Abridged and commented translation of Horst Althaus on Hegel’s death

Horst Althaus (introduction, translation and comments by Kai Froeb)
In his biography ‘Hegel und Die heroischen Jahre der Philosophie’ (Carl Hanser Verlag, München Wien 1992, ISBN 3-446-16556-8), which is the Hegel biography available which uses the latest research results, the author Horst Althaus comments in the chapter on Hegel’s death (chapter 24, “The End”) on page 579-581.

He issues the idea that Hegel’s death may have come (indirect) from his quarrel with Eduard Gans.

Free after Althaus:

Hegel had announced two lectures for the winter semester 1831/32: one on the Philosophy of Right and one on History of Philosophy.

He now saw at the beginning of the semester, that Gans announced his lecture on Philosophy of universal right (“Philosophie des allgemeinen Rechts”). That meant that both teacher and pupil would teach at the same time the same topic with the same method. But there were some remarkable differences: Gans was the progressive, he was republican, liberal and talented to make his topic easy to grasp. Hegel is the man of the restoration, Monarchist, of the strictest observance, enemy of the Liberalism and with a way of teaching that gives his hearers difficulties in fully understanding his topic. [KF: from the preceding chapters it is clear that Althaus not fully subscribes this characteristic of Hegel, he just wants to paint a black/white picture here for the dramatic effect]. Students had come to know that Hegelian Philosophy was easier learned with Gans than with Hegel. The reproduction, when contrasted with the original, had become the favourite choice.

That Hegel did teach Philosophy of Right at all at a time in which he had delegated them to Gans since some time had been on the suggestion of the ministry [of education], that wanted to prevent, that through Gans “all students” would be made “into republicans”. Hegel had never cared about Gans lectures and had given him free hand, while he did knew his point of view and did not share it. [KF comments: The second sentence is true in so far that Hegel must have known Gans point of views due to his frequent visits to Hegel’s house, where they must have talked about politics. Hegel himself also named himself one time an “alter politicus” in a private letter to his wife. That he did not share Gans point of view etc. is something still to be proved. At least he would not share it in public for sure].

Gans reacted by abandoning his planned topic and announcing instead a lecture on Hegel’s History of Right. What could Hegel have against this?

But it turned out: the students whom Gans had addressed in his first announcement did not want to come to Hegel’s lecture but waited instead until the more modern teacher would handle the topic [in a later semester].

So Gans writes an announcement that he recommends his students to visit Hegel’s lecture. The pupil had suddenly turned into a protector, who in public is looking after it that his teacher doesn’t get too few hearers. Hegel’s letter of the 12th of November, in which he criticises Gans about this recommendation in which he indirectly claims a competition and allows himself a recommendation of his teacher (“worin Sie den besprochenen Umstand einer Konkurrenz an die Studenten bringen und eine Empfehlung meiner Vorlesungen an dieselben zu geben sich erlauben”) is the last thing what Hegel ever wrote down in his
life. He has only held two lecture hours on the Philosophy of Right, became than ill and had since then never appeared again in university.

That extreme excitement may have caused his old stomach diseases to become worse again and brought him to death is an assumption which has many good reasons. Arnold Ruge has seen a connection here in his memories “Aus früherer Zeit”. We know from [Hegel’s friend] Varnhagen, that Hegel could be terrible in his anger. He had made another surprising discovery at this occasion, according to Ruge: “He should” [with teaching again Philosophy of Right] “throw in his authority for the court and it turned out that he had no more” [KF: among the young students]. And Gans had known this already in contrast to Hegel.

See also:

- You might want to compare what Hegel’s first biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, has to say on Hegel’s death⁴

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⁴ rosenkranz-life-of-hegel24.htm#book-3-chapter-21