CHAPTER 2

Capital Breeds: Interest-Bearing Capital as Purely Abstract Form

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Introduction

The ‘Rnodlsky Challenge’

Roman Rosdolsky describes Marx’s Grundrisse manuscripts as making ‘massive reference’ to Hegel’s Science of Logic (SL).1 I propose that Rosdolsky’s characterisation leaves us with an interesting challenge: to supply the footnotes. Taking on the ‘Rosdolsky challenge’ would first involve solving the problem of just how to go about providing citations amid such ‘massive reference’. There are over a hundred logical terms and phrases in the Grundrisse that Marx borrows directly from SL. Meeting the challenge would entail close textual and philological exegesis. To establish a citation, you would have to link a term or phrase as found in the Grundrisse to a term or phrase as found in SL. The methodology sounds simple enough, but anyone who has ever done this sort of work knows just how mind-numbingly difficult it can be. The magnitude of difficulty increases exponentially not least because SL is one of the most semantically dense works ever composed and, of course, the Grundrisse manuscripts are no walk in the park either. Yet, this is precisely what meeting the ‘Rosdolsky challenge’ entails.

In this chapter, I provide an illustration of the value of the empirical approach of philological exegesis in examining the relationship of Marx’s Grundrisse to Hegel’s SL. I choose a particularly nettlesome transition in the Grundrisse from profit-bearing capital to interest-bearing capital in illustrating just how tightly Marx weaves SL into the fabric of the manuscripts. In preparing the transition, Marx describes capital as ‘self-reproducing and multiplying’ and, as such, perennial.2 Moreover, he goes on to say that when capital relates itself to itself as self-reproducing, it distinguishes itself within itself as profit, and then supersedes the separation and thereby expands itself as the subject of a self-expanding circle, or spiral.3 Capital breeds.4 If Nicolaus’s

3 Ibid.
4 Of course, capital breeds only in and through relations with alien labour.
translation here is difficult, it is only because Marx’s German is likewise exquisitely turgid. More than one commentator has found Marx’s choice of words here at least puzzling. Yet, Marx’s (ab)use of the German language at this point in the manuscripts is a rich vein from which to mine numerous nuggets in establishing a relation of indebtedness, in ‘dropping a footnote’, as it were. We can go a long way toward solving the puzzle of the origin of Marx’s wording in this complex transition to ‘real capital’ by linking the Grundrisse to SL, at the appropriate juncture. So, for example, by making use of this methodology, I will show how we can explain Marx’s deployment of phrases such as ‘self-reproducing’ and ‘real capital’ at precise points in the manuscripts by linking Marx’s language to logical terms and phrases Hegel uses in his presentation of ‘realised genus’, the concrete universal.

In the conclusion, I move from the illustration to claim that we can meet the ‘Rosdolsky challenge’ only by ‘dropping a footnote’ for each and every transition in the Grundrisse manuscripts as making ‘massive reference’ to SL – a truly daunting task.

**A Note on Method**

In meeting the ‘Rosdolsky challenge’, we must supplement philological exegesis of the relation of the Grundrisse to SL with an appreciation of why Marx would use a specific logical term or phrase at a certain point and yet never again use that same term or phrase anywhere else in the manuscripts. For example, Marx uses ‘self-reproducing’ and ‘self-expanding circle’ only and precisely at the locations in the manuscripts where he describes ‘real capital’ as distinguishing itself within itself from itself as profit, and then superseding the separation thereby expanding itself als Subjekt des Kreises.

I submit that an answer to this question rests on Marx’s understanding of the absolute necessity of the ordering of the logical categories in SL. Marx agrees with Hegel on this point. The necessity of the ordering of logical categories makes Hegel’s method the ‘scientifically correct method’. In meeting the ‘Rosdolsky challenge’, we must therefore supplement our philological exegesis with an understanding of the ordering of economic categories in the Grundrisse manuscripts in relation to the ordering of logical categories in SL. In short, we map logical terms or phrases in ‘dropping footnotes’ by remaining faithful to the logical structure of both works. Logical terms or phrases provide us with signposts to logical structure. The logical structure of both works, in turn, provides us with clues in our construction of a philological map in ‘dropping footnotes’.