
Hegelianism in America

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Editorial notes

Below, we cite first a short overview of the early Hegel reception in the USA by John Stewart, which covers the period from its early beginning in the 2nd half of the 19th century until today.

The rest of this page, i cite from excerpts I made from an interesting thread on the Hegel-Mailing List mailing list of around 4/2000 (I did not write any of these messages. Unfortunately, I have not kept the authors, titles, dates etc. of the messages).

That part of the article is in the public domain.

These excerpts include a nice biography on that subject, where you will find more information.

John Stewart on the reception of the Hegelian Philosophy in the USA

There is a surprisingly long tradition of Hegelianism in the United States that began with two main centres in St. Louis and Cincinnati. The most important members of the St. Louis school included Henry Conrad Brokmeyer (1826-1906) and William Torrey Harris (1835-1909). The latter was the editor of the celebrated *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*,* which served as the principal organ for the dissemination of classical Greek and German philosophy in America at the time. The Cincinnati group, which included August Willich (1810-78), John Bernard Stallo (1823-1900), and Mocre D. Conway (1832-1907), represented the Hegelian left on the American continent. This alignment can be seen, for instance, in the socialist political views of Willich, or in the unorthodox religious convictions of Conway. This American tradition of Hegelianism, although significant for many aspects of Hegel studies and American cultural life, was, however, less important for the development of the Hegel myths and legends in the English-speaking world than was the history of Hegel research in Great Britain.

Excerpt from Jon Stewart: *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, Ed. Jon Stewart; Published: North-Western University Press, 1996.

(See also the complete foreword to the book, out of which the above long quote was excerpted)

Thread on HEGEL-L on Hegel reception in the USA of the 19th century

There is a pretty strong connection between American pragmatism and Hegel (I'm speaking as an interested layman, not a professional scholar). The early Dewey was overtly Hegelian and admittedly maintained his Hegelian roots later on.

Peirce referred to himself as a "Hegelian in a strange costume," but the connection is obscured by scholars who are not past Kant themselves, and who prefer to say Peirce misunderstood Hegel rather than to seriously have to deal with his comments regarding him. Peirce certainly opposed Hegel, but he was far from misunderstanding him and his remark reflected his perception of a basic affinity between the two of them.

And, of course, there is Royce who also was a forthright Hegelian.

I think the connection runs even deeper and up to WWI or so virtually every American philosopher felt compelled to deal with Hegel in one way or another. After that, they apparently became convinced they no longer needed to even read him.

The link is primarily through Dewey in his early period when the first philosophic articles he got published were in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* edited by William Torrey Harris the founder of the Hegelian St. Louis Philosophical Society along with a German immigrant Henry C. Brockmeyer, a mechanic who translated Hegel's *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* into English.

Brockmeyer won Harris, a blueblood Yankee intellectual, over to Hegelianism. Dewey's early articles were very Hegelian in tenor, but, as I wanted to show in the short quote from Dewey the Hegelian influence stayed with him in some form throughout his development. It has been a long time since I read the JSP which as the first philosophic journal in this country is still available in many public libraries, but you can get a feel for this development in a couple of extracts from Dewey printed in an anthology, *The American Hegelians*, by William H. Goetzmann (Alfred A. Knoff, NY, 1973).

What is most interesting to me is that the St. Louis Hegelian movement was a non academic one, getting its inspiration from the historic initiative of the German immigrant community in St. Louis who were instrumental in making the border state, Missouri, go with the North the American Civil War.

I've been reading a lot about (and by) Mark Twain lately and I'm pretty sure Missouri was on the side of the Confederacy, not the Union, but that is not my "final answer."

You are partially right. However, the population centre of Missouri, St. Louis, went with the North from the start. In what has been called the first victory for the North, on May 10, 1860 six thousand volunteers, mostly German workers led by General Lyon, marched on the arsenal at St. Louis' Camp Jackson which was controlled by officers sympathetic to the South.

Denton Snider, the historian of the St. Louis Philosophical Society, referred to the effect of this on the founders of the Hegelian society with the following hyperbole: the founders were "animated by the spirit of the Camp Jackson deed, which marked a new turning point, even if very local and minute, in the World's History."

An interesting corollary to this discussion is that Karl Marx's closest collaborator in the U.S., Joseph Weydemeyer, became by the war's end the commander of the military government of St. Louis. He was recruited in New York by General Fremont who took the initiative in making the Civil War a war of liberation by issuing and enforcing his own emancipation proclamation in Missouri in 1861. For much of the war Weydemeyer fought Confederate guerrillas in rural Missouri.

literature on the St. Louis (or, more generally, the American) Hegelians

(From the Hegel-Mailing List)

The subject of the St. Louis (or, more generally, the American) Hegelians, pops up on this list every couple of years or so. Here is a short bibliography on the subject.

The most comprehensive overview I know of is:

Goetzmann, William H., ed. *THE AMERICAN HEGELIANS: AN INTELLECTUAL EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF WESTERN AMERICA*, with the assistance of Dickson Pratt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973. xi, 397 pp.

Unless you specifically limit yourself to St. Louis, you should also consult:

Easton, Loyd D. *HEGEL'S FIRST AMERICAN FOLLOWERS: THE OHIO HEGELIANS: JOHN B. STALLO, PETER KAUFMANN, MONCURE CONWAY, AND AUGUST WILLICH, WITH KEY WRITINGS*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1966. ix, 353 pp.

A couple of other interesting works:

Leidecker, Kurt F., ed. *THE RECORD BOOK OF THE ST. LOUIS PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY FOUNDED FEBRUARY 1866*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990. viii, 120 pp. (Studies in the History of Philosophy; v. 14) (Includes an overview of the movement and the records of the society's activities.)

Schaub, Edward L., ed. *WILLIAM TORREY HARRIS 1835-1935*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1936. [vii], 136 pp. (A festschrift on Harris.)

Branching out, we have:

Pochmann, Henry A. *NEW ENGLAND TRANSCENDENTALISM AND ST. LOUIS HEGELIANISM: PHASES IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN IDEALISM*. New York: Haskell House, 1970. (First published 1948.)

Anderson, Paul R. *PLATONISM IN THE MIDWEST*. New York: Temple University Publications / distributed by Columbia University Press, 1963.

Pochmann, Henry A. *GERMAN CULTURE IN AMERICA: PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY INFLUENCES 1600-1900*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

Some peripheral works:

Whitehead, Fred; Muhrer, Verle; eds. *FREETHOUGHT ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992. (This anthology contains a selection on the St. Louis Movement by Denton J. Snider [pp. 69-85]. I have not compared this selection with the one in Goetzmann.)

Cowan, Bainard; Kronick, Joseph G.; eds. *THEORIZING AMERICAN LITERATURE: HEGEL, THE SIGN, AND HISTORY*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. ix, 294 pp. (This is nearly a complete waste of time.)

I don't know whether anything else of substance has been accomplished since 1973, so I would recommend beginning with Goetzmann, and then following its bibliography, which includes primary works by the American Hegelians. With the exception of the 2-volume autobiography of Moncure Conway, I have never seen any of their works in used bookstores. I have found some of the works of Denton Snider available from rare book dealers on the Internet.