

Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen y Alem (1850–1933): “Krausism” and international understanding*

Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen y Alem (1850-1933): “Krausismo” e entendimento internacional

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Abstract: This paper intends demonstrate to what extent Krausism, doctrine named after the German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), influenced Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen, Argentinian politician and two-time president (1916-1922 and 1928-1930) to challenge tradition and advocate for a new international law, Pan Americanism, linked to the the idea of the right to share the Earth and one humanity, thus, inspiring him to pursue a different path in the negotiations of the Treaty of Versailles and at the League of Nations after the First World War.

Keywords: Krausism, Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen y Alem, Pan Americanism, Humanity.

Resumo: Este artigo pretende demonstrar até que ponto o Krausismo, doutrina que homenageia o filósofo alemão Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), influenciou Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen, político argentino e duas vezes presidente (1916-1922 e 1928-1930) a desafiar a tradição e advogar por um novo direito internacional, o Pan-Americanismo, trabalhando com o direito de compartilhar a Terra e da existência de uma única humanidade, inspirando-o a seguir um caminho diferente nas negociações do Tratado de Versalhes e da Liga das Nações depois da Primeira Guerra Mundial.

Palavras-chave: Krausismo, Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen y Alem, Pan-Americanismo, Humanidade.

1. Introduction

Argentina has once again returned to the world stage of politics, diplomacy and international business. At any rate, that is what we read in

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the news most recently: Once again, the country is active as a dependable borrower on international capital markets. In mid-December 2017, Buenos Aires hosted the ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Most importantly, Argentina took over the rotating presidency of the G20 group on December 1, 2017.

As such, it became the first Latin-American country to organise a summit meeting of the twenty most important industrialised and emerging economies since the creation of the international forum in 1999. The fact that Argentina is hosting a meeting of more than 50 ministers and experts is proof of its growing international influence and higher profile in foreign affairs (RÜB, 2017, p. 10). This affords us an excellent opportunity to look back at a famous predecessor to the current president, namely at Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen y Alem (1850–1933) and his concept of international understanding. Just one hundred years ago, he sought to influence international agreements among nations.

The former leader of the radical party (Unión Cívica Radical) and president of Argentina is an interesting case, both from the standpoint of political theory and the history of ideas. Some of the most controversial questions surrounding this individual include: *to what extent did he refer to European legal philosophers and in particular to the school of the German idealist Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832)?*

The debate in Argentina as well as in other countries usually concerns the overriding concepts of “progress” and “moral-ethnic renewal”. Often, reference to these key terms is compared across areas of society. This is logical, because both concepts played a critical role for Krause and his students as well as for Yrigoyen. On the one hand, progressive optimism has been a common theme for Argentinian politicians and their political programmes since the second half of the 19th Century and have applied particularly to Yrigoyen’s Radical Party. On the other hand, the ethical demands of this new political movement went hand in hand with the

Krausism ethic of solidarity. Finally, the clear abuse of power and recurring electoral fraud committed by older parties offered welcome platforms of attack for the still young Radical Party. These promoted their rise and first successes at the polls (CLEMENTI, 1983; ROCK, 2002).

It comes therefore as no surprise that precisely *theorists and prominent representatives of the Radical Party in Argentina* still see Yrigoyen as a follower of Krause today because they both supported the same striving for progress. The most well-known is *Raúl Alfonsín*: Once again, it is a matter of promoting drivers of progress in society with the goal of creating increasingly greater harmony between classes of society as well as solving all social problems rooted in injustice and material inequality (GIUSSANI; ALFONSÍN, 1987, p. 44; ALFONSÍN, 1997, p. 174; GUERRERO, 1989). *Alfonsín* recognizes the effect of the Krausian ethic on Yrigoyen in the way that he was concerned with a rebalancing of societal opposition and greater solidarity among Argentinians (GIUSSANI; ALFONSÍN, 1987, p. 38).

However, in *social science literature* and in *publications on the history of ideas*, the relationship between Krausism and the Radical Party, including Yrigoyen, is often based on their shared idea of progress: *Arturo Andres Roig* views this basis in the idea espoused by Krause and his students that the person, family, community, and nation are striving for a higher goal in their organic development. The goal of this development is considered the “ideal law”. “The conscience of society” and a “progressive culture” are reflected in this law (ROIG, 1969, p. 213; STOETZER, 1988, p. 649; STOETZER, 1998, p. 325). Here as well, authors such as *Coriolano Alberini* or *Thomas Neuner* further emphasise the influence that the *ethic* and the moral content of Krausism in particular had on the members of the Radical Party and Yrigoyen (ALBERINI, 1930, p. 41). This moral impulse particularly promoted in a positive way the efforts towards re-democratisation and improvement of education (NEUNER, 2004, p. 11).

The significance of the idea of progress for Argentina and a moral-ethical impetus of the Radical Party and Yrigoyen since the turn of the 20th Century is unchallenged. However, there are certainly opposing ideas concerning what can be directly derived from Krausism. A well-known example in Argentina is *Jorge Enea Spilimbergos's* treatment of the party history of the Radicals and of Hipólito Yrigoyen: He attributes their progressive programme to the rise of the new middle class at the time and the continual process of modernisation that had already begun. He hardly takes seriously the idea that the Radicals and Yrigoyen were referring to "Krausism" (SPILIMBERGO, 1959, p. 10, 20 and 31; SPILIMBERGO, 1989, p. 77-78; CLEMENTI, 1983, p. 27).

Therefore, I would like to briefly address the extent to which the derivation of ideas previously mentioned and overwhelmingly chosen can indeed prove convincing (2). In conclusion, however, I will advocate a methodical limitation, which in my view allows for stronger proof of Yrigoyen's reference to Krause (3).

2. Advantages and disadvantages of the common derivation

(A) Yrigoyen was familiar with Krause's philosophy and admired it. Without question, he referred to Krausism expressions and terms which he related to his political work. In Argentina, the work of Krause and his students spread first in French and later through Spanish translations. Spanish philosophers such as *Julián Sanz del Río* (1814–1869) translated the works of Krause himself as well as that of his students into Spanish (ZAN, 1985, p. 243). Yrigoyen read these translations when he taught at the "Escuela Normal de Maestras de la Provincia". At this educational institution of the province of Buenos Aires, he was appointed as lecturer in philosophy and Argentine history after brief mandates as a deputy of the province in Buenos Aires and as a congressman for the "Partido

Autonomista" (beginning in 1881) (KRAUSE, 1860; TIBERGHIEEN, 1875; AHRENS, 1873).

He was inspired by Krause's harmonious law of progress and the idealistic and moral impetus of his teachings. It was a logical step in this way to connect these ideas to current questions of society and to more clearly define his personal profile (LUNA, 2005, p. 58-59; HUEGO, 1999, p.18-19). This is particularly true since Yrigoyen's sharp criticisms were directed at the reputed decadence of the reigning class (El Régimen). In contrast to this "regime", he proposed his civilizing, historical-philosophical excessive "mission" (La Causa) both before and during his presidency (1916). He even preached a calling (Apostolat) for the common good and political morale "the most prominent and important in the history of Argentina" (YRIGOYEN, 1949, p. 127-129 and 129-131; YRIGOYEN, 1981, p. 54).

(B) On the other hand, it is too often the case, in my opinion, that difficulties of reception are treated as insignificant: Neither did Yrigoyen expressly cite the German philosopher, nor did he provide any citations at all. Moreover, the painstaking, complicated nature of relaying his work was an important factor. Krause was not well-received in his time. He is considered one of the least known thinkers of the classical period in German philosophy (LANDAU, 1985, p. 81). His ideas reached the Roman language countries through writings by the German legal philosopher at the Free University of Brussels and Krause's student *Heinrich Ahrens* (1808–1874) as well as his Belgian student, *Guillaume Tiberghien* (1819–1874) (SCHRÖDER, 1985, p. 96). In addition, their characteristic style was more easily understood in translation, appeared more modern, and more clearly took into account societal and cultural-political concerns than Krause's overworked, awkward formulations (ALBERINI, 1930, p. 41; LUCAS, 1985, p. 22-23 – fn. 1).

The generally complicated path to reception made it difficult to introduce Krause's philosophy as a single school of thought abroad. This

made it even simpler to apply the vocabulary from the various sources of Krausism in a multifaceted way: Thus, widespread needs of society were easily linked with pedagogical and moral demands. As a result, this allowed progressive and democratic groups to more easily connect these to their political demands (SÁNCHEZ, 1985, p. 176, 178-179; TIMMERMANN, 2018, p. 712-714).

(C) When examining the content itself, there are arguments to be made against describing the party he led as a Krausian movement. Neither Yrigoyen as their leader nor the party members followed Krausism like supporters of an ideology. For the most part, he and his followers referred to Krause in a quite general manner. They limited their speech to the use of key expressions, most often terms such as “harmony” and “progress”. In this way, Yrigoyen promoted socio-political concerns that seemed most pressing at the time: he advocated for new forms of organisation such as agricultural cooperatives, since these were considered examples of a particularly harmonious connection between individuals (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 217). Additionally, he wanted to rebalance to the relationship between employers and employees, that is, between the principles of “capital” and “work”.² He also employed moral appeals to counteract the worldview and religious conflicts in the provinces.³

These statements were often formulated in a vague and prophetic manner. Or, it was simply another way of speaking about rebalancing conflicting interests. This was of crucial importance to Yrigoyen and his administration, above all during the difficult work conflicts and especially during his first term in office.⁴ This interpretation of Krausian terms was

² For the President of the Interior Minister Ramón Gómez, June 16, 1919 to the President of the Asociación del Trabajo, Pedro Christopherson, (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 102-103).

³ Interior Minister Ramón Gómez to the Governor of the Province of Santa Fe, April 22, 1921 (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 114).

⁴ Reason of Hipólito Yrigoyen for the bill before the congress, July 2, 1919 to promote the establishment of agricultural workers' committees (juntas arbitrales del trabajo agrícola) (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 179-180).

often the result of strategic or tactical considerations. This allowed for a mediating role between the conservative elite and the working class. The result, however, was the consistent recycling of universal approaches advocated by the German philosopher to a national renewal project in Argentina. Terms such as progress, ethical renewal and harmony were used to legitimise campaigns for the nationalisation of infrastructure and natural resources.

(D) Nevertheless, this recourse is somewhat closer to Krausism when the more widely propagated concepts of Krause's students are taken into account. The influence of Krausism is then seen more clearly. In particular, Heinrich Ahrens' social philosophy went further than that of his teacher. He justified very concrete seizures of private property by the government. Seen as a prohibition, this meant comprehensive limitations of specific forms of use. Viewed as a proscription, this implied furthermore the ordering of specific use, even up to complete expropriation (AHRENS, 1968, p. 132).

Although it is possible to argue that these respective terms were embedded in an entirely different associative context in Argentina than in Germany decades before, individual bills drafted by Yrigoyen with extensive limitations for use and availability of private property seem to be influenced by these theories. A well-known example is the authorisation to expropriate city and private land. The goal was to provide residential space for workers and their families in the state capital and in the larger cities of the province.⁵

(E) In the sense of a *preliminary result*, the findings are unclear and contradictory. *On the one hand*, there is proof of reappearing terms and the influence of Krause's writings, or that of some of his students, in the programme statements of Yrigoyen. Both employed a similar word choice, such as *ethical aspects* and particularly *progress* in the broadest sense of the

⁵ Art. 1, 2 of the relevant bill of September 30, 1920 (*construcción de casas para obreros en la Capital Federal y ciudades principales de provincia*), (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 184-185).

term: as forward movement and moving towards improvement, or in a socio-economic sense as a certain gain, a flourishing and growth.⁶

On the other, the disadvantage of the commonly accepted derivation of ideas mentioned above is that it allows parallels to be drawn between either progressive optimism or the ethic of solidarity and nearly all social fields. These can be applied at will to any country or people. Krausism therefore served as an umbrella for numerous, diversely applicable and often contradictory terms and concepts.

Moreover, other concepts which influenced a similar terminology enjoyed widespread use in Argentina until the end of the 19th Century: Intellectuals from all over the Americas connected quite simply the lawfulness of social progress with the social theory of evolution of *positivism*. Yrigoyen expressly cited this main term “orden y progreso.”⁷ The enlightened theory of *eclecticism*, on the other hand, emphasised ideas of harmony, as did adherents of Krausism. In keeping with the spirit of the times, Yrigoyen devoted himself to belief in progress and targeted educational policy with the zeal of idealism. *Catholic social teaching* also played a role. Particularly considering the ethical-moral issues facing Argentina, Catholic social teaching exercised an ever greater influence.

3. Differing solution approach

The stronger the purported reception of Kraus is related to practical political questions and very concrete conditions in society and nations, the more difficult it is according to my observations to actually draw solid deductions. Therefore, it is my opinion that a greater chance of success in establishing proof can be found when the comparison between Krause’s philosophy and Yrigoyen’s programme policy is limited to one field and the

⁶ To this word use, see RITTER, 1972, p. 1032; and WRIGHT, 1997, p. 1.

⁷ Message of Hipólito Yrigoyen to the youth of Uruguay, April 1912 (*Mensaje a la Juventud Uruguaya*), mentioning the term “orden y progreso” (YRIGOYEN, 1919, p. 42).

right conditions are in place: *Firstly*, an area of universally applicable principles is chosen that can be more easily extracted from unavoidably specific social conditions of a country. *Secondly*, the comparison of the uncontroversial tendency of both personalities towards wide-ranging idealism should provide a great deal of space for discussion.

Yrigoyen's speeches and official correspondence from 1917 onwards reveal that his concept of *international understanding* is an appropriate topic of research.

In matters of foreign policy, Yrigoyen consistently presented an organic view of the world and society. The ideal of domestic "social harmony" (*armonía social*) corresponded with the concept of "universal harmony" (*armonía universal*) on a global level. The basis of any societal development, according to him, was the constancy which provided all persons involved with assurance that they were continually perfecting and supporting one another in their daily lives (YRIGOYEN, 1981, p. 100).

It is clear that Yrigoyen referred to Krause when he made the following comparison: just like groups in society (families, corporations, associations), people as well are subject to upward development, thanks to their moral determination as "asociaciones de finalidad universal". Over the course of this process, they strengthen each other and grow ever closer to one another. In the end, the ideal of "perfected human harmony" (*armonía ideal de la humanidad*) and that of "one humanity" (*humanidad unida*) is achieved and everyone shares equally in prosperity and happiness (LUNA, 2005, p. 60; GUERRERO, 1983, p. 115).

This concept borrows from the idea of the "ideal of humanity" that Krause divided according to the organic forms of life: beginning with the family and then associations, on through the organic "total life of a people" and the harmonious association of people through the "unity of humanity" (KRAUSE, 1851, p. 105 - families and clubs, p. 128-135 - people, peoples association; and p. 155 - mankind). For Yrigoyen, the same applies here as

for all social movements: the development of nations also requires leading decisions to show the way forward. It is for this reason that he himself founded a “School of Higher Ethics” (YRIGOYEN, 1981, p. 80). Here, Yrigoyen’s sense of mission took on nearly religious tones: He not only aimed at the principle of equal treatment of all nations. Rather, he promoted even more “the evangelical awareness that nations are sacred to all nations, just as people are sacred to all people” (YRIGOYEN, 1981, p. 66; TIMMERMANN, 2018, p. 725-726).

The opportunity to put these principles in practice was offered to Yrigoyen during the First World War. In 1917, he decided to keep Argentina neutral and maintain friendly relations with all countries. In particular, the United States, threatening to enter the war, was opposed to this stance. Within the Argentinian administration as well, supporters of the Allies (los aliadófilos) held a significant majority. Even foreign policy advisors to the President who actually held sway on these matters unequivocally supported the opposing position (ROSA, 1992, p. 35).

Furthermore, Yrigoyen advocated an “alliance of solidarity” among as many American states as possible. He pursued his idea of a “Latin-American Conference” since taking office. The 1917 proposal undoubtedly influenced Yrigoyen’s tendency towards “Pan Americanism”. He founded the summoning together of a congress of peaceful American nations with long-standing connections, shared origins and the necessity of staying together in times of crisis.⁸ Nevertheless, the initiative in this form (“una conferencia de naciones americanas neutrales”) at this time contributed to widening the

⁸ According to government circular, May 8, 1917: “*Para procurar entre las naciones americanas una inteligencia con motivo de la Guerra que cada día abarca mayor extension en el mundo (...) y establecer vínculos cuya naturaleza cordial robustezca la situación y la figura de los estados americanos en el concierto general de las naciones*” (YRIGOYEN, 1945, p. 144-145); and according to the message to the Congress, June 30, 1917: “*El gobierno ha considerado que los pueblos de América, vinculados por identidad de origen y de ideales, no deben permanecer aislados unos y otros, ante la actual convulsion universal, sino congregarse a efecto de uniformar opiniones y coordinar en lo posible el pensamiento común en la situación porque atraviesa el mundo*” (YRIGOYEN, 1945, p.145)

division between supporters of U.S. policy and those states which remained neutral, such as Argentina (ROSA, 1992, p. 41). In principle, Yrigoyen wanted to use this path to “pursue peace and shared concerns”. Here as well, he referred to “harmony as a political ideal”. This was a concept, to him, that united all American countries.⁹

The USA and concerns on the part of most other countries he addressed prevented representatives of neutral Latin-American nations from gathering in 1917 or in 1918 in Buenos Aires. The theoretical underpinnings of this position clearly echoed Krause’s proposal of a new international law, to the extent that it foresaw a “right to share the earth” in addition to the “laws of a people’s union in a union of states” (KRAUSE, 1920, p. 21). According to Krause, states united with one another in order to “bring about the sacred right among themselves as higher persons (whole peoples). Thus, all united people, free from within and without, may, according to the laws of morally free development, which are unique to every people, fully perfect and complete their life” (KRAUSE, 1920, p. 11).

After the First World War, Yrigoyen committed himself of integrating the defeated nations into the world community in adherence to the principles of equal treatment. He interpreted Argentina’s role in the newly founded League of Nations in a way that recalled the words chosen by Krause when speaking of social utopia: This should guarantee a just peace and a full right of self-determination for all—including the defeated nations—and lead them to a true “covenant of humanity”. At the same time, Yrigoyen rejected the Treaty of Versailles due to the harsh terms of peace.¹⁰ After the Paris Peace Conference, he wanted to prevent the new League of Nations from becoming a “table of the victors”.

⁹ At the session of the Congress on June 30, 1917, see YRIGOYEN, 1981, p. 145; and YRIGOYEN, 1999, p. 56.

¹⁰ Krauses terms ‘Menschheitsbund’ and ‘Erdrechtsbund’ are influenced by Immanuel Kant, *Ideen zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), and Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795) (NEUNER, 2004, p. 97).

Therefore, from 1919 onwards he expressly opposed a differentiation between war-promoting and neutral nations. Victory in war conferred no rights, according to Yrigoyen. All countries should be able to claim the same rights. He warned the negotiating delegation in Geneva against making membership dependent upon such a declaration. When this demand was rejected at the end of 1920, Argentina withdrew its delegation.¹¹

4. Conclusion

As a result, this comparison actually proves that the idea of progress in particular is a link in this specific field of application. However, the marked similarity between the political programme and the written works of Krause goes beyond a general reference to “progress” or “a new ethic”. There is a concrete point of comparison between his concept of international understanding and Yrigoyen’s belief that Argentina’s gradual “rise in history” and in the fact that his own society was experiencing a harmonious and orderly upward development.

He goes beyond advocating "social harmony", better education of individuals and social policy and articulates a well-defined idea of the new League of Nations. In the spirit of Krause, Yrigoyen claims that the cultural and political development of individual nations continued in the progressive integration of all people. It is no coincidence that the Yrigoyen’s reference to Krause’s legal philosophy *in the very least* in his foreign policy positions is particularly clear and remains close to the original, even in the individual formulations.

¹¹ Referring to Yrigoyen’s controversy with his confidants in this matter: ROSA, 1992, p. 54-56; on the chronology of comments in the closing stages of this controversy (November 17 to December 7, 1920), see: ALFONSÍN, 1983, p. 268-269.

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