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The Krausist Movement
and ideological change in Spain,
1854–1874

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General Editor’s Foreword

Professor López-Morillas’s classic study, first published in Spanish in 1956 under the title El Krausismo español, involves a comprehensive examination of what has been described as ‘the bizarre phenomenon’ of Krausism in nineteenth-century Spain. Bizarre as its ideology and the circumstances of its arrival in Spain may have been, ‘Krausism’ had a great deal to do with forming the outlook and preoccupations of the radical element in Spanish life at that time. It originated in the middle of the century when some university-connected Spanish intellectuals, reformist by inclination and totally at odds with the, as they thought, irrational, decadent and self-seeking forces that then ruled Spanish politics and society, nevertheless felt themselves without access to any acceptable system of ideas capable of giving coherence and purpose to their radical urges. They found what they were looking for when a professor of philosophy at the University of Madrid, Julián Sanz del Río, returned to Spain in the 1840s as a fervent disciple of the philosophy of a now quite forgotten minor post-Kantian German idealist thinker, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1830). Though even Sanz del Río himself was never able to explain effectively to his Spanish lecture audiences the full meaning of the metaphysical complexities and the arid terminology of Krause’s thought, the latter’s stress on the central role of ethics in all aspects of human conduct and its preoccupation with lofty-sounding concepts such as, for example, ‘harmonic rationalism’, inspired a whole generation of radical intellectuals. The heyday of Krausism was in the period 1850–1880, but it had a major and enduring influence on Spanish political and social thinking, on educational theory and practice and on attitudes to religion. The impact of Krausist thinking on individual behaviour is also clearly to be seen in the work of the two greatest Spanish nineteenth-century novelists, Pérez Galdós and Leopoldo Alas. The movement was deeply repugnant to and often violently attacked by the
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GENERAL EDITOR’S FOREWORD

various traditionalist forces in the state and notably by the Church, which saw the Krausists as a kind of dangerously unorthodox lay priesthood whose beliefs and moral fervour were, as was indeed the case, based on premisses alien to Spanish traditions. Nevertheless, the ‘New Philosophy’ (as some of its adherents called it) heralded a continuing admiration for German philosophy and German science which would, even when Krausism itself had lost its appeal as an ideology, remain an important influence on the history of ideas in Spain into the twentieth century.

Professor López-Morillas’s study of the subject is notable for the way in which it combines comprehensiveness with clarity and readability. Though the author’s main concern is with the pervasive influence of Krausism on various aspects of the Spanish scene and with the kind of life-style it imposed on its adherents as individuals, he also successfully undertakes the difficult task of explaining the most important characteristics of Krause’s philosophy. The book’s appearance in an English translation will, it is hoped, make it easier for English-speaking students of nineteenth-century Europe to understand what is often seen by foreigners as a baffling element in the making of modern Spain. Professor López-Morillas, after many years as professor of Spanish and then as professor of Comparative Literature at Brown University, is now the holder of a chair in the University of Texas at Austin.

April 1980

P. E. RUSSELL
Preface to the English edition

In the following pages I have tried to present a movement of ideas that has rightly been considered one of the most influential in the history of modern Spanish thought. The reader who knows little of that history may be surprised to learn that a movement originating as the arbitrary choice of one man would later develop into a philosophical school, closely connected at first with the University of Madrid, and would eventually become a way of understanding and interpreting life that affected many Spaniards who knew little or nothing about philosophy. Today, when we have at our disposal a broad range of bibliographical data concerning the Krausist movement, we know that its remarkable influence was due neither to the novelty of its postulates nor to its intrinsic power of persuasion, but rather to the fact that it arrived in Spain from an obscure German source just at the time when an incipient intellectual class was feverishly seeking a faith or doctrine with which to identify. I believe that this is extremely important. It is well known, of course, that there were intellectuals – the so-called ‘enlightened’ men – in Spain during the eighteenth century; men, that is, who confronted the environment in which they lived and used their intelligence (they would have preferred to call it reason) to deal with that environment. But these men, first of all, worked in scattered fashion; their only point of contact was a vague feeling of reverence for les lumières; and in addition, they never made clear whether they thought of reason as a passive faculty, in the manner of a magnifying glass to see things better, even perhaps to observe what did not conform to ‘rational order’, or whether it was an active faculty, namely a structure of principles or ideas which, changed into a plan of action, would eventually supplant the traditional order of things.

Perhaps if the anti-Galic feeling produced by the French Revolution, first, and later by the Napoleonic invasion, had been less virulent, these early intimations of critical rationalism might also have been those of an
intellectual class that recognized itself as such and felt a responsibility for undertaking reforms. But this ‘possible Spain’, as the country during the reign of Charles III (1759–1788) has been described, remained just that, a mere possibility. Most of Spain’s population was suspicious of the ideas that were filtering through the Pyrenees (1789–1808); the country, devastated by the fight against the French invaders (1808–1814) – what in England is called the Peninsular War – and subsequently governed by a fierce and unrepentant reactionary faction (1814–1833, with a three-year interruption), could provide no encouragement for the development of speculative thought. The universities dispensed second-hand information, the Academies languished in indifference and routine activity, the nascent periodical press was effectively muzzled, there was severe censorship of foreign books, and Spanish presses offered almost nothing capable of exercising the mind. It was only after the death of Ferdinand VII (1833) that intellectuals and writers began to breathe freely; not very freely, to be sure, but enough to give grounds for hope that the unhappy period just ended would not be repeated. It was then that desire for change and improvement became concentrated on literature, which had acquired new vitality with the Romantic movement that belatedly entered the country with the return of the exiles who had fled during Fernando’s reign.

We need to emphasize the accessory function of literature during the first half of the nineteenth century in Spain, and especially during the Romantic period. Thought, in its broadest sense – ideas, beliefs, opinions, intuitions – was most often to be found in lyric poetry, in drama, and especially in critical essays often disguised as ‘local color’. Obviously there was nothing consistent or particularly logical about this; but it showed at least that writers’ brains were beginning to work again after a long fallow period, that writers’ eyes were taking a sharp look at the contemporary scene, and that writers’ pens were being wielded in response to timid hopes of national progress and rehabilitation. However, the country’s political, social, and economic condition was far from hopeful. The death of Ferdinand VII opened a period of civil strife between Carlistas, supporters of Ferdinand’s brother Don Carlos, and Isabelinos, those who favored Doña Isabel, the dead king’s daughter, who had acceded to the throne thanks to her father’s revocation of the Salic law excluding women from the succession. In very general terms, it was the Carlists who wished to perpetuate the old régime: political absolutism, traditional institutions, religious intolerance, preference for an agricultural and grazing economy; their chief
strength lay in the rural and semi-rural areas of the north and northeast of Spain. Among Isabella’s partisans were the liberals, those who favored representative government, tolerance in questions of religion, and an industrial and commercial economy; their strength was based largely in the cities and, in general, in the country’s central and southern regions. The Carlist cause, represented either in the person of Don Carlos or those of his successors as pretenders to the Spanish throne, led to an outbreak of hostilities several times during the course of Isabella II’s reign (1833–1868), and a lasting peace was not achieved until 1876. The threat of war, either real or latent, gave a strongly military stamp to Queen Isabella’s governments, and the ambitions of certain army generals led to pronunciamientos or political pressures in which the sovereign herself often played a leading role. The intrigues of Isabella’s court, the perversion of the political process by corrupt royal favorites and insubordinate military men, the queen’s personal immorality, all eventually exhausted the liberal faction’s initial sympathies toward the queen; they had hoped that her accession to the throne would inaugurate a splendid epoch in her country’s history, like that it had experienced under the first Queen Isabella.

And so the Krausist movement, with which this book deals, took root in a climate of disappointed hopes; and the young men who, beginning in 1854, received the teachings of the school’s founder, Julián Sanz del Río, were those who felt the disappointment most keenly. The wretched reality they saw around them led them to draw away from it as one draws away from a source of infection, and this withdrawal soon revealed their small numbers. At first there were very few of them, but for this very reason they felt closely linked to each other, huddled together like an aloof, austere little band of brothers. Later, encouraged by their teacher, they were to discover that their task was to think, and that thinking is a hard job that demands, in addition to a lofty sense of dedication, large stores of effort and will. Reason was to be their instrument and guide, in the dual sense, active and passive, of which I spoke above. They were, in short, the men who constituted an intellectual class for the first time in Spain, a ‘thinking minority’ as they called themselves, a ‘horde of fanatical sectarians’ as their enemies preferred to call them, using the phrase of a well-known traditionalist.

A possible linkage has been suggested between the Krausist movement and the Revolution of September, 1868, which resulted in Isabella’s exile and was followed by a six-year period of instability during which Spain tried, in quick succession, a Provisional Govern-
ment (1868–1870), a new dynasty with Amadeo of Savoy as king (1870–1873), a Republic that soon dissolved into anarchy (1873), and a military coup d’état that opened the way for a Bourbon restoration (1874) in the person of Alfonso XII, son of the dethroned Isabella. It must be noted, however, that if by ‘linkage’ a causal connection is implied between Krausism and revolution, the suggestion has no basis in fact. In 1868 those who opposed Isabella’s monarchy were legion, and the immense majority had never heard either of Krausism or Krausists. Strictly speaking, the Revolution of 1868 was a military pronunciamiento engineered by the same generals who had been dancing attendance on the queen for years, receiving her favors or her slights according to circumstances and the royal whim. But on this occasion, no doubt eager to acquire prestige and to place civilian talent at the service of plans for reform, the officers who had taken part in the coup made considerable efforts to attract the ‘thinking minority’ that was emerging from the universities or taught in them; and of course the Krausists formed a strong element in this group.

Hence it is not surprising that during the six-year revolutionary period the Krausists – along with others who, although they were not Krausists, sympathized with one aspect or another of the school – gained a solid foothold not only in centers of instruction, as was only to be expected, but also in various departments of governmental administration. They were experts at drawing up suggestions, plans, and projects, and their contribution was more doctrinal than practical. In the University of Madrid the rector, Fernando de Castro, a prominent Krausist, pondered a plan for university reform. In the presidency of the Republic Nicolás Salmerón, another well-known Krausist, advocated a federalized Spain that would put an end to political and social discord. Other more or less enthusiastic Krausists worked on the text of the Constitution of 1869 and on plans for the Ministry of Finance, public works, charitable institutions, public education, and the like. But disenchantment with the Revolution spread quickly among the ‘thinking minority’. Their eyes fixed on a lofty ideal, their souls filled with utopian zeal, the Krausists soon lost patience with the skepticism – if not stubborn opposition – with which the real world greeted their efforts. It might be said that they were condemned to live in a state of perpetual frustration, consoled only by the hope, which grew frailer day by day, that the future would prove them right.

But the future – at least the immediate future – did not treat them gently. Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy brought with it a reaction
against the doctrines and ideologies that had fed the revolutionary movement, and Krausist philosophy was one of these. Some of the school’s most conspicuous representatives in the world of education were expelled from their chairs and exiled to various points on the country’s periphery. The school, as such, had received a mortal wound. And as the ties that had bound its members together were loosened, their faith in the speedy arrival of a better world defrauded, they gradually moved toward other modes of thought which, though retaining a fundamental idealism, seemed more in tune with the here and now. A happy combination of noble aspiration and practical common sense would, however, place an unmistakable imprint on their later contributions to the fields of pedagogy, law, sociology, and aesthetics. But a study of this phase of Krausism’s later influence lies outside the scope of the present book.

Madrid, July 1979

J. L.-M.
Preface to the first Spanish edition

About the middle of the last century there appeared in Spain’s cultural life the initial phase of an ideological change which would lead, in the decades that followed, to a shift in the viewpoint from which Spaniards examined their material and spiritual contributions in the past and tried to anticipate the trajectory of their future activities. As a partial justification of this study, let me begin by saying that not a few of the consequences of that shift in attitude are very much in existence today; and this makes the task of finding and defining them still more difficult. Indeed, anyone who confronts as a spectator the life of his time, or an immediately past time, is overwhelmed by the quantity of information that pours in upon him. Lack of perspective gives him a deceptive view of things, in which, at the outset, both the substantial and the accidental claim the same measure of careful attention. But in addition he feels disturbed by the suspicion that when he pins down and interprets the ideas, beliefs, and passions of his contemporaries, what he is really doing is to define and justify his own ideas, beliefs, and passions by objectifying them. He wants to be an impartial spectator yet feels, willy-nilly, the impulse to participate in the drama that unfolds before his eyes. Chained to the moment in which he himself lives, he cannot draw away from it to view it as a reality from which he has consciously detached himself, and can contemplate from a number of viewpoints. And yet such detachment is indispensable, even though it may be illusory.

Some of the aspects of Spain’s intellectual history offered in these pages have been in their time – and in some cases still are – subjects of bitter controversy, and for this very reason the object of very contradictory judgments. Often the passion aroused by the ideological disputes that Krausism brought with it seems to derive from a transfer to the intellectual plane of the impassioned feelings natural to a country torn by civil strife for a half a century. Under the troubled surface of nineteenth-century Spain I have tried to discover some elements which, I believe, characterize the second half of that century within the history of ideas. As with any other period, this one too tempts me to set down
what was potential in it and what was real, what it might have been and what it in fact was. For we must not forget that it was a period over which a question mark still hovers. During it, problems were made flesh and constantly tormented those who most prided themselves on calmness and serenity. The almost frantic vehemence with which the most bizarre theories were postulated makes us suspect that fundamentally we are dealing with a defensive attitude, a challenge born of deep-seated uncertainty and nourished by a desire to steer an ideal course through an inconstant and elusive world.

The Spaniard of the mid-nineteenth century felt a vague dissatisfaction within himself which gradually spread and darkened his whole sphere of activity. Inwardly, he felt relegated to a humble corner of the modern European scene, from which he watched, with an avidity not unmixed with mortification, the more relevant role played by other actors not of his blood. It was then, during that twenty-year span which preceded and followed the Bourbon restoration, that three polemical attitudes appeared on which judgment of Spain’s cultural history would be based for years to come. The first of these attitudes embodied the opinion – latent ever since the eighteenth century – that the Spanish genius, eminent in the intuitive grasp of inner and outer reality, in the poetic vision of God, the world, and man, was incapable of abstract reasoning, minute observation, and patient experimentation; incapable, in short, of philosophy and science. Imaginative exuberance, bursts of passion, all-absorbing individualism, lack of intimacy, were considered to be special traits of the Spanish genius. All of them had contributed toward giving an eruptive and spasmodic stamp to the culture that had sprung from that genius – ‘orgiastic’, Ortega y Gasset was to say later; Unamuno would call it ‘African’. The second attitude was that of persons who, without accepting this diagnosis but recognizing that the current cultural inadequacy was indisputable, examined Spain’s history seeking the point at which that history had ‘changed course’ under the pressure of specific factors, had betrayed itself, as it were, and destroyed the cultural structure that Spain had been building, until then, in collaboration with other Western nations. To the psychological interpretation of the first attitude, the second opposed a determinist interpretation founded on the constricting action of outside elements. The Inquisition, the Counter-Reformation, Habsburg absolutism, taken separately or together, had been the disturbing elements of Spain’s cultural configuration. The sixteenth century had witnessed this unfortunate deviation. And lastly, the third attitude was that held by persons who
insisted that not Spain but Protestant Europe had broken the spiritual unity, and with it the sense of cultural community, that had been achieved during the Middle Ages. They justified sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish intransigence as a logical result of the noble, though fruitless, attempt to restore that broken unity. This last group identified Spanish culture with Catholicism to the point of considering as anti-Spanish any ideological current that tended to undermine the Church’s sovereignty, and as an aberration any spiritual manifestation tinged with heterodoxy.

Underlying this dissatisfaction was the undeniable fact of Spain’s material backwardness. The Spaniard who crossed the Pyrenees was forced to recognize, no matter how inflexible his national pride, that in the sphere of material things his country lagged far behind the rest of Western Europe. The mere evidence of that disparity was in itself a cause for discouragement; but it was a still greater cause in a period when the material level of life was viewed as the index of a culture’s degree of vigor and efficiency. A bourgeoisie conscious of its mission of renewal, of its increasing command over the obstacles of the physical surroundings, inclined to read history as a chronicle of man’s irresistible progress toward a fuller life, smiled complacently upon the multitude of material creations which made possible, as well as justified, the extent of its power. The bourgeoisie, newly arrived at full enjoyment of the purely normative and ideal values of traditional culture, had ended by appropriating them, immediately placing them at the service of utilitarian ends. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment, an aspiration to spiritual improvement, had been replaced by Progress, an aspiration to material betterment. Culture became a simple dimension of Progress, and often the two terms were assigned the same meaning.

The Spaniard of the mid-nineteenth century, unaware of the error implicit in so pragmatic an interpretation of culture, was dazzled by the results that material progress had brought to other European countries. If he had possessed an adequate notion of his own spiritual heritage, a notion kept strictly separate both from patriotic effusion and facile criticism, he might perhaps have been able to judge with minimal accuracy the meaning of the change that had recently taken place in the Western European spirit. But in reality he did not possess this knowledge, and the fact that he did not shows through the intellectual fumblings, the frequent diatribes, and the violence itself of the period’s controversies. In trying to shorten the distance between his country and the rest of Europe, his lack of reliable criteria caused him to favor men
or ideas that had received only fleeting attention. Convinced heart and soul that he was hopelessly behind the times, this conviction impelled him, as a strong psychological reaction, to idolize everything new. The important thing was to be in the latest fashion, to cut one’s ideas according to the most recent pattern. A scientific hypothesis, a philosophical doctrine, a style of art, embraced with blind enthusiasm, was abandoned as soon as the suspicion arose that it had been replaced by others in the interest of cultured Europe. The educated Spaniard had never had so unbounded a zeal for the fortuitous. A man like Manuel de la Revilla, whose intelligence was sharp and his culture extensive, was able, in the course of a life lasting only thirty-five years, to militate successively in the ranks of Krausism, neo-Kantianism, and positivism. The best-known reviews of the period display a constant and fervent desire for modernity. The translator’s pen moved tirelessly to place within the Spanish reader’s grasp articles and essays that reflected, or aspired to reflect, the current state of the different provinces of knowledge. And partisans of the dominant philosophical system – Krausism – called it, by definition, the brand-new philosophy.

It was indeed a mistaken perspective, a result of the suffocating isolation in which the Spanish intellect had lived for so long. And yet we must excuse it because, however mistaken, it represented the initial phase of the fruitful spiritual change that was to appear in subsequent decades. The errors of that perspective could be corrected, as in fact they were later. They were errors of focus, distortions caused by the rapid overview of a visual field that had suddenly and unexpectedly expanded. The cultured Spaniard of those days was in large measure self-taught. What he learned, whether well or badly, had a strong adventitious flavor. His intellectual hunger, innocent of all critical refinement, fed on thoroughly seasoned as well as tasteless victuals. In the end, what saved him from ideological indigestion was a basic integrity, a clear ethical intuition which tended to personalize the most abstract questions, to fit them into the frame of moral conscience; that is, to turn them into very necessary tasks of the human condition. In Krause first, as later in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson, this inquisitive and capricious Spaniard sought above all else a means of allaying his ethical unrest. From Sanz del Río to Ortega, from Fernando de Castro to Unamuno, from Francisco Giner to Antonio Machado, this concern is always unmistakable, the result of an instinctive grasp of the fact that man is more important than ideas. And it is interesting to note how, at the precise moment when the Spaniard is most eager to be primarily
intellectual, the frustration of that eagerness shows that he possesses a rich potential of human qualities – reveals, in short, man himself in all his greatness and misery.

This study will attempt to draw the outlines of Spanish Krausism, a spiritual movement to which – though more out of laziness of mind than serious thought – has been attributed Spain’s incorporation into modern European thought. The Europeanization of Spain is far from being a recent concern. It arises, already vociferous, in the eighteenth century; it persists, though concealed by more peremptory concerns, during the first half of the nineteenth; and it finds at last, in the doctrine imported by Julián Sanz del Río, the opportunity to be structured into a militant school. And so Krausism’s ‘newness’ lies not so much in advocating the Europeanization of Spain as in identifying Europe with the rational view of the world and, in conformity with that identification, in trying to guide Spanish culture in the direction of rationalism. I freely confess that what attracts me is the characterization of a cultural mode rather than the analysis of a philosophical system. What a certain type of Spaniard tried to see in Krausism is much more significant for me than what Krause put into his doctrine, or what Sanz del Río was trying to accomplish by importing it. I also believe that I should limit myself to describing the phase in which this spiritual movement appears in its greatest degree of homogeneity, namely during the years between the Revolution of 1854 and the early days of the Restoration. It is true that Krausism survived for a long time after this second chronological landmark, either as a doctrinal ingredient in disciplines like pedagogy, sociology, law, etc., or as an ethical ingredient in writers like Galdós, Clarín, Antonio Machado, and a few others. But it is not Krausism as a survival, but as a living doctrine, which interests me here.

First of all I wish to thank the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation which, by granting me a fellowship in 1950–1951, made this study possible; the librarians of the Hemeroteca Municipal, the Biblioteca Nacional, and the Ateneo, of Madrid; those of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris and the British Museum of London; and my colleagues Professor William L. Fichter, Professor Albert J. Salvan, and Dr José Amor y Vázquez, of Brown University, who have patiently read the manuscript.

J. L.-M.

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Note to the second Spanish edition

The first edition of this book went out of print nearly ten years ago. Since then I have inclined to believe that my purpose in writing it had been accomplished: namely, that of investigating and casting light on a movement of ideas very frequently spoken of but almost never clearly defined. I think I can say without exaggeration that the book did indeed carry out this task. Its vicissitudes, nonetheless, are not lacking in interest. For a number of years after its publication in Mexico in 1956 it could not be sold openly in Spain, and it was the object of clandestine traffic by Spaniards traveling abroad or foreigners entering the country. Copies were made of a number of chapters – I have seen some of these in manuscript – which passed from hand to hand, especially among university students. The book has also served as a stimulus to other scholars interested in the Spanish Krausist movement.

I have good reason to believe that the book is still sought and read with interest, and many people have urged me to have it reprinted. The result is this new edition. I have not wished, however, to write a new book, in which I would have had to take into account the large number of studies on Krausism published during the last twenty years. That would have been an undertaking too great for my energies and far removed from my present concerns. Hence I have confined myself to adding certain indispensable bibliographical material, in particular other studies of mine written since 1956 in which I tried to expand or explain aspects of the book that clearly required such treatment. These references, and a careful correction of obvious errata, have sufficed to complete this elementary revision.

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