HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA.'

IN Mind of October I927 I tried to trace the circumstances

under which " Hegel came to England." So far as the same

general conditions prevailed in the United States, and as American

students of philosophy had access to the literature that was pub-

lished in England on German philosophy during the first half of

the nineteenth century, there was likely to be a general coinci-

dence in the arrival of Hegelianism on both sides of the Atlantic,

and it might be supposed that the same story would serve for

both. As a matter of fact the movement in America took place

under entirely different circumstances and to a large extent was

independent of what was taking place in England at the same

time. Such coincidence as there was, was rather the result of the

general spiritual requirements of the age and the fact that in both

countries there were found men sufficiently in touch with these

requirements and sufficiently endowed with the enthusiasm and

industry that were needed for any attempt to meet them. It is

this that makes the American story another and in its course and

issue not less romantic one than the British.

I. The introduction of German influences into American

philosophy is traceable to the second decade of the nineteenth

century, when, following the example of Coleridge in I798, a

group of New England students 2 paid a visit to Germany and

returned with authentic news of the new movements in thought

that were there taking place. Their visit was to bear fruit later

in translations from German writers of the Romantic movement

in Frederick H. Hedge's German Prose Writers 3-the American

equivalent of Carlyle's early work in this field. The immediate

result in New England was to turn the minds of some of the

younger Unitarian ministers in Boston from the arid Deism, to

1 The following article is written by a British student in America with

limited means of completing and verifying his account. He would very much

value corrections and additions from others who are better informed.

2 George Bancroft, Edward Everett and George Ticknor.

3 i849. Second edition, i870.

226

HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 227

which a too slavish adherence to the Lockean tradition 4 had

brought the theology of their own church, to the philosophy of

immanence which was to form the speculative basis, so far as it

had one, of the Transcendentalist movement. The school took

its name from Kant, whether directly or indirectly through Car-

lyle, who undoubtedly exercised a powerful influence on Emerson

its founder and in the early days its chief hierarch." But its very

use of the word to indicate truths which transcended ordinary time

and space experience and its claim on behalf of the human reason

to possess an intuitive apprehension of such truth, showed how

little justification there is for attributing to its members any more

accurate knowledge of the teaching of Kant than Carlyle himself

possessed. So far as the movement owned any prophet in Ger-

many, it was not Kant but Schelling, whose ideas were being

made familiar on this continent by the publication of American

editions of Coleridge's works.6 But here also the school as a

whole was too content to get its metaphysics from second hand

sources. Its members were for the most part ministers, teachers,

men of letters who as Riley puts it " cared more for free thinking

than for precise thinking." The historian of Transcendentalism

has chapters on " The Seer," " The Mystic," " The Critic," " The

Preacher," " The Man of Letters " and the " Minor Prophets ";

he has none on "The Philosopher." Yet some of them were

keenly conscious of this limitation and made intermittent, some-

4 Unitarianism at this time was itself defined by an able contemporary

as " the result of the attempt to explain Christianity by the sensual philosophy

instigated by a desire to get rid of mystery and to make everything clear and

simple" (Article on the Unitarian Movement in New England in The Dial,

Vol. I, p. 431). It was in this way that Christianity was gradually emptied not

only of all appeal to miracle but of the elements of the great Platonic tradi-

tion which was of its very essence. In emptying the bath the reformers had

emptied out the baby. For this reason the same writer could say " Unitarian-

ism was sound, sober, good sense. But the moment a preacher rose to elo-

quence he rose out of his system."

5 D. A. Wilson quotes Carlyle to the effect that " Emerson took his system

out of Sartor and my other writings in the first instance but he worked it out

in a way of his own " (Carlyle at his Zenith, p. 138).

6 The BiograPhia Literaria as early as I8I7; Aids to Reflection with Pre-

liminary Essay and Additional Notes by James Marsh in I829; The Friend

in I83I. The movement of thought from Kant to Schelling and Coleridge's

relation to it was sketched by an able writer (The Editor?) in the Christian

Examiner in i833.

228 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVI.

times pathetic, attempts to remedy it. Theodore Parker lamented

that he " was meant for a philosopher and the times called for a

stump orator" and Margaret Fuller wrote: "When I was in

Cambridge I got Fichte and Jacobi; I was much interrupted, but

some time and earnest thought I devoted; Fichte I could not

understand at all, though the treatise I read was intended to be

popular and which he says must compel to conviction. Jacobi I

could understand in details but not in system. It seemed to me

that his mind must have been moulded by some other mind, with

which I ought to be acquainted in order to know him well-per-

haps Spinoza's. Since I came home I have been consulting

Buhle's and Tennemann's histories of philosophy and dipping

into Brown, Stewart and that class of books." 7 Repelled by the

difficulty of Coleridge's expositions, they betook themselves to a

writer as lucid as Coleridge was confused, in whom they seemed

to find all they wanted for their work as preachers and propa-

gandists. Linberg's translation of Victor Cousin's Introduction

to the History of Philosophy appeared in I832 and its readers

were encouraged to content themselves with what they there

found by George Ripley the transcendentalist " Man of Letters "

and editor of Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature.8 In

the Introductory Notice to the long extracts from Cousin that

occupy the main portion of the first volume Ripley wrote: " The

objects at which Mr. Coleridge aims, it seems to me are in a great

measure accomplished by the philosophy of Cousin. This philoso-

phy demolishes by one of the most beautiful specimens of scientific

analysis, that is anywhere to be met with, the system of sensation,

against which Mr. Coleridge utters such eloquent and pathetic

denunciations. It establishes on a rock the truth of the everlast-

ing sentiments of the human heart. . . . Such a philosophy, I

cannot but believe, will ultimately find a cherished abode in the

youthful affections of this nation in whose history from the be-

ginning the love of freedom, the love of philosophical inquiry

and the love of religion have been combined in one thrice holy

bond." After describing the kind of philosophy that was needed

at the time and by whom, he concludes: " The elements of a

7 Frothingham, Transcendentalism, p. 286.

8 Boston, 2838.

No.3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 229

philosophy of this character I venture to think are contained in

the doctrines of Cousin and his distinguished pupil Jouffroy as

exhibited in the present volumes."

The writer's hopes seem to have been fulfilled even more lit-

erally than he expected or perhaps desired. Speaking of the

Transcendentalists six years afterwards, the first historian of the

movement could say: " So far as I can judge they have merely

taken up the philosophy of Victor Cousin, and, after comparing

it according to their opportunity with that of the more recent Ger-

man schools, have modified a little some of its dicta, and applied

them freely to scientific and practical theology. . . . Of course

they differ considerably from one another; some following Cousin

more closely, and others leaning more towards some German;

some preferring one set of Cousin's terms, and others another,

or coining new ones to suit their fancy. After all, Linberg's

translation of Cousin's Introduction to the History of Philos-

ophy may be considered the great storehouse, from which most of

them-e.g., Brownson, Emerson, Parker, etc.-have derived their

peculiar philosophical opinions, their modes of reasoning and

their forms of thought and expression." 9 It was this fatal com-

plaisance as to the foundations of their philosophy that more than

anything else was the cause of the dissolution of the movement.

Cousin did good service in the emphasis he laid on the history

of philosophy and the comparatively detached spirit in which he

expounded the work of Kant and his successors. For the rest,

in his "Eclecticism" he showed no real comprehension of the

philosophical situation in his time, and his " System " went down

like a pack of cards before the criticism of Sir William Hamilton

on the one hand and the new empiricism represented by Mill,

Spencer, Taine, and Lewes on the other. Those who clung to it

found themselves as much adrift as sailors at sea who had

anchored their vessel to a floating mass of seaweed. While

Cousinism was helpless before these attacks, there was nothing in

the Hamiltonian dualism of reason and faith, or in the naturalism

which seemed the only alternative, to satisfy the deeper spirit of

the age, determined to keep hold of the " eternal values " and yet

9 James Murdock's Modern Philosophy (New York, i844), pp. 177-9.

230 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVII.

convinced that unless the Infinite were in some real sense know-

able there could be no rational justification of them.

In another important respect Transcendentalism had showed

itself inadequate to meet the demands of the time. Already in

the middle of the century the causes which led to the Civil War

were casting their shadow before. The next decade was to see

the struggle between North and South which concealed the

deeper issue of the unity or disintegration of national existence.

What was wanted in the coming years was a philosophy which

could do justice to the demand for local and individual freedom,

while insisting on the value of the institutional side of life, of

which the State was the fullest and most coherent expression.

Perhaps it was easy after the events of the Civil 'War to see all

this, but it was not so easy to see where such a philosophy was

to be found; and those who, alone on the continent in the sixties,

saw both are entitled to the credit of discoverers. " The national

consciousness," wrote W. T. Harris in i867, "has moved for-

ward on to a new platform during the last few years. The idea

underlying our form of government has hitherto developed only

one of its essential phases-that of brittle individualism-in which

national unity seems an external mechanism soon to be entirely

dispensed with and the enterprise of the private man or of the cor-

poration substituted for it. Now we have arrived at the con-

sciousness of the other essential phase and each individual recog-

nises his substantial side to be the State as such. The freedom of

the citizen does not consist in the mere Arbitrary but in the realiza-

tion of the life which finds expression in established law. This

new phase of national life demands to be digested and compre-

hended." 10

It was just on this side that Transcendentalism proved itself

most inadequate to meet the situation. It was a philosophy of

detachment from the old world rather than of attachment to the

new. The spirit of aloofness from current politics and contempt

for institutional life which characterized so many of its adherents,

is described not without a touch of irony by Emerson in his essay

on Transcendentalism. It is true that this was only one side of

10 Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Vol. i, Address "To the Reader"

(condensed).

No. 3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 23I

the matter. There were those who were profoundly interested

in social reconstruction, but the forms which their zeal took in the

attempt to found utopian communities were in the spirit of a by-

gone age and in the end brought the whole movement into derision.

By the sixties there was little left of this side of it but the memory

of what the Cambridge History calls a " transient experiment in

civilization." "1 It was in this way that the time was not only

ready but was crying out for a philosophy which should be pre-

pared at once to speak with the new form of naturalism in the

gate and to provide a sound intellectual basis for efforts of con-

structive statesmanship.

II. Traced to its source the weakness of the Transcendentalist

philosophy was the weakness of the Cousinian Eclecticism. In

its " principle " or starting point no less than in its " process " of

criticism, to use Cousin's own terms for the twin foundations of

his system, this had failed to understand both what Kant had

done and what he had left undone, while, in committing itself

to the doctrine of an immediate and infallible " intuition," it ran the

risk of reviving the worst features of the eighteenth century doc-

trine of the all-sufficiency of private judgment.'2 Not only did it

11 The failure of the most famous of these (Brook Farm, I842-47) is

attributed by Frothingham to its becoming connected with the economic so-

cialists of New York. But the cause was deeper and consisted in the rooted

moral individualism of the leaders of the movement. When A. Bronson

Alcott (after Emerson perhaps the most outstanding representative of the

school, and the author of an independent experiment at Fruitlands) visited

England, a meeting was got together in the name of persons prepared to sub-

scribe to the declaration: " We ignore human governments, creeds and

institutions; we deny the right of any man} to dictate laws for our regulation

or duties for our performance and declare our allegiance only to Universal

Love, the all-embracing Justice." Following naturally on this was " the

restoration of all things to their primitive owner and hence the abrogation of

all property " and " the substitution \*of the divine sanction for the civil and

ecclesiastical authority." Where there is no organised thought extremes meet.

Alcott, who could apparently listen to all this unmoved, himself writes of

the duty of the community to protect itself by the state-education of children

against their parents' vices-a principle that would justify anything. (See

Frothingham's chapters, op. cit., on " Practical Tendencies " and " The

Mystic.")

12 How this dogma struck an intelligent observer may be illustrated from

James Murdock's account of its immense theoretical and practical effects: "It

makes the Divine Being, his government and laws, and our relations to him

and all our religious obligations and interests,-every part of theology, theo-

232 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVII.

find itself in a blind alley but it had its ears stopped to voices

coming from the open road.

What was wanted to provide the basis of a sound Idealism was

a conception of the Infinite which could be defended against Posi-

tivism not as a datum but as the underlying assumption of all

knowledge, and against Hamiltonian Agnosticism as in a true

sense an object of knowledge. It was just such a conception that

the successors of Kant had sought to work out and that had

taken stable form for the moment at least in the philosophy of

Hegel.

Although divisions had broken out among his followers in Ger-

many immediately after Hegel's death, and although Schelling had

taken occasion to effect a diversion of men's minds in an alto-

gether different direction, there were those in America who under-

stood the situation and were prepared to recognise Hegel's place

as the lineal heir of Kant and the true representative of ob-

jective idealism. Among these was Dr. Frederick A. Rauch,

Professor in the University of Heidelberg, who got into trouble

with the Government owing to the freedom with which he had

expressed himself on its ways, had to flee the country, and settled

in America in I83I. At first attached to the Theological Seminary

of the German Reformed Synod at York in Pennsylvania, he be-

came in 1836 President of Marshall College in Mercersburg.

Rauch's familiarity with German philosophy and particularly with

Hegel, as well as his thorough identification of himself with the

country of his adoption, qualified him in a special degree to carry

the life and spirit of German thought into America, and, as he

himself expressed it, "to unite German and American mental

philosophy ".13 Unfortunately he died in i84i when he had just

begun this work by the publication of his Psychology or View of

the Human Soul including Anthropology, but not before he had

imbued others with the conviction (as the Author of the short

biography prefixed to the second edition puts it) " that German

Philosophy must in the end make itself deeply and extensively

retical and practical,-perfectly comprehensible to our Reason in its spon-

taneous operation. . . we need no explanations and no confirmations from any

books or teachers. . . we are, all of us, prophets of God, all inspired through

our Reason and we need no one to instruct and enlighten us." See the whole

passage. Op. Cit., pp, I8I-3.

13 Preface to his Psychology (1840).

No. 3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 233

felt upon our system of thinking in one way or another "-as it

ought to do, " for it embodies elements which are needed to give

tone and vigor to our inward life." But the time had not yet

come and it was not till towards the end of the fifties that Hegel

began to be more than a name with a mark of interrogation af-

fixed to it to American students of philosophy. They had heard

of him in the histories of philosophy.14 Cousin had referred to

him, with a note upon his works, in the " Specimens " published

by Ripley in I838, where he is described as having "borrowed

much from Schelling " but as starting with "abstractions of his

own which in his view are the foundation and the type of all

reality."

The earliest record of an attempt to read and understand him

occurs in the chapter entitled " Pantheistic Philosophy. Hegel's

absolute Idealism: Logic the only Metaphysics," in Murdock's

Modern Philosophy.15 After a short account of " Dr. Geo. Win.

Fred. Hegel, a professor at Berlin, who died in I83i at the age

of 6i," Murdock goes on to indicate the relation of his school to

that of Schelling which it " has of late altogether eclipsed." The

difference between them corresponds to that between "a system

of Absolute Idealism and a system of Realism." After referring

to the two volumes of the Science of Logic of I812 and i8i6 and

the single volume in the Encyclopcedia republished in I830, which

he has before him, Murdock goes on: " Hegel is the most unin-

telligible writer I ever read. . . although abundantly warned on

this point, I had the temerity to take up his Encyclopedia and

read it attentively from beginning to end, and some parts of it a

second, a third, and even a fourth time, comparing it often with

his Logic vainly hoping to get some idea of that logical analysis

which he tells us is the basis of all philosophy. But after a

fortnight's hard study I was nearly as ignorant of the whole pro-

cess and of every part of it as when I first sat down." He has

the honesty (which some other reporters on Hegel would have

done well to imitate) to admit defeat and to content himself with

reporting the opinions of others, chiefly Krug-himself a reporter

of opinions mainly hostile to the Hegelian philosophy.

14 On the allusions to him in Tennemann's, Morrell's and Lewes's histories

see article " How Hegel came to England," Mind, October, 1927.

15 I 844.

234 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVII.

But as in England so in America it was not only the difficulty

of Hegel's language but the rooted prejudice in academic circles

against German influence that stood in the way of progress. The

Eastern centres of culture, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, were

all still under the deadening influence of what Santayana calls

" the genteel tradition " in its various forms. " Mental and Moral

Philosophy" as it was called was not a free and independent

study but a means of inculcating that tradition in the literal sense

of stamping it in at the end of the undergraduate course. What

struck Emerson's contemporaries at Harvard was not the inade-

quacy of Transcendentalism as a philosophy but its danger as a

heresy. Yale turned away from Kant and all his works as " sub-

versive of morality." Princeton entrenched itself behind the lines

of the Scottish Philosophy-seeking, as its Trustees announced

in an address to the Inhabitants of the United States, " to make

this institution an asylum for pious youth in this day of general

and lamentable depravity."

III. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the

pioneers of the Hegelian movement were found in men who sat

loose to academic tradition and in a city totally devoid of it. St.

Louis has been described by a writer who knew it well in the

sixties as "different from any other city of the land, more for-

eign, more cosmopolitan, more un-American in its conception of

freedom." It was " a Teutonic city of the radical type " in which

" a party somewhat like the European Red Republicans had risen

to the surface and threatened for a while to re-enact the bloody

deeds of the French Revolution." 16 Though the freedom of its

atmosphere was probably a factor in the new movement, the

Teutonic character of the population had little to do with its

origin, as the connection of the leader and the main actor in it

with the city was purely accidental.

If the man who first utters a name "with emphasis and even

with affection" 17 in a country may rightly be claimed as its dis-

coverer there, the honor of discovering Hegel belongs unques-

tionably to Henry C. Brockmeyer, whom W. T. Harris met in

16 Denton J. Snider in A Writer of Books (St. Louis, i9io) himself ranked

by Riley along with Brockmeyer and Harris as one of the leaders of the

movement, of which he was the historian.

17 Snider, op. cit., P. 304.

No. 3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 235

St. Louis in i858. Brockmeyer was a fugitive not from govern-

mental but from parental tyranny in his own country, who found

his way to America while still little more than a boy, and without

education to speak of. His chief qualification to become the

leader of a new movement in philosophy was the restless energy

that carried him in a short space of time through the stages of

thought which had occupied several generations in the community

in which he found himself. Though a rebel against the discipline,

he brought with him the simple piety of his old home, and when,

after making enough money to support himself at college, he felt

the need of a wider education, it was to orthodox centres in

Georgetown College, Kentucky, and Brown University in Rhode

Island that he betook himself. But he was not the man to be

detained long with "the dead material of a dead past" that was

then being offered by the teachers of these institutions, and, when

the "oceanic swell" of the Transcendentalist movement rose

near by, he was more than ready to plunge into it. It was under

the influence of its teaching that he took his gun and spent some

years in the backwoods of Missouri, carrying out the movement,

as his biographer says, to its bitter logical results: "the only one

who did so "-even Thoreau's experiment being civilization itself

as compared with his. By the time we meet him in the fifties in

St. Louis, he has entered on a third phase of spiritual development.

If he was not and never could be an " unromantic," he had got

beyond the crude romanticism of the transcendentalists, " trans-

cended transcendentalism " and " emancipated himself from

emancipation." It was the living insight, which he thus had at-

tained for himself into the dialectic he was to find worked out in

detail in Hegel, that led Harris to describe Brockmeyer as "a

thinker of the same order as Hegel " who before reading any-

thing of Hegel's except the few pages in Hedge's German Prose

Writers " had divined Hegel's chief ideas and the position of his

system." Snider has described him as he appeared some ten years

later: the center, which came near to being also the circumference,

of the group that was the nucleus of the St. Louis Philosophical

Society " with the quick almost wild eye of the hunter, his face

unshaven, the chief feature an enormous nose, his body tall ar-

rowy and lithe raying forth agility and strength which was not

17

236 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVII.

only corporeal." The description of the whole scene reminds the

present writer of a similar group in Glasgow of the seventies,

drunk like the St. Louis one with raw draughts of Hegel, incited

and led by their own Brockmeyer in the person of Henry Jones.""

In after days his restless genius carried Brockmeyer into politics

but not before he had executed a translation of Hegel's Logic

that was at once the inspiration and the initiation of the younger

men and the Bible to which he had himself continual recourse to

the last.19

It was this man whom William Torry Harris met for the first

time in I858. Himself a man of an entirely different make both

physically and intellectually,20 this " active worker of the philosoph-

ical set and most devoted Hegelian propagandist that ever lived "

was then a youth of twenty-three. Born at Killingly, Connecti-

cut, he had studied at Andover and Yale but left college Without

taking a degree to accept a position as teacher of short-hand in

St. Louis.2'

18 Hegel's Logic (Chicago, i8go), Preface, p. xi. See Hetherington's

Life of Sir Henry Jones and Jones's own Life and Philosophy of Edward

Caird.

19 The fortunes of this translation, which is still in manuscript, would

alone be a romantic story. Snider, who was employed upon the revision of

it, thought that "the catastrophe of the movement was its failure to make

accessible to English readers at the pivotal time the creative book of its

system" and that "what is true of St. Louis in this matter is true of the

rest of the English-speaking world " (op. cit., p. 327). A translation of

the Larger Logic is at present being executed by a group of British scholars,

but it would be anr act of piety on the part of American idealists of whatever

shade of opinion to subscribe for the publication of so interesting a relic.

It is now in charge of Mr. D. H. Harris, brother of William Torry, in Los

Angeles.

20 " Pale, nervous, twitching, thin-chested and seemingly thin-blooded,

sharp face and rather pointed nose, a needle that could prick keenly and

deeply into things," is Snider's description of him as he first saw him in i865

(op. cit., p. 308).

21 Subsequently he held the post of Superintendent of Schools in that city

from i867 to i88o, when he removed to Concord. In i889 he was appointed

Commissioner of Education for the United States-the fourth to hold that

office. In i889 he received the degree of doctor from the University of Jena

for the work he had done as exponent of Hegel. On his retirement in i9o6

the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching conferred upon

him the largest permissible allowance for distinguished service. He died in

i909 at the age of 74.

No. 3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 237

" He informed me that Hegel was the great man among modern

philosophers and that his large logic was the work to get," is Har-

ris's own description of this fruitful meeting. " I sent imme-

diately to Germany for it and it arrived late in the year." By the

end of i86o Brockmeyer had translated the whole of it and Harris

set about making a copy for himself, thus making sure that he had

"read every word of it." But it made him equally sure that he

"did not understand anything beyond the first part of the first

volume and could not follow any of the discussions in the second

and third volumes or even remember the words from one page

to another." It was " all over my head." Balked in the attempt

to take Hegel by storm, Harris returned to the study of Kant's

Critique of Pure Reason, on which he was already engaged.

If the course taken by the pioneers of thought possesses for

another generation the same kind of interest as the trail of the

first settlers in a country, the account that Harris gives of his

pilgrimage deserves to be remembered. This is not the place to

follow it in detail. The two steps in it which led from Kant's

Critique to Hegel's Logic were the discovery in i863 of the mean-

ing of Ffir-sich-seyn or " independent being " as standing not for

indeterminate but for self-determined reality,22 and secondly, in

i866, of " Hegel's most important aperu and highest thought "-

the distinction "between negative unity or substantiality and

Begriff or Idee." Arriving at them thus for himself and independ-

ently of the Logic, he was able to see that neither of these two

doctrines was exclusively Hegel's but that both went back to

Plato and Aristotle,-.Hegel's originality consisted merely in giv-

ing universal form to the expression of them.

The steps on the other hand by which Harris reached in I879

"his final and present stand-point in regard to the true outcome of

the Hegelian system " and the defects in it of which by that time

he had become aware, belong rather to the story of the criticism

of Hegel in America,-the flight from him rather than the flight

22 Howison, whose copy of Harris's Hegel's Logic is before me, in a mar-

ginal note derides this " discovery" as " the common property e.g. of all

theologians." This is to forget that to hold a truth as part of a dogmatic

system is one thing, to arrive at it as the result of speculative insight is

quite another. It is further to forget that there have been mystical theo-

logians who have held quite another view.

238 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW. [VOL. XXXVII.

to him. What here is of interest and importance for the history

of philosophy on the American continent is that by the middle

of the sixties 23 by a singular coincidence there was a student of

philosophy there, as in Scotland, who in entire independence of

each other and of academic assistance had discovered what they

regarded as the secret of Hegel, and were prepared to devote the

rest of their lives to the exposition of it as containing also the

secret of the aspirations of their age. While the work of

Hutchison Stirling, taken by itself, was undoubtedly the more

massive, the American perhaps possessed advantages denied to

the other in his contact with a group of friends whom he was able

to inspire with his own genial enthusiasm, and in the possession

of funds that enabled him to establish an organ for the exposi-

tion and diffusion of the new thought. Certain it is that the

foundation of the " Kant Club" in St. Louis and of the Journal

of Speculative Philosophy (both the first of their kind in the

Anglo-Saxon world) and his connection later with the Concord

School of Philosophy and Literature,24 of which, so far as philo-

sophy was concerned, he was the leading spirit, provided Harris

for the next twenty years with unique means of making his in-

fluence felt.

In the address " To the Reader " in the first number of the

Journal Harris as Editor set forth what he and his friends re-

garded as the chief needs of his own generation. That which

concerned America particularly-the demand for a philosophy

which should provide the intellectual background of the political

structures in which the national consciousness was struggling to

embody itself-has already been referred to. But there was the

wider need of a philosophy which should " close the vortex be-

tween traditional faith and intellectual conviction " by something

23 J. Hutchison Stirling's Secret of Hegel, the Hegelian System in Origin,

Principle, Form and Matter was published in i865.

24The idea of the School dated from i84i but did not materialize till the

arrival in Concord of Harris as guest in i879. In the following year the first

large subscription to its funds was promised by Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson of

New York on condition that Harris should emigrate from St. Louis to Con-

cord. (See F. B. Sanborn's Recollections of Seventy Years, Vol. II, pp. 486

and 489.) Without possessing the philosophical genius either of Hutchison

Stirling or of Edward Caird, Harris was able to combine in a degree the work

of both and do for America what they together did for England.

No. 3.] HOW HEGEL CAME TO AMERICA. 239

that went deeper than an emotional mysticism devoid of real

speculative insight. Deeper than both of these was the predica-

ment created by the more philosophical writers on natural

science, led by Herbert Spencer, who no longer appealed to sen-

sory data for the foundations of the structure of the physical

universe but to the idea of the " correlation of forces," and thereby

transferred the issue to the region of metaphysical speculation by

raising the question of the adequacy of this conception as a basis

of ultimate explanation. It was because Harris and his com-

panions thought they saw in the Hegelian philosophy a sword

wherewith to smite the three-headed monster of anarchy in poli-

tics, traditionalism in religion and naturalism in science, that they

found the courage to undertake and the perseverance to carry

through the task of naturalizing it in America.

With the address " To the Reader," the short preface on the

"Speculative," explaining what the principle of the new departure

must be, and the long leading article on " Herbert Spencer " giv-

ing a foretaste of what might be expected from the application of

the principle to the chief intellectual problem of the time, Hegel-

ianism may be said to have arrived and issued its first manifesto

in America. Harris himself seems to have felt that they marked

the end of what he calls his " apprenticeship " and the beginning

of what he foresaw would be a long " journeymanship." He was

keenly conscious of the difficulties of the task. In addition to those

mentioned above there was the " popular demand for originality,"

the lack of which had been a recurrent reproach to American philo-

sophy: " Why rifle the graves of centuries? Why desecrate the

Present by offering it time-stained paper from the shelves of the

Past?" 25 He had indeed his answer ready: "To examine the

thoughts of man-to unravel them and make them clear-must

constitute the earliest employment of the speculative thinker; his

first business is to comprehend the thought of the world, to dis-

solve for himself the solutions which have dissolved the world

before him." But it required courage and patience. Meantime

he and his coadjutors could only express their belief that "our

course in the practical endeavour to elevate the tone of American

thinking is plain: we must furnish convenient access to the deep-

25 Journal, etc., Vol. I, p. I27.

240 THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

est thinkers of ancient and modern times. To prepare transla-

tions and commentary is our object. Originality will take care

of itself. Once disciplined in Speculative thought, the new

growths of our national life will furnish us with objects whose

comprehension will constitute original philosophy without par-

allel." How far this faith was justified time alone can declare,

but it explains why so much of the earlier numbers of the

Journal was occupied with translations and expositions of Fichte,

Schelling and Hegel. Whether or not it was a mistake, as Snider

thought it, to neglect the more solid work of the publication of

the Logic may be a question. What is certain is that the Journal

stimulated a wide interest in German philosophy and literature

and to a large extent provided the material for the series of more

systematic treatises which in the eighties and nineties rivaled the

similar series in England.26 It was just such work (" spade" if

you like) which was necessary to naturalize Hegel on the new

soil. America was fortunate and in its own way original in being

able to bring forth the men who had the power, and to provide

for them the means of doing it.

J. H. MUIRHEAD.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

26 Grigg's German Philosophical Classics for English Readers and Students,

edited by George S. Morris, is the American equivalent of Blackwood's Philo-

sophical Classics. Besides Harris's book on Hegel's Logic this series contained

one by the Editor on Hegel's Philosophy of the State and History (i887;

second edition I892). G. S. Morris's adhesion to the movement is all the

more significant as he had to fight his way to his final position inch by inch.

(See R. M. Wenley's Life and Work of George Sylvester Morris, New York,

I9I7, which contains an interesting picture of the philosophical forces against

which Hegelianism had to make its way in the years following the period

referred to in this article.) In the nineties appeared The Ethics of Hegel,

translated Selections from his Rechtsphilosophie with an introduction by J.

M. Sterrett (Boston, Io890); Theory of Right, Duties and Religion with a

supplementary essay on Hegel's systems of Ethics and Religion by B. C. Burt

(Ann Arbor, I892); Hegel's Educational Ideas by W. M. Bryant (Chicago,

i896); Hegel's Logic by J. G. Hibben, I902; Thought and Reality in Hegel's

System, by G. W. Cunningham, i910. If the work represented by these and

other books falls short in mass of the work done in England in the same

period, we have to set against this the more practical direction which it took.

After Bradley's Ethical Studies (i876) little or nothing was published ir-

England claiming to be an exposition of Hegelian ethics till the present cen-

tury.

**Hoe Hegel in Amerika terechtkwam**

Als je iets leest over de geschiedenis van de Hegeliaanse filosofie in Amerika, stuit je vrijwel altijd op de uitspraak van Josiah Royce, dat "Hegel hier nooit is geweest." Dit is typerend voor de toon waarin de Amerikaanse filosofie zich lange tijd heeft uitgesproken over Hegel: op afstand, aarzelend, soms spottend of schamper, en meestal vanuit een fundamenteel misverstand over wat Hegel nu werkelijk beweerde. Tegelijkertijd is het een uitspraak die getuigt van Hegels invloed, juist omdat men zich ertegen moest verzetten.

In de negentiende eeuw leek Amerika voor Hegel een onvruchtbare bodem. Zijn ideeën kwamen via omwegen binnen: via Duitsland, Frankrijk, Engeland en uiteindelijk via individuen zoals George Bancroft en Edward Everett. Deze studenten reisden in de jaren 1810 en 1820 naar Göttingen en Berlijn, waar ze les volgden bij Schelling en Hegel, en brachten een mengeling van romantisch idealisme en historisch denken mee terug naar Amerika.

Toch sloegen ze niet direct aan. De jonge Amerikaanse geest had weinig geduld voor de abstracte speculaties van Hegel. De pragmatische geest, gevormd door Locke, Newton en het Schotse realisme, heerste. Wel werden de Transcendentalisten, met name Emerson, beïnvloed door Duitse denkers, maar hun kennis van Kant en Hegel was beperkt en vaak indirect, verkregen via Engelse denkers als Coleridge en de Fransman Victor Cousin.

Cousin speelde een belangrijke rol in de Amerikaanse receptie van het Duitse idealisme. Zijn *eclectisme* – een poging de kern van elk filosofisch systeem te destilleren en te combineren – leek perfect voor een natie die haar eigen identiteit zocht. Maar Cousins systeem bleek oppervlakkig, niet in staat diepgaande theoretische of praktische antwoorden te geven. Zijn idee van *intuïtie* als onmiddellijke toegang tot de waarheid kon niet op tegen de toenemende invloed van de empirische wetenschappen.

Tegen het midden van de eeuw werd het duidelijk dat men behoefte had aan een robuuster denkkader: iets dat individuele vrijheid kon verbinden aan orde en instituties. In Duitsland bood Hegel dat. Zijn idee van vrijheid als verwezenlijkt binnen rationele instituties (zoals de staat, het recht en de moraal) leek precies datgene wat Amerika nodig had, zeker in het aangezicht van de naderende Burgeroorlog.

In deze context verscheen een opmerkelijk figuur: **Henry Clay Brockmeyer**, een Duits-Amerikaanse immigrant die Hegels *Wetenschap van de Logica* vertaalde in een blokhut in Missouri. Hij vormde samen met William Torrey Harris en anderen de *St. Louis Hegelians*. Deze groep zag in Hegel de mogelijkheid om een filosofie te bieden die trouw bleef aan zowel de geest van het idealisme als aan de eisen van moderniteit.

Hun invloed reikte verder dan de academie. Harris werd benoemd tot *U.S. Commissioner of Education* en richtte het *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* op (1867), het eerste filosofische tijdschrift in Amerika dat systematisch Hegeliaanse ideeën publiceerde.

De St. Louis-groep vond dat de Amerikaanse democratie haar principes (zoals vrijheid, gelijkheid en zelfbestuur) pas ten volle kon begrijpen via Hegels dialectiek: vrijheid is geen gegeven, maar iets dat zich ontwikkelt door strijd, zelfkennis en institutionele belichaming. Hun lezing van Hegel was soms aangepast aan Amerikaanse waarden, maar fundamenteel serieus.

**How Hegel Came to America**

[J. H. Muirhead](https://www.jstor.org/action/doBasicSearch?Query=au%3A%22J.%20H.%20Muirhead%22)

[*The Philosophical Review*](https://www.jstor.org/journal/philrevi), Vol. 37, No. 3 (May, 1928), pp. 226-240 (15 pages)