

## Philosophy 457/557: Marx's *Grundrisse*

The most important achievement of Karl Marx's sizable corpus is his development of the historical materialist critique of political economy, namely, his distinctive critical analysis of capitalism as a socio-economic system. Through a combination of philosophical-theoretical and empirical-historical approaches to capitalist economics, Marx painstakingly delineates the destructive and self-destructive structural tendencies inherent to capitalism. This critical analysis is crystallized in the crown jewels of Marx's *oeuvre*: the three volumes of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus-Value* (the latter being intended as the fourth volume of *Capital*). However, the foundations of *das Kapital* are laid in a set of notebooks dating from the late 1850s (1857-1858). Published well after Marx's death (1883) in 1939 under the title *Grundrisse*—this title refers to the breaking of ground in the process of laying foundations—these notebooks were kept by Marx during his intensive intellectual labors preparatory to the composition of the multi-volume project of *Capital*. They sometimes are described as “Marx's laboratory.” Indeed, the *Grundrisse* amount to the textual spaces of evidence-based thought experiments yielding results central to what subsequently becomes the hulking edifice of *das Kapital*. In the pages of these notebooks, one discovers all of the core elements of *Capital*'s critique of political economy: Marx's account of social structures generally and capitalist social structures specifically; his ambivalent rapport with G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy and its legacy; his reckonings with key economic thinkers, especially Adam Smith and David Ricardo; his theories of money, value (as use-, exchange-, and surplus-values), labor, and capital's circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption; and, his reflections on the accumulation and self-valorization of capital. This seminar will involve a close reading of the entirety of Marx's *Grundrisse*.