The tradition of radical economics is a long one, rich in insight, passion, and conflict. Motivated by different forms of a common opposition to capitalism and the economic theories which celebrate it, radicals have offered a variety of analyses of economic and more broadly social interactions, problems, and trends. Our task in this paper is to make sense of the varieties of radical theory: we present a taxonomy, a catalog of some of the major contemporary radical positions, locating both the shared principles which unite theorists within the various schools of thought and the issues of struggle and debate defining boundaries between them. Of course, there are probably as many ways to organize and classify radical economic theories as there are theories to classify; any taxonomic scheme is also inherently an evaluation of the theories considered, and our own perspective is obviously at work in shaping the distinctions we draw. Because of this, we will also explicitly locate our own views in relation to other trends in the field, in the process clarifying the reasons for our allegiance to one particular radical approach.

But before considering particular radical economic theories, we need to ask a prior question: how in general do we establish differences among theories? What exactly would we look for in these theories that would stamp them as uniquely different from one another? Any answer to these questions involves some discussion of epistemological issues. We will take up these issues first, explaining how we think about these theoretical differences, and then use our method to construct indexes of difference that can be used to distinguish different radical economic theories. As we shall see, there are two ways to distinguish theories: establishing their respective "entry points" into social analysis and identifying their "logics."
Distinguishing Theories: Entry Points and Logics

Let us begin with what seems to be a simple problem. Suppose we were asked to make some kind of sense of the relationship among individuals in a household. Now to "make sense" of a household is to theorize what it is, and this theorizing invariably shapes a definition of its object. Thus the objects we think and talk about are always the results of theorizing; they always represent in part the knowledges in which they are defined. Past experience living in a household suggests a first step in theorizing it. We might begin merely by listing the things we think go on there: cooking, cleaning, laughing, loving, educating, ordering, crying, arguing, caring, fighting, borrowing, gifting, repairing, and so forth.

The diversity of the activities which any one person might list as well as the likely differences between the lists of different people suggest that even seemingly simple problems of definition and demarcation are actually quite complex. Moreover, each aspect catalogued on such a list not only exerts its influence on the household relationship, but each one shapes all the others as well. Aspects interact with one another. So, for example, the relationships we have in households are shaped in diverse ways by how we talk to, work with, exert authority over, and love one another there. But our work experience there is also shaped by the different ways we love, talk, and exert authority over one another.

This story about theorizing household relationships can be extended to relationships among individuals in any location or site in society (factory, state, church, union, school) and to society as a whole. The latter becomes the totality of such relationships including all aspects at all sites. As in our household example, each of these social sites (and their collection into a society) also is composed of an enormous list of interacting aspects. Taken together, the sheer number of aspects and their mutual interaction define the central task of social theory: to bring a kind of order, a systematic understanding, to this chaos of interacting aspects. The key question then becomes how theory does this. Or, more relevant for our purposes, how do different theories do this differently?

In our view, every theorist picks one (or perhaps several) of the many aspects and uses it (them) as a focus, a means to bring a particular order or coherence to the initial chaos of mutually interacting social activities. In other words, this focus permits a particular understanding of all the aspects from the perspective of the chosen one. This choice assigns great importance to this particular aspect, for it now serves as a guide to the theorist pointing the way to an orderly path out of initial disorder. In a sense, a door has been opened into the analysis of relationships, and thus we refer to this as the choice of an "entry point" concept.

Choosing a particular concept as an entry point implies a commitment to a singular organizational principle or taxonomy in one's theorizing. It means that the theorist has adopted a unique way to approach and classify the complex of interacting aspects with which he or she is initially confronted. Dividing the world into entry point and non-entry point aspects is the necessary first step in
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

making sense of the chaos of aspects—otherwise no sense is possible at all. However, different conceptual divisions produce different kinds of senses: theories with different entry points produce different taxonomies of aspects and ultimately different knowledges of the world.

In the household, for example, a theorist could choose as the organizing idea the aspect of exerting authority, or more specifically, the power wielded by men over women in the relationships within households. That theorist would relate all the non-power aspects of those relationships to this power aspect. The result is a particular kind of theoretical taxonomy: relationships in households, no matter what their complexity, now can be understood initially in terms of their power and related non-power aspects. Such an analysis produces a broadly “political” theory of the household. Alternatively, choosing as entry point the aspects connected to the production and dissemination of meanings (for example, talking, arguing, story-telling, and dressing) results in a “cultural” theory. Choosing cooking, cleaning, repairing, or, in general, working to produce and distribute household goods and services generates an “economic” theory of that entity.

The choice of any one of these alternatives is itself a complex act affected by events and relationships in society and in one’s own personal experience. Whether one’s entry point is socially conventional or, as happens at least occasionally, entirely novel, the choice need not be wholly or even largely a conscious decision. Thus, to understand any theory it is always pertinent to ask why its entry point concept was chosen or invented at this time and place, a question particularly relevant to the history of thought, including in that history the psychological factors that may shape an individual’s choice.

For example, the choice of power as the discursive entry point may flow from an individual’s personal and family participations, political practices in society’s rule making and enforcing institutions, and his or her experiences with the various theories that exist in society. Indeed, many Americans use power as their organizing idea in part because of the theoretical and political importance given to this concept in both the historic and current American experience. Concern with the idea of power—who wields it and for what purpose—has been a primary American focus from colonial days to the present.

Whatever the complex reasons for our choices, different chosen entry points signal the different priorities we as theorists impose on our unique understandings of the relationships among human beings. We thus have one index of difference among theories: the different political, cultural, and economic entry points they use. Theories are different in part because of their different entry points.

A second index involves the way in which theorists connect together their ideas about their objects. Different theories deploy different connections among ideas—they use different logics in the process of linking their chosen entry point aspect(s) to all the other aspects of society.

One prevalent approach assigns the chosen entry point a dual role in the theory:
it not only focuses the analysis, but it alone is presumed to create or cause the behavior of all other aspects. In a fundamental sense, the destiny of all other aspects can be traced back to the autonomous behavior of the entry point, which is immune from the effects of those other aspects. When an entry point additionally takes on this sort of causal priority, we call it the essence of the analysis, since it plays the role not only of a guide to analysis (its entry point role), but also a sovereign of analysis (its essentialist or determinist role). We will use the words essentialism and determinism as synonyms in our argument.

The distinctive logic of determinism follows from its approach to the various aspects of economy or society as a field of potential causes and effects. For determinist logic, aspects are inherently distinguishable and separable, and the form of the question asked is, usually implicitly, "Here" is X and "there" is Y—how are they related? Which is causally primary? Which is the independent variable and which is the dependent?" The subsequent argument that X is the determining essence of Y thus relies on a prior premise that X and Y can be held up to study as independent entities—potentially related, of course, but nonetheless at least isolable and definable independent of that relationship. A presumption of the discursive independence of aspects is implicit in the determinist effort to order them according to their causal dependence or independence.

Such an ordering is a determinist theory’s principal goal: analysis becomes in practice the demonstration of how the theory’s chosen essence actually causes and thus explains whatever object is selected for theoretical scrutiny. Determinist theories need not worry initially about mutual or two-way interactions. Once the entry point concept has been chosen, the structure of theoretical explanation is already defined, for the essential causal core has been discovered. All other aspects play a secondary role, still important to the story then told about relationships, but only in the sense that they provide a surface description of what is going on. Below this, on a deeper, more fundamental level, is the powerful determining role of the essence, creating surface appearances as a reflection of its governing, explanatory power. To discover the ultimate cause of behavior, one must discover the ultimate essence. At that point the truth will be known.

An alternative logic rejects any essentialist priority for the entry point. Here, while the chosen entry point still guides the theorist and imposes a particular taxonomy on the object of study, it does not determine the behavior of any other aspect. Instead, the logic is one of mutual dependence in causation: the behavior of the entry point both is itself shaped by other non-entry point aspects and in turn acts to shape the behavior of the rest. Following others, we use the term overdetermination for this approach in which each aspect is simultaneously determining and determined by all the others.
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

which literally create its very being and thus form its conditions of existence. The separateness and distinctiveness of aspects which determinism presumes is here explicitly rejected with the premise that for any aspect to exist, its conditions must be present, and these by definition must be located in all the other aspects. It follows that an entry point concept, such as power, has no meaning, no social role to play at all, except through its relations to all the other non-power aspects. Power must be related to non-power for the former even to begin its assumed role as a guide to analysis.

This overdeterminist logic precludes the very goal of a determinist analysis: an ordered hierarchy of causal importance. In our example of the household, if the concept of power is the chosen entry point, then a knowledge of the household requires the depiction of the mutually constitutive interaction of power and non-power aspects. But this is a task that can never be completed; theory is forever open-ended and partial, since there is no end to the exploration of further dimensions of household behavior, each of which has its power and non-power aspects. Each successive addition to the range of household behaviors considered extends the story about the influence of power but also, because of the multiplication of interactions, changes the shape of the power aspect previously theorized. Every explanation is thus only a partial knowledge reflecting the particular mutual interaction of the power and non-power aspects recognized and examined up to that point.

These alternative forms of causal methodology or logic provide us with our second index of theoretical difference. We may now compare and contrast different theories along two dimensions: their different points of entry and/or different logics. Moreover, these two indexes suggest radically different ways of conceiving of things and their interrelationships. Different entry points and logics produce, then, different conceptual objects, whether they be knowledges of the household, factory, state, or economy.

Not surprisingly, people who deploy different points of entry and/or different logics have basic disagreements; they will argue and perhaps even struggle, with greater or lesser degrees of self-consciousness, over precisely these two dimensions of their theoretical differences. As we shall show, radical economists have been doing precisely that for almost one hundred years.

DISTINGUISHING RADICAL THEORIES

One of the prominent concerns of radical economics has always been the interpretation of the relationship between capitalists and workers. That relationship, as well as the interactions between both groups and other social actors (landlords, money lenders, merchants, managers, state officials, etc.), can be approached from a variety of different conceptual points of entry. In Figure 1 we illustrate the capitalist-worker relationship together with some of the most famous entry points.
used to organize radical analyses. The list is diverse; each of these different entry points, and sometimes complex combinations of them, provides an interpretive taxonomy which can be used to impose a distinctive order on initially chaotic social interactions.

![Diagram of radical entry points](image)

**Figure 1:** Alternative radical entry points

Some of the entry points direct our attention to aspects of society which are themselves basically economic; others alternatively stress political or cultural dimensions. The broad differences between economic and non-economic points of entry have played a crucial role in the evolution of radical thought at least since Marx's famous distinction between the economic base or mode of production (conceived as a combination of the relations and forces of production) and the non-economic superstructure (the combination of the remaining political and cultural aspects of society). Thus the entry points of class, technology, and accumulation are distinctively economic, whereas consciousness and authority over people's behavior are respectively cultural and political. Property ownership, though, can be conceived in different ways. We prefer to treat ownership as a political entry point, since it is the power that ownership confers which gives it significance. However, virtually all property theorists place their stress on the economic assets over which control is exercised, so we follow that tradition in classifying ownership as yet another economic entry point.²

Since this distinction between economic and non-economic aspects, base and superstructure, is recognized, albeit in different ways, by all radical theorists, all must confront an obvious question: how are these different social aspects related? The answer is given by what we have termed the logic of each theory, and by and large throughout the history of radical economics the chosen logic has generally
been that of determinism. Each of the various entry points has been presented by proponents as the essence of events and changes within society: Indeed, many of the pivotal debates within the radical tradition have been struggles between competing economic and non-economic determinisms, each embracing the same essentialist reasoning, the same ultimate sense of the form and meaning of causal interactions, yet posing different and incompatible essences.

The prevalence of determinist explanations in radical economics is most striking, but it is by no means inherent in the entry points radicals have stressed; a commitment to the alternative logic of overdetermination is possible, at least in principle, irrespective of one’s entry point. Historically, though, the lure of determinism has proven difficult to avoid, even for theorists who have consciously stressed the complexity of the interactions of base and superstructure. For example, in a famous comment Engels argued that while “the ultimately determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life,” this economic factor is not “the only determining one”: “[t]he economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence . . . and in many cases determine the form in particular” (Engels 1975, 394–95). Despite the obvious effort to find a kind of middle ground in which the powerful influence of culture and politics is admitted, Engels still expresses a form of economic determinism in which the economic mode of production causes and explains “in the last instance” all other aspects of social relationships. Several recent theorists (Hindess and Hirst 1975; Cohen 1978; Roemer 1988) strike a similar theme: although in non-capitalist societies politics or culture may “dominate” over the influence of economic factors, it is ultimately the economic aspects of society (relations and/or forces of production) which determine whether it is politics, culture or economics which assumes the dominant role. While radicals who embrace this sort of argument avoid the obvious criticisms which can be directed at a coarser kind of economic determinism, they nonetheless affirm an ultimately essentialist logic which, at least by this criterion, places them in the same camp as their theoretical opponents who defend the essential priority of some non-economic entry point.

There is yet another dimension of difference among determinist theories with their various alternative points of entry. Do the concepts definitive of the entry point designate human characteristics, properties or capacities of some or all individual persons, or do they instead refer to structural characteristics of society, organizational features of the social environment encompassing all individuals? These two contrasting approaches, humanism and structuralism, have been in conflict throughout the modern history of social theory, and within the realm of radical economics the struggle has been particularly intense.

Radical structuralists give priority to some structural feature of social organization (one which, in principle, may be economic, political, or cultural), and when this premise is allied, as is typically the case, with determinist logic, that structure becomes the governing essence both of other structures and of the behavior of
individuals in their various interactions. Individual choices and actions are viewed as ultimately reflecting the imperatives of a social structure which transcends the individual's role(s) within it. It is just this sense of the individual as role-bearer, obeying the dictates of an underlying all-determining structure, that motivates the humanist alternative. Radical humanists give center stage to the human subject and the traits seen as central to individual subjectivity (traits which again may in principle be economic, political, or cultural) and then typically employ determinist logic to reduce social structures and changes to the status of effects of human striving. Neither approach to the choice of entry point necessarily requires the use of determinist logic, but the prevalence of determinist theories within the radical tradition leads us to reserve the terms humanism and structuralism for opposed varieties of essentialist thinking.

The contentious relationship between humanism and structuralism has helped to shape radical debates between rival economic and non-economic determinisms. Within the radical tradition, economic determinism is most often a form of structuralism, while non-economic determinism is correlated with humanism. Thus, while the language of base and superstructure remains part of contemporary radical discussions, disagreements over the relative importance of economic and non-economic aspects of society also simultaneously concern the relative stress to be placed on social structures versus individual agency. And of course, even within the rival traditions of structuralism and humanism, debate continues over which structures (class or technology or accumulation or property ownership) and which human characteristics (the capacity to wield power or to choose rationally or to communicate) are the most essential for theory to grasp.

WHY USE THE TERM "RADICAL"?

The stark differences between humanist and structuralist approaches, as well as the gulf separating both from the alternative logic of overdetermination, point up an obvious question: what do these theories have in common to make them part of a singular "radical" tradition? Given their differences in entry points and logics, the common thread uniting radical economic theorists seems to be their shared dislike for capitalism as an economic system and for those neoclassical and Keynesian theories which support and celebrate capitalism. Radicals are grouped together more by their common desire for radical alternatives in both the economic and theoretical status quo than by any particular common analytical feature. Thus agreement among radicals often quickly disappears when it comes to detailing the precise flaws in capitalism or the strategies needed to confront them, since the choice of a particular conceptual entry point gives those designated aspects of society an inherent priority in describing or prescribing for capitalism. Yet all radicals can join in castigating orthodox economics for denying an explanatory role to variables of radical concern (class, power, etc.) or for celebrating as causes of
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

wealth and happiness those institutional features which radicals associate with inequality and injustice (e.g., private property, market competition) (see Resnick and Wolff 1987).

We must be careful here though, for despite the real differences between radical and non-radical economic theories, they do have some surprising similarities. The theoretical humanism underlying the neoclassical premise of rational individuals similarly animates those radical theories that posit an autonomous human subject with an inherent capacity to wield power or transform nature (Elster 1985). Similarly, Keynesian macroeconomics, with their structural interactions based on predetermined parameters summarizing aggregate behavior (consumption, money demand, etc.) are remarkably similar in form if not entry point to radical theories specifying given structures of productive forces or property ownership or mode of production. And with humanist and structuralist camps within both radical and non-radical traditions, the evolution of theoretical debates has sometimes followed a distinctly parallel path. For example, Roemer (1986, 192) argues:

Marxian analysis requires microfoundations. . . . What Marxists must provide are explanations of mechanisms, at the micro level, for the phenomena they claim come about for teleological reasons. In a sense, the problem is parallel to the one bourgeois economics faces in providing microfoundations for macroeconomics.

Thus, the humanist reaction to structuralism clearly transcends the boundaries between traditions; humanists of every stripe are partners in a common search for the essential (micro level) role of the individual human being in determining the behavior of society and the structural relationships visible at its macro level.

There is at least one further characteristic which all radicals, whatever their other differences, have in common: all owe an intellectual debt to Marx. Even those radicals who are avowedly non-Marxist represent positions shaped by a reaction to Marx's prominent place in the tradition of radical analysis and social criticism. Marx was preeminently a proponent of class analysis, and the vocabulary of class (surplus labor, exploitation, etc.) has had a special place within radical economic theory for over one hundred years. For many radicals and non-radicals alike, the category of class more than any other has established a conceptual boundary between radical and non-radical theories. Certainly most radical theorists have viewed the class dimensions of social life as one of those key aspects requiring fundamental change. Equally, that goal is not shared by non-radicals, whose entry point concepts devalue or deny the existence of this class aspect.

But the common radical tendency to invoke Marx masks a world of difference in the interpretations offered. In the radical literature, frequently the structuralist Marx who posits the determining role of the economic base confronts the humanist Marx stressing the autonomously acting human subject. Each position finds ample support for its project in Marx's own writings and struggles with difficult questions, and thus different Marxes appear at different times as each part of the tradition uses its own interpretation of Marx to support its position. And since that
interpretation of Marx and that position both derive from the same approach, it is not surprising that each variant of radical theory is enormously successful in showing the correspondence between the two.

We too have our own interpretation of Marx and our own related radical theory. A review of Marx as we read him provides the final groundwork needed for our survey of prominent positions in contemporary radical economics. In our view Marxism is distinctive in combining two commitments: the entry point of class and the logic of overdetermination.

MARXISM AS A RADICAL THEORY

For Marx, class designates the economic process through which surplus labor is performed and appropriated. Surplus labor in turn refers to the amount of labor time worked by individuals above and beyond that socially and historically normal and necessary for their survival and reproduction as workers. Marx’s revolutionary idea was that appropriators receive this surplus without giving anything in return, thus exploiting the producers of surplus. A society takes on its defining class characteristics according to the different forms in which this surplus labor is performed and appropriated. The famous adjectives used to describe different societies—capitalist, feudal, slave—refer to the different ways appropriators can receive the produced surplus, through distinctively different forms of exploitation (Wolff and Resnick 1987). To argue that capitalism is exploitative in this sense is clearly radically unconventional in a world dominated by orthodox economics, with its powerful and soothing claim that incomes are equated to productive contributions through the invisible hand of market allocation.

But Marx’s class entry point is radical in other ways as well, for it conveys one of the most important ethical and moral messages ever developed in social theory. To be an appropriator of surplus is to take from workers some of their labor, their surplus portion. For the worker, the result is no different than if a thief had stolen some of the worker’s goods. Irrespective of the intent of individual capitalists, the economic process through which they gain something for nothing is the equivalent of theft; modern capitalists, in their role as surplus labor receivers, are not fundamentally different from the overthrown tyrants of the past, the slavemasters and feudal lords whose exploitation differed in form but not substance. The moral, ethical, and political aim of Marxism becomes then the elimination of this economic crime against workers, with its many complex effects on the rest of society, by changing the relationships among people to make them non-exploitative.

Equally important as the class entry point, though, is the antiessentialist logic of overdetermination. The class relationships within capitalist societies are Marx’s primary focus, analytically and politically, but class is conceived neither as the essential determinant of social events nor as a phenomenon of some other singular cause. Instead, any particular form of class relations exists only as the combined
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

effect of all the other non-class aspects of society which provide its necessary conditions of existence. All are jointly necessary because all aspects of society are mutually constitutive; none can be treated as conceptually independent of the others or as "the" cause of some event, action or relationship.

A radical theory based on this reading of Marx is different in specific ways from other radical approaches, and the nature of the difference provides a useful perspective on the array of competing radical positions. Why is it that neither class nor overdetermination commonly receives this sort of stress? One obvious problem in accepting the central status of surplus labor appropriation is explaining why workers would stand for such exploitation. What would cause workers to allow exploitation to continue? Various answers have been offered. Perhaps workers produce something for nothing because they are not conscious of their own exploitation. Perhaps they are forced to produce this surplus because of the capitalists' domination of them or because of their inability to reproduce themselves as workers independently of property owned by capitalists. Alternatively, they may be caught in this exploitation trap because of the ubiquitous technology adopted by modern industrial corporations or the sheer momentum of capitalist expansion and accumulation. For our purposes, what is most interesting about this list is that each of these reasons why workers are exploited represents one of the major radical entry points already mentioned. There is a reason for this.

In the history of radical economic theory, the theoretical status of some answers as to why exploitation exists have been so persuasive to some that these answers have evolved into new conceptual entry points. Typically, for these individuals the original discovery of Marx—class as the performance and appropriation of surplus labor—has become a subsidiary effect of some other more basic cause which has become the new entry point. But if there is to be a singular ultimate cause for workers' exploitation rather than a variety of mutually constitutive conditions for its existence, then overdetermination has been dispensed with in the very act of positing a new (essentialized) point of entry.

From the perspective of overdetermination, each of the reasons listed for exploitation—consciousness, power, property, technology, accumulation—represents an influence on the form of exploitation and thus a condition for its existence and perpetuation. But the humanist and structuralist theories which choose one or another of these reasons as an entry point effectively turn a condition of existence of class exploitation into its essence, thus not only denying the special theoretical location of Marx's class idea in the logic of his theory but also in the process rejecting that logic as well. In the resulting determinist theories, class exploitation remains an important but clearly secondary concept to that of the new and different entry point. In some cases, its meaning has been so radically altered by its new subordinate place in radical theory that it takes on an entirely different meaning from that originally formulated by Marx.

We may now examine more closely how each of these various conditions of
existence of class exploitation operates as an essentialized entry point, citing authors who exemplify each perspective. We stress, though, that there is no automatic one-to-one correspondence between some of the authors cited and a single theoretical position within our taxonomic system. Many radicals could be cited under more than one heading, for reasons as diverse as simple inconsistency, change and development of ideas over time, or the deliberate use of a composite entry point fusing otherwise incompatible organizing principles. This latter option is particularly interesting, as we will discuss.

PROPERTY THEORIES

Historically, one of the most prevalent radical arguments explains class exploitation as the effect of an unequal distribution of ownership rights to the means of production. The initial thesis here is that in capitalism workers are those who have been dispossessed from the means of production, while capitalists have concentrated such means in their hands. To survive, dispossessed workers must enter into a wage contract, selling the only commodity they have left, their labor power. In Marxian economic theory, labor power is the one commodity capable of producing more value than its own worth (the wage paid to the worker to reproduce his existence in that class role). The capitalist buyer of labor power thus acquires its unique ability to produce that extra or surplus value precisely because sellers of labor power have no choice in the matter. The distribution of property ownership is the ultimate explanation of classes and class exploitation.

Consider the following example of this kind of reasoning:

The nature of classes in a given social formation... is determined by the distribution of the means of production, "the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers." It is this "internal distribution"... which determines the mode of appropriation of surplus-labor... and thereby the nature of class relations in that society. This interpretation implies acceptance of the traditional marxist definition of class as depending essentially on the individual's relation to the means of production. (Callinicos 1982, 149)

Callinicos follows in a proud tradition of radical thinkers (Dobb 1963; Sweezy 1964; Laclau 1977; Cutler, et al. 1977) who bestow on effective possession of property the role of an essential entry point. One recent contribution to this tradition illustrates the overriding dominance radicals may attribute to this single aspect. Roemer (1988) attempts to derive the very concept of class from the choice-constraining effects of unequal ownership of property. However, unlike many others in this property school, Roemer (1988, 131) views the concept of exploitation as clearly unnecessary to Marxian class analysis:

Exploitation is a misleading concept if one's true interest is in inequality in the distribution of wealth. There appears to be no reason for an interest in the technical measure of exploitation, calculated in the classical Marxist way.
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

Although few radicals likely would follow him in expunging the concept of exploitation, Roemer exemplifies the results of taking this organizing idea of unequal property ownership and pursuing determinist logic to its ultimate conclusion.

POWER THEORIES

Theories essentializing command over property have been challenged over the years by a different theory of command, one stressing command over people. Authority or power vested in the hands of some individuals or groups can be used to order the behavior of others, the powerless. It follows that the reason for workers' exploitation is, in the last instance, that force or the threat of force compels them to labor for capitalists. The relations of production are thus interpreted as relations of authority: capitalists have power over workers and use force in different forms to perpetuate exploitation.9

Many recent works employ variants of this approach (Poulantzas 1973; 1978; Giddens 1975; Dahrendorf 1959; Wright 1979a; 1979b; Braverman 1974; Marglin 1974; Noble 1977; 1984), but Bowles and Gintis are perhaps most explicit in their avowal of power as entry point:

Unlike the dominant tendency for the past two centuries, which has seen the infusion of political thinking with economic metaphor, we propose the converse: a political critique of economic thinking and the importation of genuinely political concepts concerning power and human development into the analysis of economic systems.

(Bowles and Gintis 1986, ix)

Power and related "political concepts" shape the conclusions of their analysis in part because they are present from the beginning in the goal which motivates it: empowering individuals to order their own behavior by abolishing the institutions of the capitalist economy which constrain the generalization of democracy into economic as well as formally political spheres of life.

Power is, however, the essence as well as the organizing principle of the analyses offered by Bowles and Gintis and the other power theorists. The wielding of power by capitalists over workers is seen not merely as a condition of existence of capitalist profit (a thesis with which most radical thinkers likely would agree), but rather as the essential condition: "Profits are . . . made possible by the power of the capitalist class over other economic actors with which it deals" (Bowles et al. 1986, 137). In this determinist logic, it is only through the successful exercise of power that capitalists can turn the purchase of labor power into an economic gain:

Labor must be extracted from labor power because workers will not willingly pursue the type and intensity of labor which maximizes profits. . . . But how is labor to be extracted? As capital's only formal power is the threat of firing, the extraction must be induced, in the last instance, by enhancing this threat. (Bowles and Gintis 1985, 37)

The threat is made real through various strategies which enhance domination;
investing in supervisory techniques, promoting hierarchy and discrimination within the labor force, and paying higher wages (to enhance the cost of losing one's job) are among these fundamentally political strategies stressed by power theorists as essential to the economic extraction of labor from labor power.

This distinction between labor power and labor effort is all that remains of the Marxian vocabulary defining class as surplus labor appropriation, so it is hardly surprising that the meaning of class has been transformed by viewing social relations through the lens of power. For Bowles and Gintis, classes are now defined in terms of command over people versus lack thereof, the powerful and the powerless. The concept of exploitation remains meaningful only as one of the various effects of domination, rather than as the very definition of class as the object of analysis.

PROPERTY VERSUS POWER THEORISTS

Dialogue and debate between these two different notions of command are as old as the radical tradition itself. Elements of both are present in Marx, who in Capital linked workers' exploitation to both their separation from the means of production ("the so-called primitive accumulation of capital") and their relative powerlessness in the face of coercion by capitalists. Still, one could hardly credit Marx with the invention of either of these power concepts. The division of society into classes of the powerful and powerless, propertyed and propertyless, clearly predated Marx, and in our view it was Marx's reaction against these senses of class that led him to the distinctive definition of class as a process of surplus labor appropriation rather than as a characteristic or property either of individuals or of social structures. Instead, the celebration of power in either form has more to do with the writings of Max Weber than of Marx. But the ongoing battles between essentialist proponents of ownership and authority provide a concrete illustration of the larger tensions between structuralist and humanist tendencies.

Years ago, Engels foreshadowed the contemporary structuralist reaction to domination theories:

The institution of private property must be already in existence before the robber can appropriate another person's property, and...therefore force may be able to change the possessor but cannot create private property itself. (Engels 1976, 180)

For the structuralist, the notion of power is an empty one without an appreciation of the essential priority of the institutional setting which literally creates positions of differential power. Callinicos (1982, 155) states:

It is...a serious error to seek to reduce the relations of production to relations of power. The position of authority enjoyed by capital is not somehow [a] primordial fact...On the contrary...[t]he fact that capital is dominant within the process of production arises from the capitalists' effective possession of the means of production and workers' resulting need to sell their labor-power to capital.
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

The same sense that power is inherently a derivative effect of prior social conditions comes through in Roemer's position that "the essential injustice of capitalism is located not in [domination] at the point of production, but, prior to that, in the property relations that determine class, income, and welfare" (Roemer 1988, 107). This view of power relations as logically derivative from prior structural conditions denies the very essence of the power theorists, the inherent struggle of individuals to extract or resist extraction of labor from labor power.

For power theorists, on the other hand, the attempt to read the behavior of capitalists and workers from the given structure of property ownership is itself a flawed project. Such a structuralism ignores the inescapable subjectivity of human agents, in particular making of labor an object rather than a subject in society (Bowles and Gintis 1985, 35–38). If social agents act the way they do because of some external structural imperative, then their struggles reside not in them but rather are given to them, a premise unacceptable to a humanism of power. Bowles and Gintis (1985, 36) bluntly reject the economic essence they see as inherent in the Marxian tradition: "The treatment of labor as an object thus achieves a radical partition in economic thought: politics is banished from economic thought." For them, the realm of individual human action is by definition "political," a quest for command over oneself and others, and thus to "banish" politics is equivalent to affirming the life of the structure at the cost of the death of individual human will and choice. The logic of determinism then leaves no choice but to invert the causal hierarchy of structuralist property theory by affirming an essential power within each individual to determine his or her own destiny in any social setting.

ACCUMULATION THEORIES

Different from power and property theorists is another school of radicals who conceive the relationship between capitalists and workers as relentlessly driven by capital accumulation. Workers are exploited, propertyless, and powerless because of the inexorable capitalist drive to accumulate, which recreates at every moment the prison of relationships in which laborers are trapped.

Marx is again a key figure for these accumulation-radicals because he is seen as the first economic theorist to define and elaborate the idea of capital as the self-expansion of value. Productive capital initiates a process in which a sum of value expands quantitatively by setting in motion the production and appropriation of surplus value. Successful appropriation then renews this process on an expanded scale as more value is deployed in pursuit of ever greater profit and growth. Capitalism's inherent nature finds expression in the process: its "law of motion" is the limitless pressure for expansion of value.

This nature of capital leaves its mark on every aspect of capitalist society. Because productive capitalists personify productive capital, it must be in their nature to seek to expand value without limit. Similarly capitalist firms bear the
stamp of their location within the structural logic of capitalism's law of motion. Capitalist firms and capitalists become, then, bearers of a drive to expand value, given to them by the nature of capital. Sweezy specifies this structuralism nicely:

The circulation form M-C-M', in which the capitalist occupies a key position, is objectively a value-creation process. This fact is reflected in the subjective aim of the capitalist. It is not at all a question of innate human propensities or instincts; the desire . . . (to accumulate capital) springs from (the capitalist's) special position in a particular form of organization of social production. (Sweezy 1966, 80)

For members of this school, the accumulation process is the very mechanism of economic reproduction, and as such it is the ultimate explanation for the entry point aspects of other radical theories. Capital accumulation reproduces the relations of production between capitalist and worker through which surplus appropriation and class exploitation take place. Accumulation by capitalists reproduces as well the uneven structure of property ownership, for it is the capitalists, and not workers, who use the surplus to purchase and thus control the means of production. It also reproduces relations of power enabling the capitalist to boss the worker. Viewed in this determinist fashion, capital accumulation becomes the essence of every dimension of the relationship between worker and capitalist.

Among the authors identified with this approach are Harvey (1982), Levine (1975; 1977; 1978; 1981), Steindl (1976) and Sweezy (1966; 1972); Baran and Sweezy's analysis (1966) remains a classic exemplar.12 They deploy a two-pronged essentialist strategy: relationships in society are first reduced to the workings of giant monopoly corporations and then the complex actions of these corporations are interpreted as manifestations of their inherent drive to expand:

The heart and core of the capitalist function is accumulation: accumulation has always been the prime mover of the system, the locus of its conflicts, the source of both its triumphs and its disasters. (1966, 44)

There are, of course, differences among the proponents of specific accumulation theories,13 but all share a commitment to the notion of productive capital accumulation as the "prime mover" in determining all else, including power over workers and property, receipt of the workers' surplus labor, cultural phenomena, political laws and regulations, and so forth. Like some fundamental law of the natural world, the law of accumulating productive capital embodies within it the secret cause of the expansions and declines of capitalism.

FORCES OF PRODUCTION THEORIES

Another kind of radical theory takes as its entry point the technical ways and means of physically producing goods and services, called traditionally the forces of production. Every sort of economic theory gives a role to technological change, but forces of production theories give technology and its autonomous development the essential place in a strict hierarchy of causal importance. The forces of
production constrain and ultimately determine the shape of viable social relations of production: social relations which fail to correspond to ongoing developments in the productive forces must change under the influence of contradictory and sometimes revolutionary pressures. The unity of forces and relations of production (the mode of production or economic base) then governs the political and cultural aspects of the superstructure. The approach thus embodies a thoroughly determinist economic structuralism, in which even economic relations and their dynamics are reflections of the almost pre-economic level of the technological structure.

As is so often the case, proponents of the forces of production as essentialist entry point find ample support for their views in Marx's writings, as in the statement that "The first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history [is] that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history.'... The first historical act is thus... the production of material life itself" (Marx and Engels 1968, 16). The act of laboring to produce "material life" is itself one of the developing forces of production, and this "first premise" is wedded to determinist logic in a long tradition of so-called "orthodox" Marxism (Stalin 1940, Lange 1963, Comforth 1954, Dobb 1963). Perhaps the leading contemporary advocate is Cohen, who self-consciously stresses his intellectual roots:

For it is an old-fashioned historical materialism which I defend, a traditional conception, in which history is, fundamentally, the growth of human productive power, and the forms of society rise and fall according as they enable or impede that growth. The focus is on the more basic concepts of the theory, those of forces and relations of production, [with] unusually little discussion... of class conflict, ideology, and the state. (Cohen 1978, x)

Little discussion of these topics is needed because, for Cohen, such political and cultural phenomena are merely effects rather than causes, and are far removed from the technological interaction with nature which is to him so basic.

The entry points of other radical theories share a similarly derived status, since for Cohen the existence of a surplus, as well as the social relations affecting its size, form and disposition, depends logically and historically on the prior development of the productive forces. So long as productive forces are very much underdeveloped, labor productivity (the ratio of total wealth produced to the direct labor required to produce it) is insufficient to permit any kind of surplus. Only with the growth and development of the forces of production is it possible to produce the surplus which permits some individuals to live off the efforts of others.

Exploitative class relations thus have an essential precondition: Cohen reduces control over property and power over people to the emergence of a surplus, and then reduces that surplus to the development of the forces of production. He understands the relations of production to be "relations of effective power over persons and productive forces" (Cohen 1978, 63). As aspects of capitalist relations of production, power over physical means of production and power over workers act together to ensure the production of a surplus for capitalists. But their
impact on the production of a surplus is itself explained by the development of the forces. Thus relations of production—whether in regard to the class aspect, i.e., the appropriation of surplus labor, or the power wielded by capitalists over laborers and property—are finally grounded in the forces of production: "relations are as the are because they are appropriate to productive development" (Cohen 1978, 136). Were they inappropriate, they could not persist, since their role is to facilitate but not prevent the development of the forces (Cuder et al. 1977, 135–53).

With regard to capital accumulation, here again the pattern of cause and effect is inverted. Whereas for accumulation theorists, it is the inherent capitalist drive to accumulate that produces development of productive forces, for Cohen the latter is causally prior. Capitalist firms do indeed seek to expand value, but what makes this inevitable is the fact that competition will bankrupt and eliminate any firm which fails to develop the productive forces in the most efficient manner possible (Cohen 1978, 197). Competition thus enforces accumulation, rather than vice versa, but the competitive relations between capitalist producers are themselves derived from the underlying materialist imperative for qualitative change in the forces of production. No matter how the argument turns, whether dealing with exploitation of labor, power over physical property or people, or with capital accumulation and competition, productive forces remain the essence of the story.

COMPOSITE ENTRY-POINTS:
STRUCTURALISM AND HUMANISM COMBINED

From our discussion so far it may appear that structuralism and humanism are simple alternative positions, utterly antithetical and opposed. In fact, the relationship between them is often more complex, with elements of both positions affirmed simultaneously within a single discourse, in a more or less conscious effort to overcome the limits of any single form of determinist logic.

An excellent example of the use of a consciously composite entry point is the approach now known as the "social structures of accumulation" school (Gordon et al. 1982; Bowles et al. 1983). Here, as the name would indicate, it is society's evolving institutional structures which define the different distinguishable phases of capitalist growth, through their conditioning effects on the form and pace of accumulation. These complexly given structures thus have a central role in explaining the profitability of capital and, through that, the crises which periodically erupt in the course of social development. But despite the deliberate bow to structuralist concerns, these authors are simultaneously engaged in a humanist examination of power, especially the power exercised by individual capitalists in dealing with workers, or foreign capitalists, or citizens in general.

The presence of both structuralist and humanist elements raises the question of their relation, and for Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf, the ultimate weight is given to power and the individual wills of capitalist agents of power. On the one
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

hand, institutional structures are understood to influence or regulate the relative power wielded by capitalists over workers. But on the other hand, the very mediating role of these structures is itself explainable in terms of the deployment of power by capitalists. The composite entry point of power and social structures collapses in the last instance into a singular humanist essence, capitalist power.\(^5\)

A different sort of composite is present, seemingly unconsciously, in the work of Cohen. As already discussed, his project is structuralist: to present a rigorous defense of the essential determining role played by the development of the technical forces of production. And yet, when he confronts the problem of justifying the inevitability of development of the productive forces, Cohen the structuralist slips into a thoroughgoing humanism. Evolution in the structure of technology is a consequence of the inexorable drive of human beings to master their environment; a drive ultimately rooted in three “enduring facts of human nature”: people are rational, they always confront scarcity, and they always seek to do better (Cohen 1978, 152). Given these attributes of human nature, he concludes that it would be “irrational” for humans not to develop the forces (1978, 153). Once rationality is stamped on the human species, development logically follows, and Cohen is off and running on his determinist horse.\(^6\)

Cohen is hardly alone in employing this tactic, which is common both inside and outside the radical tradition. When an essentialist argument of one form or another is confronted with questions about the essence it champions, it tends to offer a determinist explanation in terms of a different essence. Structuralism seeks its ultimate justification in humanism, and vice versa.

Roemer’s work is perhaps the best example of the tensions created by a consciously composite entry point. As already discussed, Roemer regularly stresses the centrality of the structure of property ownership, but at the same time he is a vigorous proponent of the microfoundations approach, reducing social outcomes to choices made by individual human agents. Both tendencies are visible when he states: “A person acquires membership in a certain class by virtue of rational activity on her part, by virtue of choosing the best option available subject to the constraints she faces, which are determined by the value of property she owns” (Roemer 1988, 10). The resulting composite entry point melds elements of structuralism (the pattern of property endowments) and humanism (individuals with personal preferences and an innate rationality). But this mix is an uneasy one; pushed to defend the central place of either, he tends to retreat to the other in an effort to affirm both.

Property ownership plays an essential role ultimately because of the universal rationality of human choosers. Property is not merely a constraint on human choice, but the binding constraint, only when the criteria for optimal decision-making are identical in every other respect. It is because all choosers are similarly motivated by rational self-interest that their unequal property holdings assume the essential place in explaining different class positions. Conversely though, when
challenged to justify the humanist premise of a universal pattern for individual choices, Roemer returns to the structural significance of property ownership. To maintain any link with the Marxian tradition, the preferences on which rational choices are based cannot be treated as exogenous properties of the individual. Roemer deals with this by arguing that "preferences of individuals are to a large extent determined by the property forms that exist in the societies in which they live" (1988, 13). Thus at least this key dimension of the nature of individual action has structural determinants located in the social "environment" (1986, 191–201), although rationality itself seems to remain untouched by anything else. At times the disjunction between the two entry points takes a discursive form, with his analytical models embodying the pure choice-theoretic approach (with exogenous preferences) while the accompanying prose stresses the significance of the social context. This sort of tension is, we think, almost unavoidable when determinist logic seeks to confront the limitations of any singular essence.

THEORIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Other radical social theories begin with an entry point of consciousness. That is, they make the ideas in some or all people's minds the focus and usually also the essence of their explanations of social and economic change. They articulate a cultural essentialism which reverses the usual pattern of linkage between base and superstructure: the culture of a time and place, as expressed in its pattern of consciousness, determines the political and economic relations present.

In the logic of these theories, cultural conditions ultimately govern whether reproduction occurs. Social structures survive only to the extent that people accept them as necessary, desirable, or both; naked power and economic pressure alone cannot long maintain structures which contradict socially prevalent ideas of rights, justice, goodness, etc. Thus, for example, in certain radical theories the existence and persistence of capitalist exploitation ultimately requires the dominance of particular conceptions of the worker-capitalist relation. Workers who view capitalist income as the just reward for saving or risk-bearing will neither resist direction nor protest against the capitalist system. Indeed, they will likely accept the political and economic institutions of capitalism as valid or even inevitable. On this basis, fundamental economic and social change can emerge only given a prior change in the consciousness of the mass of exploited people. Consciousness must break from the pattern of acceptance to one of militant rejection of the ideas that justified previous social roles and relations, a rejection based on allegiance to concepts and beliefs appropriate to an alternative social system. Thus the existence, extent, and outcomes of struggles for social change depend ultimately on the patterns of consciousness of those on all sides of such struggles.

Lukács (1976) exemplifies this approach by treating the consciousness of the industrial proletariat as the key to the possibilities for socialist revolution. So long
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

as the capitalist class succeeds in convincing the mass of people to see the world through its concepts of social life (its notions of fairness, productivity, markets, democracy, human nature, and so on), the masses can only play roles appropriate to ongoing capitalist reproduction. Only when those concepts are supplanted by Marxist alternatives (exploitation, class, equality, democracy, and so on) can the masses find the organization, determination, and vision needed for successful social change.

Thompson’s (1963) famous history of the English working class goes further in making the meaning of the term “class” dependent on ideas self-consciously present in people’s minds. Only when English workers finally came to see themselves as a distinct, exploited class within and also against the particular structure of capitalist England were they really a class at all:

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men who interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. (Thompson 1963, 9)

In effect, class exists here only through the self-consciousness of those who see themselves as class actors.

Another kind of culturally determinist economic theory (present, for example, in Bowles and Gintis 1986) holds that basic ideas of social justice, freedom, and democracy are more or less universal. What varies is the degree to which alternative economic systems support and embody these ideas. If a system does measure up to these ideas, social stability reigns, but if not, struggles ensue as people become “alienated” from economic institutions and from one another. Social consensus disintegrates until institutional change restores conformity with the basic ideas of a good society.

While cultural determinist approaches are common in radical social theory, they figure less prominently within radical economics. By making economic outcomes the effects of non-economic aspects of society, theories of consciousness tend to demote economics from the center of theoretical attention, with the uncomfortable implication that economic theory is somehow less central than cultural theory in understanding society. So radical economists generally shy away from giving major stress to cultural developments, although consciousness is often invoked as a secondary point or theme.

THEORIES OF CLASS AND OVERDETERMINATION

There is wide variation in the entry points chosen by the theories so far catalogued, but all are varieties of essentialism. As suggested, each chooses some aspect(s) of the economic, political, or cultural context for class exploitation and interprets class, and indeed the rest of society, as shaped and ultimately determined by the chosen aspect(s). In the process, the concept of class takes on different
meanings in each, as class is understood as a phenomenon of each successive essence. A radical alternative within the radical tradition thus involves not simply shifting the focus to surplus labor appropriation, in place of the various aspects of the context said by others to cause it, but also rejecting the causal conceptions of determinist logic in favor of the mutual interaction and constitutivity of overdetermination. The final radical theory we consider does just that: our own position within the spectrum of radical economics affirms the entry point of class and the logic of overdetermination.

Our emphasis on the class aspect of society deserves explanation. We take class as our entry point because the story of class exploitation is the one we are most interested in telling since, in turn, it is the one we are most interested in changing. As already suggested, we regard Marx’s invention of the vocabulary of class analysis as his original contribution to social theory. But the class dimension of social life is as little recognized, as much repressed, today as it was in Marx’s time, and not only by theorists in the neoclassical tradition. To view class exploitation as a derivative effect of underlying structural conditions or human traits is to strip it of the central place which we, as both Marxists and antieessentialsists, wish to preserve.

By placing the concept of class at the center of our analysis, we do indeed wish to say that class is “most important” to us, but only in a very specific sense. The distinction made at the beginning of this paper is relevant here: a theory expresses its priorities through both its entry point and its logic, but the implications of these two theoretical choices are quite distinct. There is a fundamental difference between, on the one hand, the “importance” attributed to some aspect chosen as the focus, the organizing principle of analysis, the means by which one’s political and moral goals are expressed and given priority in discourse and, on the other, the “importance,” in the causal sense, of an aspect elevated to a privileged place within the logic of theory. Perhaps the most radically unconventional characteristic of our approach is that we affirm the importance class has to us, as the focus of analysis and efforts for change, precisely by denying, to it or any other aspect of society, the sort of causal importance which determinist theories forever seek to assign. Both the theory and the politics of class are, we think, better off without the seductive simplicity of “the last instance.”

The problem then is how to make sense of class as one aspect within a totality of aspects, each conceived as the site of influences emanating from all the rest, each therefore existing in a state of ongoing contradiction and change. Our answer is that for any distinctive sort of class process to exist, it must have its conditions of existence secured, conditions which include the very aspects taken as entry points in alternative radical theories.

For example, surplus value is produced for and appropriated by capitalists due in part to the complex consciousness of workers and capitalists about themselves, their relationship to each other, and to the work process. Here we recognize the
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

focus of the consciousness theories just discussed. From the perspective of overdetermination, though, consciousness is only a partial rather than an essential determinant of class exploitation. Clearly, without appropriate and sustaining attitudes, ideas, and feelings within and between workers and capitalists, class exploitation is problematic, but even a radical change in consciousness will not necessarily alter the class process in a way that automatically fulfills the aim of the radical theorist. For example, workers who understand that they are exploited cannot be assumed to respond with a struggle to eliminate or even change that class status. The awakening to exploitation will certainly push workers in a new direction, since their altered consciousness represents a new and contradictory influence on every aspect of behavior, but it is also possible for other cultural processes with their own different and complex meanings to undermine the impact of that very class consciousness. For instance, workers may come to understand their exploitation but because of patriotic feelings generated by a nationalistic message, work even harder to produce surplus for the capitalists.

In like fashion, each of the other aspects already catalogued as the essentialized entry point of a different radical theory can be similarly understood as a partial determinant of the existence and form of class exploitation. Each has its own effects: power, since capitalists use a variety of different institutional mechanisms to coerce surplus labor from workers; property, in that workers are dispossessed from effective control over the means of reproducing their social existence; accumulation, because capitalists continually reproduce the relations of exploitation by reproducing productive capital on an expanded scale; technology, through the pressure on capitalists to innovate or risk going out of business and thus losing their surplus value. Each non-class entry point makes its own valid contribution to the story of why class exploitation exists. Consequently, from the overdeterminist perspective, the notion of class exploitation takes on a rich meaning as the locus of all these different and unique effects propelling workers to produce and capitalists to receive surplus value. Class exploitation cannot be reduced to any one of them, as its essence. It follows that for class exploitation to continue, each of its conditions of existence must be reproduced. But, as suggested above, since there are many different configurations of consciousness (power, property, etc.) capable of sustaining capitalist class relations, no particular state of consciousness (power, property, etc.) can ever be considered an essential condition for class exploitation.

The logic of a theory of course affects its agenda for change. The chief goal of a class theory is change in the performance and appropriation of surplus labor, but given overdetermination, we recognize that that aim itself cannot be achieved without changing one or more of the non-class aspects supportive of exploitation. The agenda for this sort of class theory must include the altering of both class and various non-class processes, in the hope that those changes will produce contradictions threatening the survival of the class structure.

But even though overdetermination argues the importance of these non-class
aspects to the survival of the class aspect, the constitutive effects are inherently two-way. It is the generation, appropriation, and subsequent distribution of the surplus in particular ways that allows for the perpetuation of power differentials, inequalities of ownership, and so on. Capitalists use parts of their appropriated surplus, for example, to pay managers to maintain a hierarchical structure of authority and to accumulate productive capital, sometimes embodying new production techniques. They use parts to pay owners of capital to gain or maintain access to physical or financial property. And they pay taxes out of their surplus to the state to produce an educational system which, among its other effects, reinforces in each generation the attitudes, beliefs, and allegiances "natural" to participants in an exploitative economy. The reproduction of a capitalist surplus requires these distributions, but equally it is the class process of surplus generation which provides the revenues available to reproduce these non-class aspects.

Systematic interdependence of this sort can be incorporated into the vocabulary of class itself. Some individuals may occupy what we have called "fundamental" class positions if they participate directly in the class process either as performers or appropriators of surplus labor. But since many activities beyond these are intimately linked to the reproduction of the class structure, we use the term "subsumed classes" to designate individuals whose non-class activities (necessary for the existence of fundamental classes) allow them to receive a share of the surplus (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Capitalist society is thus composed of its fundamental and subsumed classes: each is necessary for the other, and both, in the richness of their varied forms, represent the meaning of class as a developed entry point.

As already noted, other radical theories understand classes in their own very different ways. Capitalists, for example, may be defined as "accumulators" or "innovators" or "owners" and so on, or perhaps composites of these. In the effort to cut through to what is "really" causally important, determinist theories seem invariably to end up reducing some dimensions of class to others, in the process losing both the separation and the interdependence of fundamental and subsumed classes. Our approach directly seeks to avoid this. In the end, it is not that we consider property, power, accumulation, technology, or consciousness to be unimportant. It is that the web of interconnections among them is so elaborate, so conditional, and so changeable that any sort of "ultimate" causal hierarchy subtracts from rather than adds to our ability to comprehend the changes needed for the end of exploitative social relations.

A FINAL WORD

Our critical examination of alternative radical economic theories and the grounds on which we distinguish them are, of course, much influenced by the particular radical theory we embrace, the overdeterminist class theory (Resnick and Wolff 1987). For us, it avoids the constraints imposed by essentialist logic, while
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

affirming the relative importance of diverse aspects of life in (over)determining that life. It thus recognizes the attempts of both structuralists and humanists to affirm the importance of their respective positions, but refuses to allow the essentialist claims of either position. Our approach offers class as the entry point of analysis but denies to class the status of hidden essence of non-class parts of life. It is class which we choose to stress because, like many Marxists before us, we view its existence in society as an outrage. The strength of this feeling shapes in part our commitment to class as an entry point.

Nonetheless, we recognize the key contributions of those other radical theories to our own, for they underscore the importance of struggles over property, power, consciousness, accumulation, and technology to the struggles over class. We would only hope that other radical theorists would likewise recognize the importance of struggles over class to the various struggles they see as crucial. It seems to us that such mutual recognition is possible without reducing the importance of one struggle to the other. Anti-essentialism can be an important principle in rebuilding the unity that has eluded radical forces for some time.

NOTES

1. We prefer this term to the alternative, “dialectics,” because the latter is loaded historically with diverse meanings from Greek and especially Hegelian philosophy. Marxian dialectics, although influenced by both philosophies, still differs from them. See Althusser (1969); Resnick and Wolff (1987).

2. Our discussion of these economic and non-economic entry points problematizes our use of the term “economic,” since for us there is no discernible field strictly definable as “radical economic theory.” All theories considered in this paper are social theories: they employ different social aspects—economic, political, and cultural ones—as their respective entry points, and examine social, and not just economic or political or cultural, changes. We use the term “economic” rather than “social” merely because currently it represents a labeling with which most radicals feel reasonably comfortable.

3. In practice, this distinction is often less clear-cut than it may seem here. In defining “relations” and “forces” of production, many authors allow non-economic aspects—dimensions of power or cultural abilities—to creep into the meaning of what were supposedly sovereign economic categories. This breakdown of boundaries between categories suggests the difficulty of specifying aspects of life independently of one another. The very terms “relations” and “forces” of production seem to deconstruct themselves when some radicals put them to use in social analysis.

4. To their credit, Hindess and Hirst recognized in their Mode of Production and Social Formation (1977) the slip into economic determinism of their first book on modes of production (1975). Their work on the methodological issues since then has been exemplary for its antiessentialist stance, although they are not always so successful in their social analyses.

5. For a thorough and interesting discussion of the differences and similarities between radical structuralists and humanists, see Cullenberg (1988).

6. For example, the work of some members of the Frankfurt School, particularly
Horkheimer (1972), employs an entry point of human consciousness and culture, and yet
the stress on "dialectical" interactions is thoroughly in tune with overdetermination.

7. We stress only correlation since there is no necessity for the pairing always to hold,
particularly for non-radical theories. For example, a theory whose essentialized point of
entry is the given international distribution of power among nation states represents a
political determinism which is nonetheless thoroughly structuralist. And neoclassical
economics, with its stress on individual choice, is clearly a theoretical humanism, and yet by
viewing each human as "homo economicus," neoclassicals employ an essentialist logic in
which equilibrium outcomes reflect the bedrock economic traits of human nature.

8. Radical and neoclassical humanists obviously do differ, in that the former underscore
the inevitability of conflict between capitalists and workers while the latter emphasize the
harmony that emerges from their superficially antagonistic interests. The radical humanist
sees an inexorable drive by capitalists to take advantage of workers, while the workers'
human interests is in resisting those pressures. In direct contrast, the non-radical humanist
stresses the process by and through which the different desires of capitalists and workers are
brought into harmony with one another in the market. While Adam Smith's work helps to
provide the solution for the non-radical humanist, Thomas Hobbes's thought problematizes
that very solution and gives support to the radical humanist's notion of inevitable conflict and
struggle.

9. Two excellent surveys of power theorists can be found in Olson (1985) and Hillard
(1988). The use of power as an essence is also discussed in Resnick and Wolff (1987, 113-
15, 242-45).

10. It is interesting to note that Bowles and Gintis have no need for the Marxian notion
of the extraction of surplus labor. Their discarding of the latter idea is premised on their
rejection of the labor theory of value and its dependence on the distinction between necessary
and surplus labor (Bowles and Gintis 1985). In effect they have collapsed together the
notions of necessary and surplus labor to equal merely labor. Consequently, they abstract
from the very definition of class exploitation established by Marx. According to the latter,
capital exploitation involves capitalist extraction not of labor but rather of surplus labor.

11. The influence of Weberian ideas on Marxian thought can be found in Wiley (1987).
See also Wolff's review (1988) of this book for further discussion of the importation of some
of Weber's ideas into the modern Marxian discourse.

analysis of how this drive to accumulate is at the heart of the work of each of these authors.

13. Indeed, there are economic and humanist variants, and the internal debates between
them concerning the nature of the drive to expand have much in common with those between
structuralist property and humanist power theories. See Cullenberg (1988) for an excellent
survey.

14. For an insightful critique of the social structures of accumulation approach and, in
particular, of its power reductionism, see Norton (1988c). A reaction to Norton is in Bowles,

15. This rendition of the social structures of accumulation (SSA) is more closely
identified with the work of Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf (1983; 1986) than with Gordon,
Edwards and Reich (1982). In the latter approach, the SSA is not reducible to capitalist power
in the forms specified by Bowles et al., especially in their more recent work (1986).

16. Cutler et al. present an analysis of this collapse of economism into humanism in their
THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES

critical examination of the relationship between forces and relations of production within
the writings of Marx. See Cutler et al. (1977, 139–43).

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