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EROS AND HERMES: GERHARD KRÜGER AND THE SOCRATIC PATH TO NATURAL THEOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Over the past century, many students of Martin Heidegger have followed in their teacher's footsteps by engaging with ancient philosophical thought. In an account of his formative years in Marburg, Gadamer observes that, while it gradually became evident that the young professor approached Aristotelian texts with a critical intent, his early students were captivated by various interpretations that ignited vibrant interests. They came to believe that returning to the ancients addressed the need to recover a form of knowledge deeply rooted in everyday *praxis* [Gadamer 1967, 82-92]. Heidegger had made a significant promise: to restore the entirety of knowledge produced by modern science to its "practical" meaning, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of both naturalism and historicism, which complicate any normative reflection. However, this promise ultimately went unfulfilled. While his critique of modernity remains persuasive, Heidegger's constructive effort is far less convincing. The ethical paradigms he proposed over five decades – from resoluteness to releasement in response to the call of Being – seemingly lack sufficient justification. As a result, figures

such as Strauss, Klein, Löwith, Arendt and Gadamer himself distanced themselves from their master, pursuing their studies of the ancients independently, though still informed by the insights he provided.

A significant episode in this broader chapter of 20th-century philosophy, often referred to as the second *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* [Rosen 1989], is the debate between Leo Strauss and Gerhard Krüger regarding the role of Platonic dialogues in the history of Western philosophy: a crucial pathway to resolving the dilemma of what constitutes the good life for human beings. This study specifically focuses on the perspective developed by Krüger, an unjustly overlooked pupil of Heidegger, who may offer an intriguing insight into the correlation between eros and hermeneutics as the foundation of a natural theology. First, I will briefly provide some historical context regarding the genesis of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* (1939), his masterwork in Platonic exegesis, with particular emphasis on its relationship with Heidegger and Strauss (2). Secondly, I explain the logic through which eros evolves, in tandem with the interpretation of the world it offers within a critical *mythologein* (3). In the third place, the hermeneutics of love proposed thus far should evolve into a metaphysics of desire, conceiving of a beauty that transcends the limits of time while also inspiring a political striving to create a better world (4). In conclusion, I will briefly show how this perspective differs from a Straussian paradigm and outline avenues for further development in this direction.

2. *From Kant back to Plato: the Maßstab between natural law and eros*

The ethical and religious interests of Gerhard Krüger, coupled with a mature perspective that remains skeptical of the ideologies of his time, illustrate a path for navigating the challenges of modernity without succumbing to the vortex of post-modern nihilism. However, secondary literature on the author is limited and almost exclusively focuses on his relationships with other contemporary thinkers. With the exception of a monograph in Catalan authored by Joan Ordi i Fernández, there are no volumes that extensively examine his thought, despite his development of original theoretical perspectives that could herald «a new spring for strong thinking» [Ordi i Fernández 2009, 12]. The *damnatio memoriae*

he endured warrants a biographical digression aimed at elucidating the context essential for understanding his Platonic work.

Krüger was born in January 1902 in Berlin. He completed his education in Marburg, where he earned his doctorate in 1924 with a thesis on *Kant's Doctrine of Sensory Affection*, supervised by Nicolai Hartmann. As a student of Bultmann, he engaged in discussions on theological issues during a period when dialectical theology critiqued the liberal theology of Ernst Troeltsch and Adolf von Harnack. Yet, Krüger also voiced reservations about Karl Barth's *Römerbrief*, which remained ensnared in the categories of German idealism: «Since Barth's conceptual framework does not explicitly address the question of Being, he cannot conceptually express the dialectical movement of the believer within his faith» [1926, 155]. The polemic against idealism is a constant theme in the reflections of the young philosopher, dating back to his arrival in Marburg in 1920 [Gadamer 2006, 813]. Such a stance is rooted in the profound belief that any effort to reassess the relationship between philosophy and religion – ensuring that the latter is neither subsumed under the former nor reduced to mere personal idiosyncrasy – must engage with the question of Being. This inquiry offers an alternative to both the idealist thesis of sovereign, self-sufficient self-consciousness and the materialist, historical perspective that denies the mind's ability to transcend prevailing circumstances.

These concerns are bound to converge with those of Heidegger, who began collaborating with Krüger in 1925 on his *Habilitationsschrift*, titled *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik*, which was completed in 1929 and was published in a more condensed form two years later. In this volume, Krüger positions himself in both continuity and discontinuity with *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, as he is prompted to raise a fundamental philosophical question that initially takes a Kantian form: the question of *Maßstab*. According to Krüger, his mentor rightly highlighted the finitude upon which human knowledge is grounded, and the receptiveness of human beings towards Being.¹ However, he failed to

¹ Despite their shared theological background and similar viewpoints, or perhaps precisely due to these factors, Heidegger did not harbor excessive sympathy for his student. In a letter to Bultmann dated 29 March 1927, he remarked: «Krüger sent me his essay. I expected more. It's unclear whether it is theology, philosophy, or neither»

provide a criterion for interpreting Being, thereby rendering freedom an inexplicable abyss [1934, 161]. In contrast to Heidegger, Krüger argues that the decisive reason for human finitude is not death, but «the obedience to the unconditional injunction, which from this point of view has already been correctly characterized by Cohen as the final law» [1931, 8].² Hence, «whereas facticity is understood by Heidegger as *thrownness*, in Kant it must be interpreted as the fact of being created by God» [ivi, 40].

While I cannot delve deeper into Krüger's interpretation of Kant at this moment, it is sufficient to state that, for him, the moral law represents the cornerstone of Kant's *Aufklärung*. He claims that rational finite beings perceive this law within consciousness as if they themselves were its authors, thus aligning it with their inherent nature. Yet, this "as if" implies that they are not the authentic lawgivers [ivi, 68]. According to Krüger, the seeds of a natural theology are already embedded within the analytic of practical reason, which the dialectic merely confirms. More precisely, one might argue that if the analytic were properly conducted, a dialectic would either have been unnecessary, or at the very least, would have taken a different form. However, let us maintain our focus on the notion of moral law as the foundational element of a theological worldview that precedes any specific revelation.

[Bultmann & Heidegger 2009, 29]. This judgment is softened, albeit only slightly, in a letter dated 9 April 1929: «Nevertheless, I believe he will produce more than Gadamer, provided his Berlin rhetorical tendencies do not end up destroying everything» [ivi, 110]. The expectations were tragically misplaced: in 1960, alongside the publication of *Wahrheit und Methode*, which would achieve success comparable to *Sein und Zeit*, Krüger was forced to abandon teaching due to a severe stroke he had suffered in 1953. He passed away in 1972, without having been able to complete a work on Augustine, which would have represented the culmination of his philosophical efforts.

² Krüger expresses sympathy for Cohen, frequently citing the second edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik*. Yet, he finds Cohen's interpretation of Kantian ethics to be lacking, arguing that «the law, for him, is the community of autonomous individuals whose pure will is only recognized in the act of producing itself». He further asserts that «Cohen understands autonomy solely as autotelic, as he overlooks the horizon of creation» [ivi, 131]. In other words, for Cohen, the kingdom of ends functions as a regulative ideal that should guide practical actions toward its future realization. Luc Langlois 2011, 146-147, ironically, claims that Krüger precisely misses this worldly-eschatological dimension of Kant. For more details about Krüger's *Kantbuch*, see Kirscher 1997; Grondin 2011.

In his correspondence with Strauss, Krüger faces reproach for his unquestioning acceptance of moral law's validity. If *das Gewissen* represents *das einzige Faktum der reinen Vernunft*, any such fact requires interpretation. Strauss contends that this assumption exposes Krüger's failure to engage in the kind of radical inquiry exemplified by Plato in his examination of «the right order of human life» [Strauss 2001a, 440]. Plato, Strauss argues, was not satisfied with merely knowing the law but sought to probe its meaning.³ This critique ultimately prompted Krüger to revise his positions in his 1939 work, which not only offers an interpretation of Plato but, more importantly, tackles the *Maßstab* problem, shaped by Strauss's critical insights. To summarize: starting with a positive assessment of Heidegger's question about the meaning of Being and his re-evaluation of human finitude, Krüger initially identifies moral law as a key interpretive framework for orienting oneself within philosophical thought. However, he eventually adopts Platonic positions so as to explore the possibility of natural theology. His Platonism will emphasize the notion of eros as a central element of his philosophical outlook.

3. Logos und Mythos: *re-thinking Hegelian dialectic within the Symposium*

In his tribute to Krüger, Gadamer distils the fundamental principles that characterize his friend's philosophical perspective. Rather than adopting the Christian synthesis of ancient philosophy and the Gospel, a defining feature of contemporary Neo-Scholasticism, Krüger opted to draw exclusively from classical philosophy, with a particular focus on Plato. Gadamer notes that «his book on Plato was a kind of foundation for natural knowledge of God» [2006, 819], presenting the Athenian philosopher not only as a critic of pagan polytheism, but also as a piv-

³ The correspondence has been published in an English translation edited by Shell [2018], accompanied by seven interpretative essays from various authors. For a more in-depth analysis of the correspondence, cf. Ghibellini's recent volume [2024, 69-103], which identifies two themes explored in the epistolary exchange: the problem of the second cave and the distinction between natural law and natural right. A third issue should also be considered: the reasonableness of faith.

otal figure within the tradition of Greek thought. Gadamer encapsulates the theoretical essence of *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* through a few incisive observations:

A new passion for vision, *eros philosophos*, enables Plato to transcend the passionate immersion in the world of archaic Greek society, while simultaneously preserving its religious foundations. In contrast, the modern concept of sovereign thought, whose aporias Krüger relentlessly pursued, endows classical philosophy with the defining characteristic of being an accommodating reason. From this starting point, Krüger sought to demonstrate the worldly order of things, as established by the Christian doctrine of creation based on revelation, as a teleological cosmos of goods. [...] The seventy pages of this introduction could stand among the enduring contributions to the philosophical dialogue with the Greeks [Gadamer 2006, 819].

From this heartfelt encomium four theses can be discerned. First, Plato transcends a passionate horizon linked to pagan religion, through a novel passion known as *eros philosophos*. Still, he remains an inherently religious thinker who accommodates a teleological view of the world. Thirdly, this perspective not only paves the way for Christianity, but also contrasts with the modern conception of sovereign thought, suggesting a broader openness to religious dimensions. The introduction to this essay, republished by Richard Schäffler as an independent volume in 1973, under the title *Eros und Mythos bei Plato*, constitutes a vital contribution to the philosophical dialogue with the Greeks, facilitating the expansion of one's own understanding. In this way, Gadamer aligns his colleague's thesis with his own: the Form of the Good emerges as an ideal, as an asymptotic goal pursued through an ongoing dialogue with oneself and the classics. Nevertheless, this reconstruction diminishes the theoretical potential of Krüger's work, which aims not only to interpret Platonic teleology for its integration into Christian thought, but also to offer a transhistorical response to the enduring question of the essence of philosophy.⁴

⁴ Thus, it becomes evident why, in a conversation with Reale, Gadamer characterizes his former study companion as «a man of great extremity and radicalism», maintaining that «Krüger's Platonic message remains fundamentally focused on the importance of dialogue» [Reale 2010, 851].

The essay opens by highlighting a key difficulty: «it is hard to attain an objective understanding of Plato's conception of philosophy», as the definitions offered in the dialogues are diverse and «appear rather unfamiliar to modern sensibilities» [Krüger 1978, xvii]. In the *Apology*, philosophy is depicted as a service to Apollo (20d); in the *Phaedo*, as a preparation for death (64a); in the *Symposium*, as a passionate love that ascends from the beauty of bodies to Beauty itself (210a); in the *Republic*, as both the salvation of the state and the pursuit of scientific dialectic (473d-e; 521c; 531d); in the *Seventh Letter*, philosophy is not something that can be taught but rather the object of illumination (341b). If we find ourselves perplexed by these definitions or inclined to dismiss them as outdated expressions of a bygone era, the end of modernity may provide an occasion to rediscover the deeper significance of Platonic philosophy [Krüger 1978, xi]. Krüger's wager is that, in the *Symposium*, Plato presents the autonomous reflection amid a state of *aporia* akin to that encountered by modernity, while also offering the means for its resolution. These means entail defining philosophy as an erotic endeavour and as the very pinnacle of natural eros, while conceiving autonomous reflection as ultimately sustained by the nocturnal passion of life. The inquiry into the essence of philosophy is then directed toward ancient thought, as the moderns have recognized a «problematicity that necessitates a serious examination of Plato, embodying the Socratic attitude of not-knowing» [ivi, xv]. In Krüger's view, Heidegger's engagement with the ancients merely reaffirms the tenets of modernity, making it plausible that "the moderns" here specifically refers to his students: Gadamer, Klein, Strauss and, of course, Krüger himself.⁵ But what is the distinctiveness of his interpretation?

According to Krüger, philosophy embodies a *logos* within *mythos* – or, perhaps more aptly, a critical *mythologein*, emerging from the conflict between archaic mythology and sophistry. The authoritative stance from which Plato engages with the mythical tradition does not alter the fact that «in particularly significant passages of his writings, *myth* takes precedence over *logos*, as it is undoubtedly the only form in which the

⁵ Krüger situates Heidegger within the framework of modernity on several occasions, most clearly in 1950; 1958a; 1959a.

philosopher can convey what is most important and encompass the entirety» [ivi, 18]. Reason emerges from myth, but it also culminates within it, as «the knowing man is an insufficient being, constrained and limited in his most intrinsic potential». Everything depends on how mythical understanding evolves through the negation brought about by reason, which, in an (anti)Hegelian scene, serves as the negative that negates itself. Krüger exemplifies the transition from mythical to mythological thought through its shift from Aphrodite to Eros.

While the goddess «emerges, even in sculpture, as the embodiment of an enchanting beauty», «he who perceives the power that primarily governs him in Eros has already come to remember himself, that is, his essential freedom» [ivi, 20-21]. The latter represents the force of passion and a desire perpetually directed toward beauty, which «ignites the “divine” flame that consumes». However, it can also prove to be a capricious lover, losing its path as it becomes hindered in self-reflection. In contrast, the truly devout pagan forgets his passion for the force that stirs it, «overlooking Eros in favour of his mother Aphrodite». Beyond metaphor, Eros is a passion that acts upon individuals, excavating within them an interior realm that remains open to the world without dissolving into it. First and foremost, since it is a passion, while one can assent to love and desire the beloved, this freedom does not equate to a causal power: «who, if one truly loves, cannot even choose to love». Just as in the mythical situation, «our behavior unfolds within a disposition in which we are immersed without our intervention» [ivi, 9]. Eros engages not only the senses, but encompasses human beings in their entirety, to the point that «even thought transforms under the influence of love».

Krüger asserts that freedom «must manifest as liberating enthusiasm» [ivi, 32]. Yet, he contends that for this freedom to be conscious, it requires one critical element: «that our love transforms us into seers, while Aphrodite (and Eros as her servant) blinds us». Within a poetic worldview, *die mächtige Schönheit der Natur* reveals itself through imagination, which, «enchanted by the given reality», becomes its clear reflection and seeks to establish itself as «the only legitimate means of knowing» [ivi, 37]. This “pious” poetry embodies a devoted surrender, yet it also signifies an indiscriminate yielding to worldly forces that, rather than illuminating the real, transmute it into a fantastical sphere.

In contrast, the worshipers of Eros break free from the constraints of traditional gods, who are now deemed significant only insofar as they relate to love. In Eros's domain, the world ceases to be the primary focus as everything orbits around human passion. This process of internalization (*insichgehen*) encourages the exploration of Eros as a criterion for distinguishing different forms of beauty, prompting an examination of our erotic constitution in order to understand the type of beauty in which the *daimon* Eros might attain its own *eu-daimonia*. Moreover, this inner space fosters a form of freedom that is fundamentally distinct from mere arbitrariness, as it unfolds through the contemplation of various images, each one presenting a *spectrum* of goods oriented towards the true good.

This perspective requires considering the Hegelian background previously mentioned, which resurfaces when Krüger asserts that the *Symposium* represents a «phenomenology of spirit» [1973a, 118]. The point is that spirit, initially articulated through myth and immersed in nature, gradually ascends and ultimately recognizes itself as the essence of nature. Nonetheless, the understanding of this spirit and the journey it must undertake to attain self-awareness and appreciate the significance of this ascent differ markedly from those in Hegel. Unlike absolute knowledge, which fulfils the course of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, «Platonic myth expresses a religious knowledge that remains aporetic» [ivi, 62]. His aporetic language, rich in imagery, does not simply indicate a limitation of reason; rather, it unveils deeper truths about the realities myth engages with: the nature of the soul, the afterlife, and the transcendent good. As Richard Schäffler observes, whereas Hegel contends that religion manifests as a moment in the development of spirit toward its self-realization in the philosophical concept, according to Krüger, «Plato's discourse on Eros offers a religious understanding of philosophy» [1978, 90].

To recapitulate, Krüger thinks that Plato serves as an antidote to modernity, as he provides an alternative *Maßstab* grounded in the inner logic of Eros, which engages in a self-interrogation that lies at the heart of the philosophical act, of which it constitutes the essence. In this process, Eros seeks an object – or, more precisely, a ground – where it might become a *good* Eros, *eudaimonios*. What, then, can we identify as this foundational ground? And what does Eros come to perceive?

4. *The multilayered event of Ergriffenheit: eternal beauty and political striving*

One of the central concepts in Krüger's thought is *Ergriffenheit*, a term resisting easy translation into English. It conveys a range of meanings, including emotional upheaval, deep engagement, and ecstatic rapture. Personally, I find Reale's more neutral suggestion appropriate [cf. Krüger 1995, 152], opting for the paraphrase "*essere afferrati*" (being grasped). While Krüger mainly invokes this concept in discussion of the relationship between human beings and the divine, as in *Religiöse und profane Welterfahrung*, where it is contrasted with an Heideggerian critical sobriety and is described as a «feeling of devotion and surrender» [1973b, 89], the ways in which reality seizes us are manifold and often bypass our spontaneous will, acting upon us without consent.⁶ *Ergriffenheit* redefines the Heideggerian notions of *Verstehen* and *Befindlichkeit*, since it signifies "being-thrown-into-love". It compels each individual to engage properly with this circle, to take a stance in response to the love awakened within us by reality. Therefore, philosophy consists of «*being grasped* by the demoniac power of such a love» [1973a, 156]; that is, it is not beauty itself that captivates us, as with Aphrodite, but rather the happiness (*eudaimonia*) that beauty provides as a ground for love to actualize itself. Kluback observes that, in this context, philosophy arises in response to a mysterious passion that captivates those lovers who remain open to what surrounds them:

receptivity is the ground of our activity, the source of our understanding, the realization of the mutual dependence of all upon all and that higher dependence of man upon God, the measure of all reality, the source of love [Kluback 1987, 218].

⁶ Schäffler 1984 offers an overview of this lesser-known work by Krüger, based on his final lecture course from the winter semester of 1971/1972. In the limited critical literature on Krüger, the concept of *Ergriffenheit* has been recognized only by Kluback 1984; 1987, whose contributions on this subject, in just a few concise pages, explore some of the central themes of Krüger's work, from his opposition to idealism to the dialectic between freedom and love. I will avoid documenting every assertion I make regarding Heidegger. Regarding critical sobriety as an "ethical" paradigm, I would like to reference my own work [2024].

In other words, the degrees of openness we maintain toward beauty – requiring reflection on the satisfiability of Eros, incited by Eros itself, and potentially leading us to philosophy – shape how we perceive things and allow us to be touched by the beauty of reality. Without critical reflection, we remain captured by a natural beauty that dominates us, rendering us, so to speak, heteronomous. In which direction does this reflection lead us? According to Krüger, a Platonic theory of Eros begins with the phenomenon of time and transience, recognizing «the supreme expression of every lack and dependence in the necessity of death» [Krüger 1973a, 151]. Beauty serves as an appropriate foundation to withstand the ravages of time, enabling the possibility of immortal love. Ancient philosophy identifies the main characteristics of time in the enduring and passing of beings; «to be in time exhausts and burdens everything» [*ivi*, 166], which is to be «threatened and ultimately swallowed by time». In this sense, one might claim that «even time is a demon». Conversely, the transience of earthly things «is rendered irrelevant when confronted with the immobile stability of the entire world as shown by eternal stars». Eros and Chronos collide within the realm of consciousness, as everything in nature remains encapsulated in the unconscious cycles of life:

The travail of transience prevails if man, beyond the gaze directed toward the cosmos, cannot forget himself. [...] The greater the forgetfulness of self, the lesser the concern for the passage of time. If in the real world one believes to perceive divinity everywhere, and therefore immortality, even the excruciating travail of decay is considered, in its entirety, of little consequence [*ibidem*].

The importance of this passage from *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* cannot be overstated, as Strauss critically engages with it in his 1959 lecture series on *Symposium* [2001b, 220]. He argues that time is a concern for ordinary consciousness, not for philosophers capable of achieving a divine life – defined as the contemplative and peaceful existence that Aristotle seemingly attributed to the stars. While Eros undoubtedly finds a reason to love in an ephemeral beauty, its transience raises questions about the adequacy of such a reason. Thus, love gravitates toward increasingly stable forms of beauty, where one can love meaningfully. Krüger claims that an enduring beauty is first encountered in the

mathematical sciences, which reveal an order within the *phenomena*, and subsequently in the Forms that transcend the hypothetical nature of these sciences, leading us to recognize the goodness – and hence the reliability – of such a *taxis*. More precisely, the renowned allegory of the sun in *Resp.* VI (509b) illustrates how, through the mediation of dianoetic beauty, *eros philosophos* is led to conceive of reality as intrinsically good – and thus as a realm where love can be meaningfully pursued. In this way, it performs an interpretative indication of the Truth, one that Heidegger, in the SS 1923 *Vorlesungen*, attributed to hermeneutics in its original Platonic sense [Heidegger 1988, 9].⁷ Yet, such an interpretative stance swiftly turns into a metaphysics of love, resulting in a vision of reality as structured, in its very forms, according to a “logic of love”. In contrast, Strauss asserts that the inferential leap from the desire for a presence to its actual existence is not only difficult to justify, but also unnecessary; it is enough to correct our behavior to find true happiness within a contemplative life. As he maintains in *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Plato’s political philosophy should allow for “Aristotelianization” [Strauss 1995, 133]. Despite this major divergence, *eros* retains a central role in relation to its intrinsic hermeneuticity in Strauss as well, as clearly demonstrated by Chiaravalli [2019] and Fussi [2021]. The way we love shapes how we perceive the world.

I cannot offer even a remotely satisfactory comparative analysis of the perspectives developed by these two authors at this juncture. However, what I wish to highlight is the political significance of this theoretical contrast, which, in turn, enables a clearer appreciation of their understanding of the figure of Socrates. While Strauss views the love of political power as irrational and fundamentally at odds with the pursuit of knowledge – arguing that philosophy should engage with politics primarily for prudential reasons, since it arises from a critique of the *nomoi* of the *polis* and must defend itself against them –, Krüger identifies a notable continuity between these two realms.⁸ While the order sought

⁷ In this regard, see Camera 2011, 15-32, who examines the connections between Heideggerian hermeneutics and the Platonic Ion: in both instances, hermeneuein signifies the announcement of a salvific word, which entails a conferment of meaning.

⁸ The origin of philosophy as articulated through critical analysis of the *nomoi* is discussed in Strauss 1981, 41. In the scholarship on Strauss, several studies explore the

within a political community fails to fully satisfy the deeper yearnings of the heart, the *polis* still exhibits a form of desirable order. For this very reason, the philosopher is bound to make a return into the cave to enhance such an order, establishing it everywhere to the extent that he appreciates true beauty, and desires to replicate it in his surroundings.

Strauss argued that Socrates fell victim to the tribunal of the city since he lacked the prudence that Plato possessed, which enabled him to reconcile the paths of Socrates and Thrasymachus [Strauss 1952, 16-17; 1964, 123]. According to Krüger, this catastrophe is unavoidable and is connected to a far more tragic fate, one that is intrinsic to philosophy. This fate encompasses the features that once again relegate philosophy to the realm of *myths* or *pistis*, leaving no certainty about its outcomes or its ability to manifest truth in an unequivocal manner [Krüger 1973a, 298]. If one were to draw a distinction between Socrates and Plato, it should emphasize Plato's approach, which enables him to assert the noetic constitution of reality in a far more compelling manner than his mentor's. Krüger seemingly suggests this difference when he situates Socrates within the *scala amoris*, at the end of the so-called inferior mysteries [*ivi*, 176], claiming that his love finds satisfaction within the confines of his own city. In contrast, Plato sought to establish *kallipolis* elsewhere, away from Athens, as he acquired a trans-political worldview. Socrates embodies a love that pursues beauty to the point of self-sacrifice for the sake of his community. Ultimately, he falls short in articulating a response to the restlessness of desire, which should transcend imagination and engage with the reasonableness of *pistis*. Platonism, then, presents a potential resolution to this *impasse*.

5. Conclusion

Just like Strauss, Krüger identifies eros as a compelling force that underlies every interpretation of the world. However, he underscores the necessity of an object-oriented metaphysics, one that is propelled by desire and, in turn, translates into political action. Yet, the uncer-

tension between philosophy and the city; among them, Fussi 2011 provides the most comprehensive analysis of the subject.

tainty surrounding the correctness of our aspirations requires a gentle hermeneutic approach when engaging in political discourse. This implies that, on a political level, we are bound to a zetetic, if not a more Straussian method, even if motivated by Krüger's insights. This is especially significant given Krüger's belief that natural theology should give way for revealed theology. According to him, this transition, coupled with a quasi-Hegelian framework of philosophy of history, enriches our understanding of self-consciousness [1958b, 67-69], which proves vital for a more adequate conception of the divine intellect.⁹ Similarly, in *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*, Krüger presents the Augustinian conception of love as a reinterpretation of Platonic eros [1973a, 181], suggesting that it serves as a supernatural integration of this natural foundation.¹⁰

One aspect of Krüger's philosophy that I find unconvincing is highlighted by Strauss's critique: if eros genuinely strives to transcend time, there would be no need to postulate separate Forms in order to foster a contemplative life unbound by external constraints. In this light, should a new natural theology arise from an exploration of eros, it would need to rely on experiences that philosophy alone cannot satisfy – such as *philia*. Time offers opportunities to love and to remain constantly engaged in vibrant encounters with other stories. Gabriel Marcel perhaps provided the most convincing answer to the question of why we have faith: «I hope in You for us» [1944, 81]. This is followed by a thoughtful comment from Pietro Prini: «I hope in God, I must hope, because I love» [1977, 120]. Mature love knows how to be as capricious as a child: it chooses and loves this particular thing here, which, in an

⁹ The aporias encountered in the Aristotelian conception of *nous* are also explored in his correspondence with Jacob Klein [2006], whose study *On the Origins of Algebra* is utilized by Krüger in his analysis of Plato's mathematics.

¹⁰ More precise conclusions would require an analysis of an unpublished 1939 manuscript on Augustine, titled *Die Philosophie Augustins*. In a brief contribution dedicated to Augustine, Krüger observes that the Bishop believes «fallen man to be still capable of seeking God and Greek philosophy to have been on the right path in this regard», as he himself arrived at Christianity through this route. Moreover, human beings are created to know and recognize God: even in sin it's natural to seek God «as that which gives meaning to life, the *summum bonum*» [1959b, 115]. Georg Hartmann 2008, 138-153, had access to the manuscript and provided additional information on the matter.

irreplaceable way, forms its experiential fabric. I believe it is for this kind of love that “Jerusalem” endures as an existential option – for the trusting hope that such encounters will not fade into oblivion, and that closeness in love remains, and will always remain, possible.

Ultimately, I would argue that, while many authors in the last century have interpreted the Socratic way of life as a compass to navigate a perplexing existence, Krüger takes a distinctive approach to rediscovering a premodern mode of thought. His perspective encourages a *mythologein* informed by reason, a hermeneutics of love which inaugurates a metaphysical and cosmopolitical gesture, enabling us to escape the typically modern – and often paralyzing – quest for certainty. This hermeneutical risk may, in fact, be our only opportunity to pursue the true Reason that lies both before and beyond all myths.

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Keywords

Gerhard Krüger; post-modern Socrates; Platonic eros; hermeneutics; natural theology

Abstract

In the 20th century, several interpretations of Plato emerged within the framework of the so-called second *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, revisiting the question of the good life. This paper examines the lesser-explored perspective of Gerhard Krüger, who, in his attempt to rethink the possibility of natural theology, develops a metaphysics and hermeneutics of love. His approach unfolds in critical dialogue with Leo Strauss, particularly around their diverging interpretations of Socrates. Although both the philosophers oppose Heidegger's ethical abyss, Krüger's emphasis on *mythologeîn* shapes a distinct understanding of theoretical and political action, contrasting with the clear separation Strauss establishes between these two realms.

Nel corso del XX secolo, la cosiddetta seconda *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* ha dato origine ad interpretazioni di Platone differenti, riaprendo il dibattito sulla questione della vita buona. Questo articolo prende in esame la prospettiva, tuttora poco studiata, di Gerhard Krüger, che, nel tentativo di ripensare la possibilità di una teologia naturale, sviluppa una metafisica e un'ermeneutica dell'amore. Il suo approccio si articola in un dialogo critico con Leo Strauss, in particolare sulla loro divergente interpretazione di Socrate. Sebbene entrambi i filosofi si oppongano all'abisso etico delineato da Heidegger, l'enfasi di Krüger sul *mythologeîn* configura una peculiare concezione del rapporto tra azione teoretica e politica, in contrasto con la netta separazione stabilita da Strauss tra questi due ambiti.

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