
Karl Rosenkranz's 'Life of Hegel' 24/24 - Hegel in Berlin (Part Three)

An abridged and commented translation into English

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(The article below is reproduced at hegel.net with the kind permission of its author, Stephen Cowley¹. It first appeared 02/2013 on the hegel.net Hegel mailing list² and was published 09/2013 as article with the pictures below on his blog 'Hegelian News & Reviews'³)



This is my concluding entry on Hegel's life, drawing from Rosenkranz's *Hegels Leben* (1844), the first biography of Hegel. I describe Hegel's final words on politics and falling out with Edouard Gans, his last sudden illness and death and the life of his sister.

BOOK THREE BERLIN - Chapter Nineteen - The Celebration of Hegel's last Birthday

In the uncertain political circumstances following the 1830 Revolution in France, the diabolical cholera epidemic broke out. Hegel's family moved out to Kreuzberg, in the Grunow gardens, where they stayed in the upper floors of the Castel villa. Most of his friends had left because of the epidemic. There were also riots at this time. For his birthday on 27 August 1831 there was a pleasant gathering, which broke up early because of a storm. Hegel was encouraged to speak out against anarchy. He replied in a poem that others should do so too:

"How welcome are the good wishes of friends.
More than wishes besides, call [us] to decide,
To speak out in order to implore

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

² <https://groups.io/g/hegel/topics>

³ <https://scottish-hegelian.blogspot.com/2013/12/hegel-in-berlin-part-three.html>

All those, friends included, inflamed by madness.

But what then, subject of your complaints, is their crime?

To hear only themselves, to raise their voices;

So that speech, that keeps from harm,

Should become only a means of increasing misery.

But if I struck forth, as I have long wished,

Your call would pledge me to wager again

Hoping that other minds would respond,

That the matter would not expire in vain lamentations

That they would reach the people, that they make it their work.”

This was an ironical reply to a greeting from Heinrich Stieglitz, addressed to Hegel as a "Prince of Spirits". Hegel apparently reproves the conceit of contemporary political commentators, but without precision, other than a wish to re-enter the debate himself, which he was shortly to do.

Chapter Twenty The Literary Testament

Hegel began work on a second edition of the *Science of Logic*, completing the first part with a new Preface written on 7 November 1831. It is worth noting that in moving from Book One (Being) to Book Two of modern editions of the *Science of Logic*, we are in effect moving back 18 years in time, from 1831 to 1813. The 1831 Preface questioned if political agitation still left room for science.

He wrote letters of condolence to von Altenstein, who had lost a sister and to Heinrich Beer, who had lost a son. He returned for his courses to Berlin, where cholera had broken out.



A disagreeable event occurred. Edouard Gans (1796-1839, above, portrait by Wilhelm Hensel) recommended Hegel's lectures to his students. Hegel wrote him an angry letter (See *Corr III*, L687+n). This was the last thing he wrote (says Rosenkranz wrongly).

[Note: Osmo tells us that, according to Arnold Ruge, who heard it in Gans' company, the Crown Prince had complained to Hegel about Gans' republican lectures. Hegel had thus decided to lecture the next semester, but Gans' lectures were more popular with students. Then Hegel wrote his angry letter. Gans duly cancelled his course, but students did not transfer to Hegel, for Gans was clearer. Hegel gave a few lectures, but then died. The source of this is Ruge's memoir *Auf früherer Zeit* (Berlin, 1867). I seem to recall that Terry Pinkard takes this up in his biography, but it is interesting that the source seems to be second hand at best and from over thirty years after the event. Looking into it a little further, the original letter reads:

"To Professor Gans
Dorotheenstrasse No.4.

The means of information that I will only call "unreliable", which you decided to make use of, Herr Professor, in putting up a poster where you make known to students the competition which was the object of a discussion and where you allow yourself to recommend my course to these students - this means, I say, would justify me in making on my side a public notice in order to correct the annoying impression that yours might produce in our colleagues and students - as if your poster and the recommendation of my courses had been done at my instigation (as you gave

me almost to understand in your note) and as if I was in agreement with this proceeding. The hopes of those at least who know me do not permit me to act in such a manner and the fear of giving you occasion for new clumsiness impels me to express my opinion of your poster to you, not by another poster, but only by these lines.

Yours sincerely
Hegel

Of course, some earlier letter may have been lost, but this suggests to me that Gans or others may have made a story of this after Hegel's death.]

Chapter Twenty One - The Death of Hegel

Hegel died suddenly on 14 November 1831 - the same day as Leibniz - at quarter past five pm, of virulent cholera of which the symptoms were less evident than usual. Rosenkranz cites a long letter from Marie Hegel to his sister Christiane:

"I will have to get a grip of myself and tell you briefly how it all happened. My beloved husband felt ill from Sunday before midday, although breakfast had gone off in the best humor, complaining of stomach pain and nausea, without there having been any error of regime or chill. The Thursday before, he had started his courses full of energy and lively; still on the Saturday he had overseen the exams, and he had invited some friends for midday on Sunday. I let them know and devoted myself entirely to looking after him. Through a lucky meeting, the doctor arrived straight away, gave prescriptions - but his condition didn't give rise to concern in any of us. His stomach pains were bearable. Then there was vomiting, at first without then mixed with bile. He had already had frequent attacks of this sort. He spent all the night in the greatest agitation. I stayed by his bedside and covered him in eiderdowns each time he sat up in bed and turned himself although he asked me on several occasions several times to go and lie down and leave him alone with his irritation. His stomach pains weren't really violent, but rather "as bad as a toothache when there is no position you can find peace".

On Monday morning, he wanted to get up. We carried him into the adjoining living room, but his weakness was so great that he almost collapsed before he reached the sofa. I put his bedding close by. We propped him up in warm eiderdowns. he complained only of weakness. All the pains and nausea had disappeared, so much that he said "Please God if I should have a single hour as peaceable this night." I told myself that he needed calm, that I mustn't accept any visits. When I wanted to take his pulse, he took my hand affectionately as if to say, don't fuss, it's my concern.

The doctor arrived the next day in good time. Like the day before, he prescribed mustard plasters applied to the stomach (the previous evening I had applied leeches). In the morning, he

had hiccoughs and had difficulties passing water. Nevertheless, despite all that, he rested very peaceably, always with the same warmth and the same sweat, always fully conscious and, so it seemed to me, without any apprehension of danger. A second doctor, Doctor Horn, was called. Mustard plasters on all the body, covered in flannel cloths dipped in a camomile preparation. None of that upset or agitated him. Towards three o'clock, asthma was noticeable, followed again by a peaceful slumber; but on the left side of his face an icy coldness started to spread. His hands became blue and cold. We knelt at his bedside to listen for his breath. It was the gasp of a transfigured being carried into the beyond.

Let me stop there. Now you know everything. Share my tears, but also thank God with me for this end without suffering, soft and blessed. Only, tell me, in all that, did you recognise even one symptom of cholera? I was horrified on learning that the doctors, health counsellor Barez and privy-councillor Horn had identified it as that, and even as that form which in the absence of external symptoms, destroys the life inside with the most extreme violence. But they didn't look at what seemed to have happened internally."

She goes on to say that the room was fumigated, but no-one was worried about cholera. He was buried on Wednesday at 3.00 pm, near Fichte and Solger. The students gathered beforehand and Marheineke gave an oration. Förster and Marheineke spoke at the graveside.

KF: You may also want to read how Althaus reports the latest research on Hegel's death⁴

Christiane Hegel

Christiane Hegel, his sister, had turned down a suitor, Gotthold, who had died a bachelor. Thereafter she was knawed by a deep sadness. Hegel had tried to help her in Nuremberg in 1815. To judge from a silhouette, she looked much like him. She followed the parliamentary debates in Wurtemberg, took extracts from books and wrote poems that were like Schiller's in manner. She was a governess, but lived her last eight years alone, helped by a servant. A brother of Schelling tried to help her with thermal cures. She formed the idea that doctors were trying to kill her with electricity. She had tried to commit suicide before. She died some weeks after hearing of her brother's death, at which news she had sobbed violently after some hours of calm. She died on the 2nd February, 1832. I have drawn attention elsewhere to Alexandra Birkert's recent biography⁵ of Christiane Hegel.

Conclusion The official journal spoke of a fit of apoplexy as the cause of Hegel's death. Varnhagen thought that the cornerstone of the university had gone and records a tear-filled visit from Gans.

⁴ [hegelsdeath.htm](#)

⁵ <http://scottish-hegelian.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/hegels-schwester-by-alexandra-birkert.html>

Rosenkranz concludes with a poem that echoes Schiller's *On Friendship*; the poem that Hegel adapted in the closing words of the *Phenomenology*. He concludes:

"The sadness of Hegel's students across all Germany and beyond was very great and as they honored in Hegel, above all, as much the master of scholarship as the noble and candid man, they felt themselves united for the present in an enthusiasm that expressed itself in numerous poems, some were published in the newspapers, others sent to the family as a sign of mourning and the peroration of one of them may here take the place of a conclusion:

"And when the ghosts awake
That you exiled for so long in the night
When the moment comes to clean the temple
That you consecrated to the cult of light
Let your mind then, its wings beating,
Be for us the measure of an assured victory,
Whilst as the prince of spirits, in a joyous clarity,
Your lips taste again the chalice of eternal truth."