

Albert O. Hirschman and Dependency Theorists: On the Search for the Possible

Abstract for the Third Conference on Albert Hirschman's Legacy: a Passion for the Possible

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Albert O. Hirschman starts *The Passions and the Interests* by saying that this “essay has its origin in the incapacity of contemporary social science to shed light on the political consequences of economic growth” (Hirschman, 1977, p. 3). In an edited volume about the turn to authoritarianism in Latin America, he would confess that his reaction to the “calamitous political consequences” of economic development in that region, an enterprise in which he had been personally involved, “was to withdraw into history, and more specifically into the history of ideas” (Hirschman, 1979, p. 62). After the project of political modernization in Latin America failed to deliver what was expected from it, Hirschman’s reply was to search for openings in the political project of modernity. His response differed from the one of his Latin American colleagues. After the military coups in Brazil (1964) and Argentina (1966), his friend Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto concluded *Dependencia y Desarrollo* (1969) in an apparently positive note, hoping that political will could “make actual what is only structurally possible” (Cardoso et al., 1969, 166). In an article published in 1978, Hirschman would call this tendency of Latin American social scientists to consider “beneath their scientific dignity to deal with possibility until after it has become actual and can then at least be redefined as probability” an “antipossibilist intellectual orientation” (Hirschman, 1978, p. 49). The article I would like to present in the *Third Conference on Albert Hirschman's Legacy: a Passion for the Possible* deals with the connection between Hirschman’s criticism of the antipossibilist intellectual orientation of dependency theorists and his search for openings in the political project of modernity.

References

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