
Karl Rosenkranz's 'Life of Hegel' 18/24 - Victor Cousin and Hegel

An abridged and commented translation into English

Stephen Cowley

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(The article below is reproduced at hegel.net with the kind permission of its author, Stephen Cowley¹. It first appeared 01/2013 on the hegel.net Hegel mailing list² and was published 06/2013 as article with the pictures below on his blog 'Hegelian News & Reviews'³)



This post summarises the relations between French eclectic philosopher and historian of philosophy Victor Cousin (1792-1867) and Hegel. Cousin was very influential in the institutionalisation of philosophy in the French education system in the 19th century. He wrote books on John Locke and Condillac; the “Scottish school of common sense” (Hutcheson, Reid and Adam Smith); and Immanuel Kant.

BOOK THREE BERLIN - Chapter Eleven - Cousin and Hegel

The actions of French liberal philosopher Victor Cousin were the occasion of a struggle between Schelling and Hegel for hegemony in German philosophy. Cousin was a “French philosopher of the Scottish school” (587) who had travelled to Germany in 1817-18 where he got to know Hegel during a stay of some weeks in Heidelberg. He later dedicated two books to Hegel:

- An edition of Proclus (4th part, 1821; also to Schelling);

- A translation of Plato's *Gorgias* (1826).

(see *Corr III*, 345). In 1824, Cousin travelled again to Germany and was arrested in Dresden on the basis of liberal sympathies and relations with the *Bursenschaften*. This was on the basis of information from the French secret police. Cousin was then brought to Berlin. Hegel wrote to the Home Secretary and minister for police, Schuckmann on 4 November 1824. Rosenkranz reproduces this in part; it refers also to Cousin's edition of Descartes. Cousin was released: the French ambassador also requested this. Thereafter he met Hegel, Gans, Hotho, von Henning and Michelet. He corresponded with Hegel and later received him in Paris (*Corr III*, L559-64).

Cousin had Heinrich Hotho's notes on the Philosophy of History and History of Philosophy lectures of Hegel sent to Paris (copies, that is). [Note: perhaps these still exist, as there is a Cousin archive

¹ <https://edinburgh.academia.edu/StephenCowley>

² <https://groups.io/g/hegel/topics>

³ <https://scottish-hegelian.blogspot.com/2013/06/victor-cousin-and-hegel.html>

at the Sorbonne. **2018 Update:** Notes on the lectures on aesthetics⁴ annotated by Cousin were published by Vrin in 2005. - SC]. He hoped that Hegel would review his *Fragments Philosophiques*, which Schelling in fact did in 1833.

On 1 August 1826, he asks for an account by Hegel, in Latin characters, dictated and corrected if necessary, of his thought, as he wishes to plant the seeds of a French version, not to merely awake an interest in what is foreign; or for the same through the mediation of Henning, Hotho, Gans, Michelet or Förster. Rosenkranz does not have Hegel's replies (but see *Corr III*). Rosenkranz adds that he has no right to make public Cousin's opinions on politics, etc. [Cousin lived until 1867 and Rosenkranz published in 1844.]

In 1853, Cousin wrote on his work on German philosophy in the Preface to the second edition of *Fragments Philosophiques*. Here he describes the meeting with Hegel in 1817. Hegel was unsure of his position and had a knowledge of French "not much better than" Cousin's of German (i.e. he found it difficult, but had made efforts). Cousin found the *Encyclopaedia* scholastic in language and not lucid. Hegel was sunk in his studies and not that friendly. He was a contrast with Schelling, whom Cousin met in Munich in 1818 along with Jacobi; but Cousin still felt that he had met a man of genius:

"Hegel scarcely let fall rare and profound sayings, a little enigmatic, his speech strong but embarrassed, his face immobile; his brow covered with clouds, seemed the image of thought folded in on itself." (562)

Rosenkranz thinks that Cousin vaunts his own significance in "discovering" Hegel too much. He comments that Cousin's views shifted between 1828 and 1833.

Notes:

1. Osmo refers to Cousin's letter to Marie Hegel following Hegel's death (see Nicolin, *Hegel in Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen*, 502-03. and to *Souvenirs d'Allemagne* in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1866. Hegel was said to be an Aristotle to Schelling's Plato, he recalls; but Schelling's followers would have him only as Wolff to Leibniz. Note: a similar remark is found in James Hutchison Stirling's *Secret of Hegel* (1865), with Kant in the place of Schelling.

2. The current blogger [Stephen Cowley] was the first to translate the Preface to Cousin's lectures on Scottish Philosophy into English in *Edinburgh Review* 89 (1993). The other volumes of the series are available in older translations.

⁴ <https://www.amazon.fr/Esth%C3%A9tique-Cahier-in%C3%A9dit-Victor-cousin/dp/2711617572/>