HEGEL'S RECEPTION IN FRANCE

It may well be that the future of the world, and thus the sense of the present and the significance of the past, will depend in the last analysis on contemporary interpretations of Hegel's works. (Alexandre Kojève)

This bibliographic guide was developed by A. Bohm. It was completed by V. Y. Mudimbe in conjunction with a graduate seminar on "The German Crisis of French Thought" he held in the Graduate Program in Literature, Duke University (Spring, 1992). The title of the seminar was inspired by Claude Digeon's book, La Crise allemande de la pensée française, which analyzes similar problems in the literary field until the 1920's. The purpose of this guide was not to achieve bibliographical exhaustiveness, but rather to give an overview of the sequence and shape of the French Hegel reception. The chronological listing in Part 1 integrates the major translations of Hegel texts into French in sequence with decisive readings by key French philosophers. Thereby some of the patterns of reception that are otherwise obscured by alphabetical listings and by the separation of primary from secondary texts come to light.

An informed guide can often point out features that might otherwise go unnoticed in a bewilderingly full (or apparently monotonous) landscape. The organization of the bibliography, the historical presentation of the reception and the annotations have been made by V. Y. Mudimbe and then edited by A. Bohm. The aim of the guide is to highlight figures and texts as important events in this area of the complex dialogue between French and German philosophy. Somewhat more than a simple bibliography, then, this guide may be useful as notes towards a history yet-to-be-written. Part II provides an alphabetical list of secondary surveys and studies dealing with the contemporary French reception of German philosophy, with the overall reception of Hegel in France and with specific moments.

The term "reception" is used here with an awareness of the extensive discussion by literary historians and critics of the inadequacies of competing concepts such as that of "influence." Reception is the active
appropriation of authors, ideas, themes and so forth by one cultural-intellectual system for the purposes of another one. The creditor system has only indirect control in this process, primarily in producing and making texts available. Some of the impulses for Hegel reception can be attributed to the German interest in a Hegel who can be opposed to the image of the official or Prussianized establishment philosopher, and this seems to have been reflected in the French interest in the Jena period as well as in the Hegel transmitted by Marx.¹

From the French side, the translation of Hegel texts is an important dimension of the reception for several reasons. First, translations, especially when they come in clusters (as in the early 1970s) or have some particular institutional support (as in the case of Hyppolite), attract attention to figures and problems. On the most elementary level, the mere fact of making Hegel more widely available increased his visibility. Second, every translation is implicitly an interpretation, so that the shifts in the French discourse on Hegel could be traced here. Third, translations are often accompanied by commentaries--those of Kojève and Hyppolite come to mind immediately. The importance of such commentaries needs to be emphasized for an English-speaking philosophical audience, where the commentary as a genre and mode of philosophizing has been de-emphasized.² Within the tradition of commentary, book reviews also deserve mention, especially those appearing in leading intellectual journals. These reviews are frequently succinct declarations of the concerns of the discourse at a given moment.

Of course, the existence of translations of Hegel does not imply that the French had no access to primary and secondary texts in German. Quite the contrary was the case, as a systematic study of citations would show. Ideally, one would complement the history of the French reception


with an awareness of German philosophy as a whole. Hegel reception ultimately cannot be separated from the reception of the entire German philosophical tradition. Three instances might be cited. The reception of Husserlian phenomenology quickly entailed an awareness of, if not an explicit return to, Hegel. Any serious engagement with the thought of Marx could not ignore Hegel. And Heidegger’s relationship to Hegel, even where it does not come under the explicit category of “Hegel reception,” was of a piece with it.

From the bibliographic perspective, claims for ruptures in the pattern of reception seem rather overstated. Mark Poster observed that “the sudden prominence of Hegel among the French intellectuals after World War II signified a breach with traditions of thought,” and went on to assert: “Only ‘offbeat’ intellectuals like André Breton’s surrealists and a circle of young Marxists in the 1920’s paid tribute to the German dialectician.” In fact this is contradicted by the history that emerges bibliographically. For example, Jean Wahl, Alexandre Koyré and Jean Hyppolite provided a bridge from scholars such as Victor Delbos and Victor Basch to the existentialists. The Marxist dimension should not be stressed to the exclusion of the simultaneous reception of other aspects of Hegel’s writings, including those affecting theology, aesthetics, and the philosophy of science. Nor should the role of Louvain as another important philosophical center beside Paris be ignored.

One final caveat might be registered about the illusory force of all bibliographies, especially brief ones. They tend to suggest orderliness and purposiveness where in fact there were (and are) wrong turns, loose ends, incomplete projects, redundancies, and coincidences. Reception is an abstract formula for the process of many readers reading—and misreading—in productive and curious ways.

I BASIC SOURCES

In his study “Hegel in France,” G. Canguilhem, writing in the late 1940s, notes that the most important and original phenomenon in the French case is the discovery of Hegel and his introduction in France one

century after his death. Hegel (1770-1831) was not an unknown thinker for Cousin, Renan and Taine in the XIXth century. At the end of that century, Lucien Herr, for instance, was perfectly acquainted with Hegel's philosophy. Yet he chose not to divulge his knowledge of the German philosopher's contribution. Seen as a symbolic embodiment of pan-Germanism, Hegel, as well as other German thinkers, are victims of two conflicting nationalisms—the German and the French—and this tension was maximized by the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. According to Canguilhem, it is thus only in the late 1920s and in the 1930s that one can observe a progressive introduction and reception of Hegel's philosophy in France. Some of the milestones of this transformation would have been: Jean Wahl's *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (1929); Alexandre Kojève's teachings on Hegel (1933-1939) at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes; and, indeed, the achievement represented by Jean Hyppolite's translation of *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1939 and 1941).

One could thus distinguish two major periods in the French reception of Hegel: one before 1930, the other, after.

1. **Before 1930**

The bulk of Hegel's work was translated into French by Augusto Véra who, in 1861, published a general introduction to Hegelianism—*Le Hégélianisme et la philosophie* (Paris: Ladrange). Here, presented chronologically, are Hegel's first French translations:


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With respect to the translation of Hegel, one should also mention the contributions of Bénard, Slowan and Wallon, who had published in 1854.

According to A. Koyré, Véra was "un disciple plus enthousiaste que compétent" (*Etudes d'Histoire de la Pensée Philosophique*, Paris: Colin, 1961: 206), and his translation was poor.

Georges Canguilhem is also very harsh in his evaluation of Véra’s work: "L’ancienne traduction de Véra ne jouissait que d’un crédit limité. C’était un pis-aller" (1948-9: 284). In 1969 these versions were reprinted and one could consult a more systematic analysis of Véra’s work by consulting André Joz’ article: "Véra, traducteur et interprète de Hegel" (*Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore*, Pisa, 1986: 1265-77). Nonetheless, Véra’s translation is the most commonly consulted, even by specialists. Major critical contributions at the end of the XIXth century and at the beginning of the XXth include:


A fascinating analysis on the notion of State which one could usefully read in conjunction with Jean Hyppolite’s study on the significance of the French Revolution in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.


An overview of the main socialist themes in the writings of Luther, Kant, Fichte and Hegel. A doctoral dissertation written in Latin, Jaurès’ text is highly scholastic.

The 1933 version is a simple re-publication of the 1897 edition.


An excellent (and the first) biography of Hegel in which a connection is established between the life and work of the German philosopher.


Victor Delbos, a specialist of Kant (*La philosophie pratique de Kant*, Paris, 1902) had already focused on Hegel in one chapter of his *Le problème moral dans Spinoza et dans l'histoire du spinoisime* (1902), and had compared and opposed Hegel and Schelling in his Latin doctoral dissertation: *De posteriori Schellingii philosophia quatenus hegelianae adversatur* (1902). From 1922 to 1929, Delbos taught a course on Hegel at the Sorbonne. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, best remembered today as the inventor of concepts such as "pre-logism" and "mystical mentality," was then a careful student of German philosophy. Indeed, he had published on German philosophy (*L 'Allemagne après Leibniz*, 1890) as well as on Jacobi (*La Philosophie de Jacobi*, 1894). And to Jaurès' thesis, one should add Charles Andler's remarkable book on the origins of State socialism in which one finds startling statements such as: "The Hegelian system is an effort [. . .] to found liberty through reason; or, the Hegelian system could stand as it is even if the world did not exist."


Alexandre Koyré invokes the influence of Boutroux and his teachings in order to account for the general interest in Hegel. Boutroux,
herself the author of important publications in the field of German
philosophy—e.g. *Essais d'histoire de la Philosophie*, 6th edition 1929, and
*La Philosophie allemande au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1928—was, along with R.
Berthelot and V. Delbos, one of the participants in an historical session
of the Société française de Philosophie that discussed Hegel's philosophy
on January 31, 1907. R. Berthelot's report presents Hegel's philosophy
as a "dynamic idealism" which is not "an absolute determinism, nor an
integral optimism, nor a panlogism" and thus against what he terms three
French "traditional conceptions", that, in misreadings and misinterpre­
tations, reduce Hegelianism to, or confuse it with "determinism,"
"integral optimism" and "panlogism," Berthelot and Delbos then sum­
mizar the state of Hegelian studies. In brief, the general climate in most
of the studies is one of hostility toward Hegel's philosophy. Alexandre
Koyré (1961: 207) suggested a series of reasons: Hegel's antimagematism
could not be understood; his will to service a philosophy of nature in
order to construct a new science seemed preposterous; the concept of a
philosophy of history was not acceptable in an intellectual atmosphere
dominated by Fustel de Coulanges' historical theories; and, finally, the
way the "Protestant" Hegel faced religious issues could not easily be
accepted in a profoundly Catholic France. This resistance to Hegel can
be exemplified in the following quotation from E. Caro's book: "His
philosophy emerged from the nothingness of being, went through the
nothingness of becoming and ended in the nothingness of death." Two
books written in this spirit were:


The reception of Hegel is, for reasons analyzed by Koyré,
basically negative or, as demonstrated by Berthelot, naive, confused and
often erroneous. In his report on the state of Hegelian studies during this
period Koyré (1961: 206) retained a number of publications which attest
to the complexity of a reception:

Barchou de Penhoen, *Histoire de la philosophie allemande*,
2 vol., Paris, 1836; the excellent *Histoire de la philosophie allemande*
(4 vol., Paris, 1849) of J. Willm who had already published in 1836 a
study on Hegel: *Essai sur la philosophie de Hegel*, Strasbourg. Let us
also note: A. Ott, *Hegel et la philosophie allemande ou exposé et
examen critique des principaux systèmes de la philosophie allemande
depuis Kant et spécialement de celui de Hegel*, Paris, 1844; - L.
In sum, the reception of Hegel was certainly negative but complex, partially because Hegel did not face the "tree" represented by Cartesianism and its scientific roots. This is a major point emphasized by L. Brunschvicq (Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale, Paris, 1927, II: 396). One may also add the problem of Hegel's vocabulary. Koyré's article, "Note sur la langue et la terminologie Hégéliennes" (Revue Philosophique, 1931; and also in 1961: 175-204) includes this quotation from L. Herr about Hegel: "His terminology is his own [. . .] and does not probably contain a sole technical term that might have an equivalent in this abstract language of French philosophy" (Koyré, 1961: 175). Nonetheless, as already indicated by the books mentioned in the preceding pages, Hegel is, since the mid-XIXth century, quite present in the French philosophical landscape. Léon Brunschvicq put it nicely: "It is true not only for XIXth-century Germany, but for the whole of Europe that philosophy developed under the sign of Hegel" (1927: 395).

Around 1930, Hegel's French presence is an obvious fact. In his 1922 treatise on L'explication dans les sciences, Émile Meyerson celebrates Hegel and his Naturphilosophie. In 1928, D. Rosca publishes a translation of Hegel's Life of Jesus (Paris: J. Gamber). The same year Rosca defends a doctoral thesis on the influence of Hegel on Taine (L'influence de Hegel sur Taine, Paris, 1928). In 1928 and 1929, Charles Andler focuses on Hegel in two of his courses at the College de France. One could even say that Hegel's problematics are by then already part of the French philosophical horizon. Encouraged by Lucien Herr, Alain taught his first course on Hegel in 1923 and published a major piece on him in his Idées: Platon, Descartes, Hegel (1932). On the other hand, previous major studies by Léon Brunschvicq, Victor Basch, Émile Brehier and Jean Wahl devoted a considerable amount of space to the German philosopher:


It should be interesting to compare this study on German political ideas to the more restricted one on socialism by Jean Jaurès (see 1.1.7). Basch’s objective is to present a faithful image of Hegel’s thought, and the book thus assumes polemical stances.


An examination of young Hegel’s analyses of religious issues.

2. **After 1930**

After 1930, one finds two remarkable trends: on the one hand, the solidification and stabilization of Hegelian studies; on the other, the steady rearticulation of Hegel’s French translations. Let us begin by presenting the latter:


1.2.16. Hegel, G.W.F. *Esthétique*. Textes choisis par Claude Khodos,


Translations enabled a re-articulation of Hegel's presence in France. Before the 1930s Hegel’s name and problematics were affirmed. Now, they were now established in the form of the work itself without mediation, in precise renderings of the German originals. In terms of chronology, Gibelin may be the first in this process (with his 1937 translation), but it is Jean Hyppolite who, with his masterful translation *Phénoménologie de L'Esprit* (1939, 1941), marks and re-orders the new Hegelian presence and designates new standards (in both translation and interpretation). Hyppolite’s work imposed a new horizon for "indigenising" and questioning Hegel on his own terms. His French version of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is exemplary; indeed, arguing that it was "an event that transformed the situation of Hegelian studies in France," G. Canguilhem observed that:

One must admire in this work of translation not only the intrinsic faithfulness value, fruit of a really enormous work, but also the probity of the author who, wishing to elucidate Hegel’s thought, began firstly by presenting it to all potential readers who could understand its expression and then evaluate it in a pertinent manner as well as so that they could know the interpretation proposed of it. The case is sufficiently rare, and it should be commented. Very often, philosophical originality consists today in using works which have remained esoteric without mentioning the sources. (1948-49: 285)

A major moment was marked by the publication of a special issue of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* in 1931. It coincided
with the centenary of Hegel's death. The issue includes contributions by:


It synthesizes the main trends in German philosophy. Beginning with the "failure"(!) of Hegelianism in mid-XIXth century, von Astier analyzes Kant's theory of knowledge, Husserl's *Seinsphilosophie*, Scheler's and Heidegger's philosophical anthropology, and the *Wiener Kreis* group, focusing on Wittgenstein.

1.2.34. Hartmann, Nicolai, "Un cercle vicieux dans la critique de la philosophie hégélienne," 38: 277-316.

The article is on how to elaborate a pertinent critique of Hegel's philosophy.


In this patient analysis, Andler struggles with the concept of will to truth in *Phenomenology* and demarcates in Hegel's project six types of reasoning corresponding to each other two by two. The conclusion is that, in Hegel true knowledge is one that accounts for Life, and Life supports this very knowledge. The truth of Life itself is to be proved by the satisfactions that it can give to the demands of Reason.


How is it possible to understand Hegel's aesthetics as a closure of those of Plato and Plotinus, Schelling, Schiller and Kant?


Presentation of subtle analogies and contrasts between Goethe and Hegel, which involve a careful delineation of the intellectual genealogies of both thinkers and their connections with the thoughts of Fichte, Schiller, Schelling and Herder.

An analysis both of the determining influences that made the Hegelian system possible, and of how Hegel transformed logical affinities between concepts into an historical genesis. Seeking what announced Hegel, Guéroult examines Fichte, Jacobi, Kant, Reinhold, Schelling.


Hegel is perceived here as "one of the most authentic representatives of his people, the German-type" who, disappointed by political reality, decides to invent an "ideal State" that does not exist. Accordingly, there is "a tragedy of Hegelian politics as there is a tragedy of German politics. In actuality, both tragedies are one and, thus, Hegel's political thought takes on a quasi-symbolic aspect" (Vermeil, 38: 413).

The 1931 volume is a benchmark. Hegel's philosophy has been received and integrated in the tradition despite the fact that, as all things German, Hegel still arouses suspicion. Vermeil's analysis (1.2.39) exemplifies this. One could consult an elaborate study of this phenomenon.


Of this period, we should also mention an article by Victor Basch on Hegel's political philosophy, an excellent complement to that of Vermeil. (1.2.39)


The most noticeable contributions are signed by Alexandre Koyré and Jean Hyppolite.


The first systematic presentation of Hegelian studies in France. In 1961, the study will be included as a chapter in Etudes d'Histoire de la pensée philosophique (Paris: Colin).


The best introduction to the complexity of Hegel's philosophical language.


Presentation of a "pre-history" of Hegel's thought, in which Romanticism and anticlericalism combine with a passion for both Hellenism and philosophy. This moment takes place between the Systemfragment of Frankfurt (1800) and the Phenomenology (1807).


Using principally works by Richard Kroner (Von Kant bis Hegel, Tübingen, 1921-1924), Nicolaï Hartmann (Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus, Berlin, 1923) and Jean Wahl (Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel, Paris, 1929), Jean Hyppolite carefully delineates the evolution of Hegel's thought and distinguishes three main periods: Tübingen (1788-1793), Bern (1793-1796), Frankfurt am Main (1797-1800), and ends with the beginning of the Jena period in 1801, when Hegel meets
Schelling.


From the preface of *Phenomenology* in which Hegel defines his time as one of transition, Hyppolite carefully studies the notions of liberty and state, and the relations between them before focusing on the preparation of the French Revolution in the *Phenomenologie*.

We should also mention the following works by Hyppolite published after 1940:


Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974).


The articles (1.2.46, 47, 49, 52, 55, 56) were reprinted as chapters in *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris, 1955), a work that Hyppolite himself considered to be a sequel to his *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel* (Paris: Rivière 1948).

Hyppolite not only stabilized Hegelian studies, but with his two main books—*Genèse et Structure de la phénoménologie* (1.2.38) and *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (1.2.53)—he "indigenizes" Hegel, as Michel Foucault might have put it. The first book is both a guide to a reading of the *Phenomenology* and an interpretation. In the *Introduction*, Hyppolite introduces the reader to Hegel's conception of history in a dynamic way: the works of the young Hegel are used as well as those of the mature. They conflict and complement each other a propos of the tension existing between the "spirit of the Ancient City" and the spirit of Christianity. The philosophy of history presented is one in which the
incarnation of the infinite opposes that of the finite, that of the universal opposes that of the particular.

Hegelian par excellence and scrupulously exemplary in his "effort d'objectivité," to use Canguilhem's words (1948-49, XXVIII-XXIX: 293), Hyppolite would have subtly marked Hegel's fate in France, according to Michel Foucault. In effect,

Hyppolite sought out and explored all the issues, as though his chief concern had become: can one still philosophize where Hegel is no longer possible? Can any philosophy continue to exist that is no longer Hegelian? Are the non-Hegelian elements in our thought necessarily non-philosophical? Is that which is anti-philosophical necessarily non-Hegelian? As well as giving us this Hegelian presence, he sought not merely a meticulous historical description: he wanted to turn Hegel into a schema for the experience of modernity (is it possible to think of the sciences, politics, and daily suffering as a Hegelian?) and he wanted, conversely, to make modernity the test of Hegelianism and, beyond that, of philosophy. For Hyppolite, the relationship with Hegel was the scene of an experiment, of a confrontation in which it was never certain that philosophy would come out on top. He never saw the Hegelian system as a reassuring universe: he saw in it the field in which philosophy took the ultimate risk. (L'Ordre du discours, Paris: 75-76.)

Hyppolite was not alone. One should note the important role of Alexandre Kojève who, from 1933 to 1939, taught Hegel, focusing on Phénoménologie, at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Among his publications, let us single out two:


An edited synthesis of Kojève's course at the Ecole Pratique, 1933-1939.

Other important contributions to Hegelian studies worth mentioning are:


In the preceding list, one should note the particular usefulness of Dufrenne's (1.2.66) and Canguilhem's (1.2.67) articles: they sum up in a critical manner the state of Hegelian studies in France from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Finally, the Hegelian "effect" can be observed in the first philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre:


3. From the 1950s

From the 1950s on, Hegel's effect is so pervasive that one should take seriously Foucault's question as to whether it is possible to philosophize where Hegel is absent. The recent overview of Vincent Descombes aptly describes the situation of Hegel in contemporary French thought:

In the recent evolution of philosophy in France we can trace the passage from the generation known after 1945 as that of the three H's to the generation known since 1960 as that of the three masters of suspicion: the three H's being Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger; the three masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. This is not to say that the Hegelians or the Husserlians vanished abruptly from the scene in 1960. But those who persisted in invoking the three H's, or any one of them, after that date, would have been the first to admit that their position was no longer dominant. In argument, they were thus obliged to take the common doxa into account and to defend
themselves in advance against the objections likely to be raised in the name of the new trinity. Our object, then, will be to account for this change. (Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, Cambridge, 1980: 3).

Here are some very excellent titles that are indicative of a permanence of Hegelian problematics in French philosophy after 1950:


1.3.3. Asveld, Paul. La pensée religieuse du jeune Hegel: Liberté et aliénation. Louvain, 1953.


1.3.9. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "L'ontologie cartésienne et l'ontologie


II. SECONDARY LITERATURE

The secondary literature on Hegel in France—bibliographies, commentaries, introductions, overviews, monographs on particular problems, etc.,--is immense. In this part, we present alphabetically some titles which are both indicative of the variety of issues and some orientations in French philosophy which (directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly) claim to be related to, and at any rate refer to Hegel or, at least, to his legacy. Some of the books included—e.g. those of Mark Poster, Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, the Lapointes or Frans Vansina, etc. concern Hegel through a French intermediary. They are useful in so far as they clearly mark what is today the integration of Hegel's insights into a
French horizon.

Indeed, a student specializing in this field should move quickly beyond this introductory and highly limited bibliography. This selected bibliography constitutes a first step toward an exhaustive list of works. It is divided in two parts: (1) bibliographies and overviews; (2) specific moments.

**Bibliographies and Overviews**


1975. [dissertation]


Specific Moments


