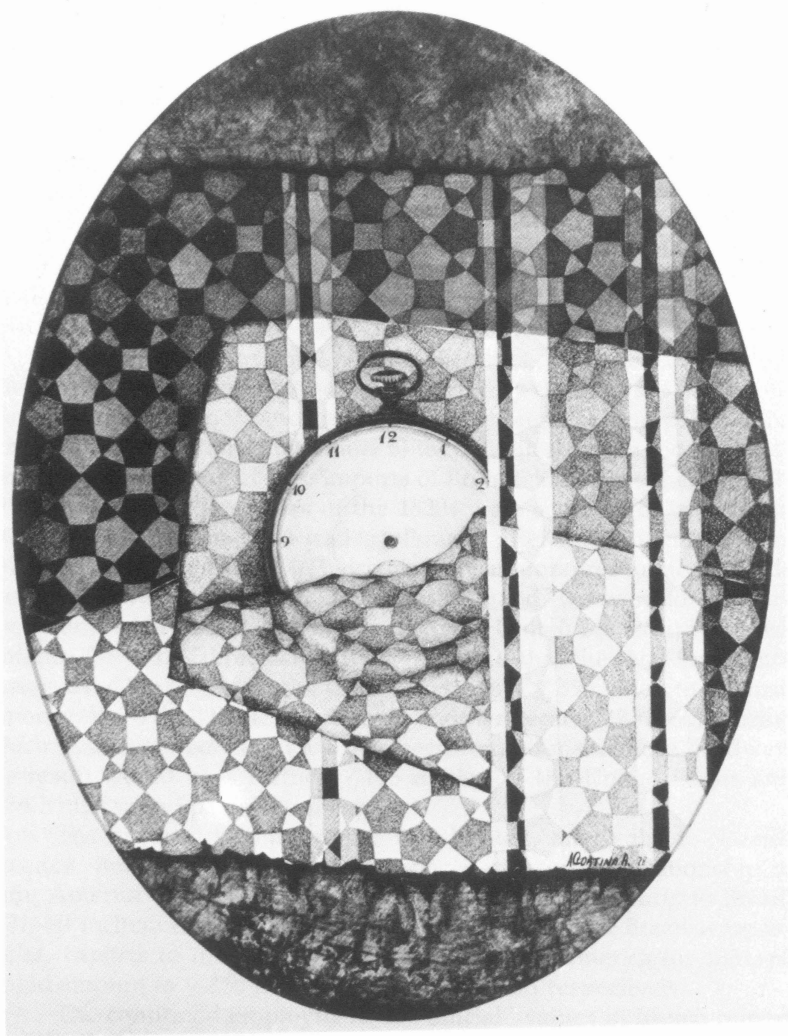
The argument in my paper was limited, advisedly, to *Spanish America*. Brazil, as I said, was the special case in the relationship of Latin America to the outside world. But total British exports to Brazil, 1831–60 inclusive, were £85.5 million, so that even if Brazil were *included*, exports to the United States and to Latin America for 1831–60 would amount to £356 million and £198 million respectively.

The continued employment of “official” values in British import statistics before 1854 makes it impossible to be as precise for British imports from the United States and Latin America, but the pattern cannot be dissimilar. The likelihood, indeed, is that Britain’s huge imports of raw cotton from the United States shifted the balance even more in favor of Anglo-American trade.

The figures for British exports are easily accessible. They are the official statistics as printed in *Porter’s Tables* and in the *General Statistical*

*Abstract of the United Kingdom.* They have often been reproduced, by me amongst others in precisely the article cited in the Steins' note 6. Now, "when the liquor's out, why clink the cannikin?"

Those who write about the nineteenth century should know the nineteenth century. I appreciate the passion and dedication of the Steins' final paragraph, although "imaginative analysis" is almost as dangerous to scholarship, and hilarious to the pragmatist, as "inventive research." But ultimately it is the facts that interest me, not solely the theory. As a mundane historian, I continue to hope and believe that *magna est veritas et praevalebit*.



*Always*, black and white ink drawing by  
Amalia Cortina A. (Argentina)