The rich cultural heritage of Latin America, in particular the Enlightenment through the 19th century, is usually considered a more or less passive echo of foreign influences. Such an appraisal only examines one angle of the complex situation of colonial dependence experienced by the continent. Since the age of the original conquest, the Latin American reality was submitted to the international conditions of a common history. The economic and political dependence produced by this internationalization did not mean that cultural output was a specular reflexion of Europe’s. The material conditions of dependence do not by homogenizing their contents determine an exact direction for ideological formations. On the contrary, the reception of the metropolitan culture was recreated by the autonomist momentum of the New Continent.

Obviously, the insertion of Latin America into the new free-exchange system was also supported by thinking that repeated the same economic dependence seen in other contexts.

But ideological production is never simple. It is displayed, at least, in a twofold polarity: one reproducing the foreign patterns and another creatively facing the influences by submitting them to a form of discrete selection. The former imitates, the latter adequately expresses a genuine process of self-definition; the former starts from deductively established theories, the latter inductively faces reality and draws conclusions. Therefore, the matter is not simply the antagonism between ‘originality’ or ‘Americanism’ and ‘Europeism’ or ‘imitation’.

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Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest
John Benjamins B. V., Amsterdam

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This can be a matter of point of view concerning some levels of cultural production, but in other fields it deals with method itself. Obviously, this is a spiny field: the epistemology of the human sciences. In this sense, the thought of Andrés Bello (Caracas, 1781–Santiago de Chile, 1865) strengthens the best independent tradition of Latin American. His Americanism is not merely a thematized version in the series "Silvas", but expresses through the independence of his approach from European patterns, an examination of Spanish grammar, the philosophy of the understanding, the method for studying history, geography, the legitimacy of the Constitution, the guidelines of the university education, and many other subjects. His methodological perspective is inscribed within the liberal trend, but it did not have anything to do with that indiscriminate Europeist and falsely progressive liberalism.

Open to the influences of Europe, he insisted with accuracy that “We only should imitate them in their independent thought.” All his work is an example of independence that, nonetheless, does not deny the European sources.

As far as study is concerned, not only of literature, but also of every aspect of the Latin American reality, he understood that the substitution of direct knowledge of the facts for their attached conclusions, distorts any real knowledge. For this case, he did not mechanically take Herder’s theories and conceptions, but provides his procedures for the study of history:

I consider, gentlemen, Herder as one of the writers that more usefully has served mankind: he has given all his dignity to history, developing in it the desires of God and the fates for human beings upon earth. But Herder himself never proposed a substitution of the knowledge of facts, but its illustration, its explanation; its doctrine cannot be appraised either by means of previous historical studies. To substitute the facts by deductions and formulae would be to expose a skeleton to young people, instead of an alive transfer of the social man; it would mean to give them a collection of aphorisms instead of showing the mobile, instructive, and picturesque panorama of the institutions, customs and revolutions of great peoples [...]. It would be like removing from moralists and