

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This work seeks to demonstrate that the doctrinal content of Marx's *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf 1857/58)* is indebted for its logical form to Hegel's exposition of logical categories as found in the *Wissenschaft der Logik*.¹ The *Grundrisse* are a series of manuscripts in notebook form that Marx composed from August 1857 to June 1858. As Marx stated in a letter to the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle (February 1858), the work represents the culmination of fifteen years of research into the origins and nature of political economy.² It is a "synthesis" of the wealth of empirical data that Marx had gathered in his study of economics.³ It was in fact Marx's first, large scale attempt to set out his critique of the capitalist mode of production.

Marx drafted the *Grundrisse* at the end of a period of transition in his intellectual development.⁴ In his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), a work written immediately after completing the *Grundrisse*, Marx referred to an early pivotal point in his life.⁵ While working in 1842-1843 as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx found himself having to discuss issues related to political economy. Recognizing his ignorance of the subject, he undertook an intensive study of the literature of political economy. This study led him to the conclusion that legal relations and political forms are rooted in the economic conditions of life.⁶ From that point on, Marx devoted himself to the comprehension of the economic conditions of modern, bourgeois society.

Many years of research followed, and Marx produced writings that were in large measure a process of "self-clarification."⁷ But it was not until August 1857 that he felt obliged to undertake a large scale critique of bourgeois society. He lived in London at the time, and it became apparent to him that Britain was about to be thrown into a deep, economic crisis. He perceived that this crisis would be of much greater magnitude than those that had occurred before. He refers in his correspondence to the added pressure he felt to quickly provide a critique of capitalism that would lay bare its contradictions for all to see. In a letter to Engels dated 8 December, he wrote that he was working quite frequently through the night on a synthesis of his studies in political economy. Given the impending crisis, "before the deluge" he wanted to have clear "at least the outlines" of an exposition on why

capitalism suffered such upheavals.⁸ His studies of economics in the 1840s and 1850s would now bear fruit, and in one relatively short, feverish burst of energy he produced a complex manuscript of some 800 pages.

Although the crisis was not of the proportion that Marx anticipated, he nonetheless proceeded to publish the “preliminary chapters” of his critical theory as *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. In the Preface to this work, he again referred to the *Grundrisse* manuscripts when he announced to his readers that he intended to produce a six-part *magnum opus*, the entire material for which lay before him in “the form of monographs” that he would put into publishable form as circumstances permitted. Many authors refer to this remark when they conclude that the *Grundrisse* served as a foundation piece for Marx’s *Das Kapital*.⁹

The discovery of the *Grundrisse* manuscripts among Marx’s literary remains was first announced in 1923; but they were published only in 1939, by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, under the title *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf 1857/58)*.¹⁰ They were again published in 1953 in East Berlin, but remained largely unknown in the West until the 1960s. The first complete translation into English was in 1973 by Martin Nicolaus.¹¹

Upon its translation into English, the *Grundrisse* quickly became the subject of study and commentary.¹² For example, Carol Gould and George McCarthy have provided full-length studies that consider the text in depth.¹³ My project, however, is not an exposition of the “social ontology,” the “social ethic,” or the history of modes of production or theories of surplus value that are contained within the *Grundrisse*. Instead, as stated at the outset, I seek to demonstrate that the *Grundrisse* are indebted for their logical form to Hegel’s SL. I do not intend, however, to reduce the content of the *Grundrisse* to its logical form, but rather to show how the Hegelian logic governs Marx’s doctrinal development in the *Grundrisse*, something quite different from such a reduction, and also quite different from a mere application of Hegel’s categories to economic data.¹⁴

1. THE METHOD OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

We have from Marx’s own hand a testimony to his indebtedness to Hegel’s SL in his ordering of the materials that appear in the 1857/1858 manuscripts. In a letter to Engels in January 1858, Marx stated that a rereading of the SL afforded him the conceptual tools that allowed him to unlock the secrets of profit.¹⁵ He also expressed the desire to “make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence . . . what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped in mysticism.”¹⁶ Elsewhere he

lamented that he wished he had had time to extract and make accessible the “rational kernel” that is contained in Hegel’s treatment of scientific method. The expression of such a desire is, in fact, in keeping with a central motif that may be found in his earlier work. Hegel is notable for having conceived a “proper logic,” or a “principle of movement,” or a “pure logical formula of movement in general.”¹⁷ Yet he is to be blamed for his mystification. Marx wished to extricate this “proper logic” from its mystical trappings.

What, in brief, did Marx take to be the “rational kernel” in Hegel’s scientific method? In the section entitled “The Method of Political Economy,” Marx gives an account of the proper method of procedure in his exposition of a “mode of production.”¹⁸ While he does not explicitly credit Hegel for having discovered this method, it is clear in his criticisms here that he is indeed indebted to Hegel for it.¹⁹ The following brief sketch will serve as a springboard to a general discussion in the next section of the nature of Hegel’s scientific method—the “rational kernel,” if you will. I return in the conclusion to a more thoroughgoing consideration of the logical structure and content of the “Introduction” to the *Grundrisse*, and Marx’s characterization of scientific method.

Marx states in the “Introduction” that scientific method includes both analysis and synthesis. One naturally begins with what is given in experience. But what is given in experience are complicated (“concrete”) things. Because any concrete thing is a “concentration of many determinations,” an investigator’s initial conception of it is chaotic. Investigation consists in moving analytically from this chaotic conception of the whole to the simple determinations that are constitutive of it. Once having arrived at the simplest determinations of the whole, the investigator then proceeds to order these determinations in reconstructing in the mind precisely what the whole is.

We can see in Marx’s short exposition of the nature of scientific method, an elaboration of what had only been hinted at in earlier works. He reiterates what had been stated in *The German Ideology* as the premise of the true scientific exposition. The subject is society: real men acting together to create and reproduce their conditions of existence.²⁰ The real remains after theoretical exposition as before, independent of the thoughts of the scientist. Nevertheless, the real is said to be comprised of a system of hierarchically ordered relations. The nature of the subject matter, therefore, is not given to sense. Since the whole is a functioning system of hierarchically ordered relations, the reconstruction of the real in thought must be accomplished in a systematic manner.

It is important to note that for Marx the term “concrete” denotes two realities.²¹ It is on the one hand the ontologically prior real. The concrete is,

Capital as Organic Unity
The Role of Hegel's Science of Logic in Marx's
Grundrisse
Meaney, M.E.
2002, XIII, 193 p. 1 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-1-4020-1037-8