The Roots of Praxiology
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This book is dedicated to my wife, Patricia, and our two children, Laurence and Patrick.
My sincere gratitude goes first to Professor Wojciech W. Gasparski for his interest in French praxiology. He proposed this project to me, and I thank him for giving me the necessary encouragement and the time to achieve it.

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Victor Alexandre

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Editorial

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It is generally considered that 1997 was the year in which praxiology celebrated its centenary, for a hundred years ago, i.e., in 1897 Alfred Victor Espinas, a French social philosopher, published his treatise on praxeologie – how he spelled the name of the science on human action – entitled Les origines de la technologie. In fact praxiology was born much earlier. The Espinas' book was initiated in 1890 when he wrote his very first article on the idea of the study on actions human beings perform throughout the history of the mankind. Even the title of the paper was identical with the title of his later treatise. Much earlier, for in 1882, Louis Bourdeau suggested praxeologie as a science of functions in his Théorie des sciences: Plan de science intégrale.

Praxiological issues have been studied since by many scholars. Two of them are considered as founders of the schools of praxiology. One was Tadeusz Kotarbiński, a Polish philosopher of the so-called Lvow-Warsaw school of philosophical thought. The second one was Ludwig von Mises, an Austrian scholar of the so-called Austrian school of economics. Both contributed the IX International Congress of Philosophy devoted to Descartes held in Paris on 1–6 August 1937 expressing there their relations to the roots of praxiology, French in their nature. Despite of direct reference to the French action theory by the above scholars and
their followers praxiology has become perceived as both Polish and Austrian specialty in the philosophy of human action, methodology of human science, and philosophy of technology. What is visible from the following quotations.

Carl Mitcham, an American technology philosopher writes:

In France one early instance can be found in *Les origines de la technologie* (1897) by the social theorist Alfred Espinas (1844–1922), who [...] emphasized the idea of technology as organ projection. Another suggestive feature of Espinas’s analysis is his use of the term *technologie* and the distinction drawn between *techniques* (skills of some particular activity), *technologie* (systematic organization of some technique), and *Technologie* (generalized principles of action that would apply in many cases). Furthermore, Espinas proposed that *Technologie* (with capital T) is for human making what *praxeologie* is for human action as a whole — thus introducing a specialized term that will be further exploited by the Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński. The ideas of both Espinas and Kotarbiński blend into what are now called systems theory, game theory, cybernetics, operation research, and various theories of management. (Mitcham 1994: 33).

F.A. Hayek, a well known economist and an economy philosopher suggested:

It has often been suggested that [...] economics and the other theoretical sciences of society should be described as «teleological» sciences. This term is, however, misleading as it is apt to suggest that not only the actions of individual men but also the social structures which they produce are deliberately designed by somebody for a purpose. It leads thus either to an «explanation» of social phenomena in terms of ends fixed by some superior power or to the opposite and no less fatal mistake of regarding all social phenomena as the product of conscious human design, to a «pragmatic» interpretation which is a bar to all real understanding of these phenomena. Some authors, particularly O. Spann, have used the term *teleological* to justify the most abstruse metaphysical speculations. Others, like K. Englis, have used it in an unobjectionable manner and sharply distinguished between teleological and normative sciences. (See particularly the illuminating discussions of the problem in K. Englis, *Teleologische Theorie der Wirtschaft* [Brün, 1930].) But the term remains nevertheless misleading. If a name is needed, the term *praxeological* sciences, derived from A. Espinas, adopted by T. Kotarbiński and E. Slutsky, and now clearly defined and extensively used by Ludwig von Mises (*Nationalökonomie* [Geneva, 1940]²), would appear to be most appropriate. (Hayek 1979: 45n).

Despite of all the references to the very first praxiological initiatives French action theory was known locally rather then internationally. Perhaps it was because the theory was very modest in its promotion keeping the achieved outputs in the language of its origin³. Those who studied French praxiology were mostly Polish praxiologists, particularly Tadeusz
Kotarbiński, Tadeusz Pszczolowski, and Jean J. Ostrowski who published the world’s most elaborated book on the discipline and its originator: Alfred Espinas, Précursor de la Praxéology (ses antécédents et ses successeurs), but they published their works in Polish or again in French.

Only after this series of The International Annual of Practical Philosophy and Methodology was established as a common venture of The Learned Society of Praxiology and the Transaction Publishers it became possible to offer French praxiologists and human action theoreticians an opportunity to present full gamut of their outstanding contributions to the discipline from the origin of the study up to contemporary achievements. Professor Victor Alexandre of the University of Nice–Sofia Antipolis, a student of famous scholar Abraham Moles—who was a friend of Kotarbiński—has done excellent job as the editor of this volume. His efforts to present the heritage of the discipline’s French chapter in the best possible way deserves high appreciation. Thanks to that the readers receive a volume which commemorating the age of praxiology encourages at the same time the followers from different corners of the world to consider what should still be an important part of human action theory in the Plan de science intégrale—using Bourdeau’s words—for the next century.

* * *

It is with great sorrow to report the passing of Donald A. Schon and A. Zvie Bar-On, members of the International Advisory Board of PRAXIOLOGY: The International Annual of Practical Philosophy and Methodology as well as of Marek K. Mlicki former Managing Editor of the Series.

Donald A. Schon (1931–1997), Ford Professor of Urban Studies and Education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a philosopher of the professions and their education. He was famous as the inventor of a concept he labeled as a reflective practitioner. The idea was presented in the book The Reflective Practitioner (1983) which was followed by the Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions (1987). Condensing the content of his books he delivered the following message to the international forum of praxiologists gathered in Warsaw, Poland in 1988:

Although our society has become thoroughly dependent on professionals, so much so that the conduct of business, industry, government, education, and everyday life would be unthinkable without them, there are signs of a growing crisis
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of confidence in the professions. [...] It is timely, then, to reconsider the question of professional knowledge. Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice which takes full account of the competence practitioners sometimes display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, and uniqueness. Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem-setting and intuitive artistry which presents these activities as describable and susceptible to a kind of rigor that falls outside the boundaries of technical rationality. [...] We should be turning the puzzle of professional knowledge on its head, not seeking only to build up a science applicable to practice but also to reflect on the reflection-in-action already embedded in competent practice.

Abraham Zvie Bar-On, Professor of philosophy at the University of Jerusalem, died 1996. His involvement in Praxiology was related to the person of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, a founder of the Polish praxiological school, and his philosophy of practicality. In early nineties Bar-On prepared a special paper “on causality of action: the conception of Tadeusz Kotarbiński and its alterations in contemporary praxiology”. The thesis of this paper is that although there is not any basis to suppose western praxiologists to be familiar with Kotarbiński praxiology the analysis of the content of their treatises demonstrate close affinity to some parts of the praxiology of Kotarbiński. There is a kind of theoretical continuum – Bar-On claimed – from Kotarbiński to Goldman (1970) through Danto (1965).

In the nineteenthies Professor Zvie Bar-On was busy with the Whitehead’s theory of categories. The output of his studies was published in the book (Zvie Bar-On 1987: 189-190) from which I would like to quote the following passage:

According to the idea of the Cogito, it is sufficient for me to think I exist for me to really exist, since it is impossible for me to think and not to exist at that time. In the act of thinking I live my existence no less that I live my thinking. Now, Whitehead takes a very significant interpretative step, whose justification is not at all self-evident: he substitutes the concept “experience” for the concept “thinking”. With this substitution, the notion of the Cogito would read “I experience, therefore I am”. My experiencing is my existence; it is a guarantee for the certainty of my existence. If so, what is the entity whose existence, or reality, is beyond all doubt? It is the entity named T – but T as experiencing here and now – here and now in the act of experience, not before it and not after it.

Dr Marek K. Mlicki died this summer (1998) after a persistent and recurring illness that broke a life that was both difficult and inspiring. Most of his early research, from Ph. D. (1983) to “habilitation” or a post-doctoral dissertation (1993) was in sociology and praxiology. He published a study of Social Conflicts in 1992, Sociotechnics. Issues in


Ethics and Efficiency in 1986 and a popular study in ethics Human Experience in 1988 (all in Polish). Managing Editor of Praxiology. The International Annual of Practical Philosophy and Methodology, he published there a number of articles and co-edited two volumes of the Annual. After a series of fellowships between 1991 and 1993 (Humbold Stiftung in Germany; ACLS at the Brooklyn College, NY, New York; Bern University, Switzerland) his interests shifted to political science and – maintaining all the time a research post at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences – he took part in a long-term research of political elites and lobbying groups in Poland during the democratic transformation.

Notes

5. Whose MA thesis was about Espinas.

References


This book is both a tribute and a testimony; it is a tribute to the memory and the writings of L. Bourdeau and V. Alfred Espinas, and a testimony to the constant presence of the theme of action in French literature and thought. In 1897, Alfred Espinas published *Les Origines de la technologie* and, following Bourdeau and his *Théorie des sciences*, published in 1882, used the term *praxiology* to designate the study and understanding of human action at its highest level. Chronologically, Bourdeau was first, though authorship for the term was attributed to Espinas. The reason for it probably lies in the fact that they do not give exactly the same meaning to the word and that the nature of the subsequent works constituting the field of praxiology, the study of human activity in particular, pointed towards Espinas rather than to Bourdeau as the precursor of praxiology. To quote J. Ostrowski (1973: 124):

In its, current, most complete form, that of a system of the good work by Tadeusz Kotarbinski (born 1886), praxiology seems to be the work of only one man. But if one considers it in a historical perspective, a very paradoxical conclusion might be drawn, i.e. that it was never created, although it always existed, more or less implicitly hidden in the patrimony of philosophical thought. [...] One then realizes that by plunging into history, one somehow takes a step backwards, and goes back to a situation when research was simpler, or more primitive than in the latest era of analytic philosophy. But at the same time one goes back to a position where wider views and large horizons were possible. [...]
It seems indeed appropriate to choose Alfred Espinas as a guide in the undertaking of this task in order to reach this goal. Among all the precursors of contemporary praxiology whom we have already found or hope to find, it seems that he will remain the most comprehensive, the most truly multilateral, and the most complete since his vital work comprehends a history and a philosophy of action, based on meticulous research, as regards facts and ideas. [...] In evaluating these happily obtained results, one will also perceive some of their temporal insufficiencies. At any rate, in the field of philosophical considerations on human action, his ideas have assured him a very honorable rank from which he ought not be displaced because of mere oblivion.

As Daval (1981) remarked, the concept of praxiology has doubtlessly not had the success it merited in France, but it has never disappeared. Each of the texts presented here makes references to it and if we had aimed at an exhaustive survey it would have been necessary to include many more authors. Rather than an academic discourse, our aim is to establish a collection of selected extracts which illustrate various stages of French thought concerning the philosophy and methodology of action. If it does not seem necessary to justify the choice of authors, it would be, however, useful to explain the reasons for which each text was selected.

There are three major reasons: the first criterion is the contribution of the chosen text to the current debate about praxiology and, more extensively, its relevance to present day issues. It is indeed necessary to stress that we were deeply struck by the actuality of these texts. By choosing them, we intend to bring relevant elements to the current debate rather than dwelling upon past ways of thinking which we shall show through examples. Secondly, we have tried to give a brief view of the major aspects of the thoughts and works of the authors, in particular Espinas, Caude and Moles. Finally, we chose extracts which presented a unity of thought, as this criterion was necessary for the understanding of the text.

Espinas and Bourdeau provide the impetus for the initial project, and an illustration of the extent of the field of investigation allocated to praxiology as it was conceived in a context of positive philosophy. In the text by Louis Bourdeau, one can see the influence of contemporary theories, in particular the Theory of Evolution and Comte’s positivism, as well as the critical sense and the originality of Bourdeau’s thought. This text was chosen for two reasons. First of all because in a rather remarkable way, it anticipates the problematics developed by the theorists of action and behavior of the twentieth century (Behaviorists, Field theorists, and Cyberneticists for example). This is sufficiently demonstrated by the
frequent use of terms such as "form", "function", "structure", "system", and even "connection" as well as by the great care with which they are defined and differentiated. Secondly, the text gives evidence of the effort to characterize and systematize praxiology, openly preferred to *mesology*. The general objective, the fields of investigation, the method, the concepts all that is required by the scientific approach are carefully examined.

Praxiology is defined as the science of functions, groups of facts which are linked in a certain order, and concerns somatic facts as well as psychic ones, and individual facts as well as collective ones. It is certainly ambitious, but the search for coherence is obvious, though necessarily threatened by the range of facts and levels examined. Bourdeau seeks the locus of this coherence in considered thinking, that is in intelligence and reason, the first being supposedly the sole capable of relating action to new and varied goals thus breaking with instinct while the second enables one to find the adequate means of actions and avoid mistakes. Thus, at the top of the praxiological structure, the ultimate function of decision, the attribution of meaning and utility as well as the source of order in the world are imparted to the psychological authority. The proposed method, termed *connective*, does not renounce the methods already known: observation, experimentation, integration and comparison, but is better adapted to the objectives of this new science.

It is true that Espinas refuses to choose between the two terms of *praxiology* and *general technology* but he leaves no doubt as to the level at which reflection on action must be conducted. It is the highest. Praxiology cannot be assimilated to a simple history of techniques. It is more ambitious and aims at understanding the place of these techniques in the evolution of human thought and in this way, to give to action a status equal to that of knowledge.

Reference to Greek philosophy leads Espinas to underline the complex relations between acts and laws whatever the origin of the latter. It also enables him to follow the slow progression of individuals as they endeavor to shape their destiny by progressively appropriating the acts and the laws, according to the circumstances and the direction of their attitudes. The passages referring to the technique of organon and to the organic projection already raise the question of the relation between mankind and their works. Without being initially conscious of it, human beings build tools and machines which resemble certain parts of the body or its articulations. They wonder at it as it is a revelation of their
power and their existence. A similar wonder is now experienced in front of the cognitive artifacts which human beings currently elaborate, while the question to know whether the creator resembles his creation seems to take the place of the converse proposition.

This implies that, at least from a descriptive point of view, the understanding of action endeavors to explain the relationship between domains that the mind naturally separates, such as knowledge, science, philosophy, religious beliefs, ethics, justice, and even play or aesthetics. This applies to the historical perspective in which Espinas sees the Greek society of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. As early as that era, however, there seems to exist a curious paradox: these useful arts with which human beings gradually build their destiny and assert their power often lead them to become conscious of an unconstructed reality, transcendent or natural, which they may certainly try to deny, to accept or to subdue, but which nevertheless imposes a limit to the omnipotence of their action and their thought.

Maurice Blondel opposes radical rationalism and warns against the positive sciences. The pages presented here illustrate three main aspects of his thought: the refusal of all determinism, the inventory of values which form the basis for the understanding of even the most ordinary actions, and the attachment to liberty. While action is the source of religious faith as well as that of reason, it would not be understood, according to him, as the faithful application of the initial will: what we were doing without seeing it, what we have done without wanting it, we end up wanting as we do it. If acts, rather than thoughts, are at the basis of the true identity of individuals, they may also entail erring or distraction, hence the necessity to find a moral basis in an ideal, a superior order, an immanent transcendence, that is in a final cause which would control them.

The hierarchy of values described as a succession of concentric waves - the individual, the relationship with others, the family as a group, social, national and international solidarity, ethics and the theocentric aspiration - is more like a hierarchy of meaning than a hierarchy of efficiency. It is also an invitation to consider social belonging in a new light, less polemic and more cooperative, which seemed to us likely to enrich the debate concerning identity at a period when the progressive disappearance of borders and boundaries create a certain uneasiness among popular opinion. We also have included the passage on the modern masks of superstition because we find here a criticism of conformity
rather than a conservative, fearful attitude. Science, metaphysics, secular morality, and the cult of the honest individual, lead only to contingent realities. A profound conformism may be dissimulated in the march towards progress. When the real is assimilated to appearance and action is immersed in the world of phenomena to the point of reducing the human being to one of them, a powerful movement of will and freedom is required to restore his perspective of infinity.

The texts by Roland Caude and Arnold Kaufmann depart from the field of pure philosophy but continue to focus on humanist preoccupations. By setting action in an economic context, that of the firm and of the even larger context of the city, they direct praxiological reflection towards methodology and efficiency. R. Caude sums up very clearly the contribution of major researchers like Fayol, Carrel, Berger and Armand, to the scientific organization of work and of management as well as the principles and the questions addressed to company managers in the 1970s.

Fayol expresses the need to know individuals in order to render collective action efficient. Psychology, which is at least intuitive, is part of the portrait of the individual of action whose art consists in leading others, seeing beyond the immediate present without becoming absorbed by trivial day to day management. A. Carrel, a physician, raises the question of the effects of work and the modern conditions of life on human behavior and looks to human sciences to provide an answer. G. Berger, using the term prospective, incites one to look further, which implies a capacity to detect in present facts, however small they may be, the value of the future indicated. L. Armand advocates a general conception of organization, a recourse to planification together with a constant adaptation of structures. These theories, however, were not conceived within a vacuum, which is why the work of P. Drucker has been included.

Let us finally note the concern for involvement, which is one of the leading ideas of a sociology of action and to which we shall refer again.

The text quoted from A. Kaufmann combines the rigor of the mathematician with the passion of the scientist examining the place of human beings in a society whose future is closely related to the development of mathematics, of exact sciences and of computer science. These disciplines, in conjunction with the progress of electronic technology, increase human knowledge exponentially. Thanks to the construction of models, they enable one to understand better the combination of parameters, to communicate better and faster, but they also reveal the complexity of our world, a complexity which is correlated to the sophistica-
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A question of the methods of knowledge. How to make decisions in a complex world? How to use action in order to give efficiency to intention, when intuition and good sense are of no help? Does one risk losing intellectual freedom by transferring the responsibility for action to a computer? The author of the article does not cede to metaphysical terror. Instead, he suggests a cooperation between the artificial intelligence of the computer and ethics, which may take place in the laboratory of Praxiology. As a consequence, the task of Praxiology lies in the search for new laws based on simulations and consequently the anticipation of the effect of decisions.

It may be too early to fully appreciate the contribution of A. Moles to Praxiology. The texts chosen show how deeply rooted his thought is in such contemporary currents of thought as the Psychology of Form, Cybernetics, the Theory of Information, Ecological Psychology (R. G. Barker) as well as in an original approach inspired by Phenomenology in which he proposes to set the basic principles and the limits of a science of acts or Praxiology. He first distinguishes the two concepts of act and behavior, the former pertaining to a logic of discontinuity, while the latter pertains to a logic of continuity, so that a science of acts cannot be assimilated with a science of behavior. It is only a branch of the latter.

He does not deny intention, goal and meaning, but relies on phenomenological reduction. The science of acts is not comparable to a semiology. Having turned the act into an object, "a visible displacement of the being into space, which modifies the environment", Moles attempts another rupture by separating the act from the agent. For him, the science of acts can by no means be assimilated to a psychology or a sociology of acting beings. If the structuralist approach he adopts enables him to leave the agent out of the field of investigation, it does not overshadow the questions related to the agent, notably as to his freedom. Finally, by integrating performing arts within Praxiology, he suppresses to a certain extent the previous distinction between useful arts and fine arts. His concepts and methods may be applied to theatre and cinema and even to novelistic fiction. Praxiology, the science of containers rather than of contents, is one of the three axes of a General Theory, along with a theory of Environment and a theory of Communication.

The goal assigned to the praxiologist is first the description and the classification of actions, in their most general nature, a true dimensioning based on observable criteria. Many notions are at the basis of the typol-
ogy, among which are the magnitude of the act, its mass, its intensity, its complexity, its intricacy as well as a method of calculating the General Cost which rests on the integration of four factors: financial cost, time, physical energy and cognitive cost. To the typological concern may be added a structural atomistic and hierarchical analysis which seeks to demonstrate how superactoms, like supersigns, are formed from clusters of smaller units called actoms, praxemes or gestemes. Lastly, an ecological perspective is effected with the idea of a statistical analysis aiming at understanding on a large scale the interactions between types of acts and lifestyles.

For our part, we have used the structuralist hypothesis and certain ideas of Moles in order to render them operational. The technique of the praxiogram presented here does not lead to a description of the chronological development of the action (PERT or Gantt) but to a diagram which shows, at a given level of observation, the integrality of the units observed, the repertoire of actions and the probabilities of transition between the actions, at a specified distance of order, that is its combinatoire. Accepting the idea of an autonomous science of acts, but not entirely, necessitates an explanation of the praxiological constraints of nature and position which modify behavior and constitute as many limits to the exercise of the sole original will. That is to say that we are attempting this method to prove in part the philosophical statement made by Blondel as to the existence of an inadequacy, if only partial, between the act and the will.

The structural analysis of real and fictitious actions applied to a large number of elementary acts leads us to note the importance of the notion of frequency/rarity as established statistically. In particular, it contributes to the distinction between acts in the work place, in which frequent acts predominate, and acts of the performing arts, in which rare acts predominate, as well as to the inferred understanding of related psychological states. Finally, we outline a social-psychological project which consists in rethinking some well-known concepts in the light of Praxiology. Actions may be considered as the origin of images, of feelings and attitudes developed towards others; in short, they constitute the fabric of relationships and social representations.

We shall briefly mention here Vallée's recent essay on *epistemic praxiology* (1995). By proposing a model consisting of operators for observation, decision and effection as well as in an epistemic praxiological loop, the author attempts to demonstrate the relevance of the cybernetical approach dealing with cognition. Uniting subject and object, system and
environment in a supersystem, he tries to formalize the link between knowledge and action and to escape the duality between what is perceived and what is acted.

A brief and faithful presentation of the current state of French philosophical and methodological approaches regarding action may sound rather pretentious. First, it must be noted that these works and researches are generally integrated within the context of Anglo-Saxon theories and trends of thought.

Regarding work and organizations, the main concern seems to be the understanding of the articulation between individual action and collective action. The authors we mention show the same desire to find a medium term between holism and individualism, so as not to explain human action solely as a response to an environment or as an adjustment to the requirements of a system. Human action is rather conceived as a complex, less predictable construction, where the objective necessities stemming from the production and exchange of goods are intricately related to the psychology and the social psychology of the agents, their desires, expectations and plans. For better or for worse, in a chaotic fashion, more often conflictive than consensual, the acting beings manage to build their own selves as they build the world which surrounds them.

Touraine’s sociology of action (1965) has its origin in postwar trends of thought: Sartre’s existentialism (1960), Parsons’ structural functionalism (1951, 1952) and earlier distant analyses of Marx and Weber. Though it draws from this context, it is an original conception and method, called Actionalist Analysis, which takes action as the very object of sociology. Although he acknowledges the historical perspective, Touraine refuses to assimilate the sociology of action to a philosophy of history or to a social graphic description of social relationships and values. Work, sociability and human existence are the three forms of action upon which the social system rests. However, these forms and the values which institutionalize them have no other raison d’être but action itself. They only depend upon free decision and what Touraine calls a “proud conscience”. Unlike structural functionalism, actionalist analysis does not endeavor to describe the way the culture, the personality and the society are integrated and maintained as patterns of action conceived as the internal requirements of the social system, but rather the way the values are created, change, are distinguished and expressed as normative orientations.

The agent is the historical subject. It consists neither in the collectivity nor in the individual but in the considered connection established by the
collective worker between himself and his work. Based upon work situations, actionalist analysis tries to understand how the constitutive conscience creates social models and controls them by proud conscience. Starting from the rationalizing bureaucratic model of M. Weber, yet following his own process, the author localizes and analyzes the role of conflicts in organizations, conflicts which express the tensions stemming from the relationship between the historical subject and his work. Four basic notions, each of which is composed of several levels, structure the analysis: involvement (goal), initiative (decision), integration (supervision) and demand (solidarity). The combining of these notions, say a strong involvement of the members of the organization and a poor involvement of the managers, or reciprocally, may help to understand imbalance. Finally, one must note the importance of the notion of goal, which is not only collective and organizational but also individual, in particular when the individual feels that he is not a simple agent but that he executes and is responsible for the historical subject.

Crozier and Friedberg's approach (1977), called Strategic Analysis, considers that the behavior of individuals within the firm is not so much determined by the organization as the organization is determined by it. Taking as an example the French bureaucratic system, which is described as impersonal, centralizing, ritualized, stratified and incapable of changing in case of crisis, but by intensifying these very characteristics, Crozier describes the strategies of action which the agents, be they individuals or groups, elaborate in order to increase their power within the organization. These strategies are likened to game strategies, they are constructed rationally and take into account the necessities imposed by the system as well as the remaining space of freedom. It is a limited rationality, as March and Simon understand it (1958).

The elaboration of such strategies, which should give the agent satisfactory if not full power, implies a subtle interplay of negotiations and exchanges between partners who may also become adversaries. It is more generally based on the control of the uncertainty zones of the organization, that is specific knowledge or know-how of the individual where he has an expertise that others lack and which consequently enables him to demonstrate his utility to the organization, thus revealing the loss it would suffer if it intended to do without him.

These zones are four in number: the competence related to one's status and role, the knowledge and the relationships linked to the environment on which part of the organization's life depends, the distribution
and circulation of information within the company and finally the knowledge of internal rules and of their application. Let us note, however, that while strategic analysis focuses on individual behaviors, it does not completely ignore the systemic approach nor even the influence which the cultural context may exert on strategies of action.

A third, more psychosociological example can be found in Thévenot (1990). Thévenot starts from the observation of a fact: the two registers of notions, that of individual action centered on the concept of intentionality and that of collective action centered on the concept of normativeness, do not explain the passage from one to the other. For him, a third notion is needed, that of coordination. This notion is not very remote from the notion of coherence ordinarily used in order to describe individual behavior, for example when one plans the means which are appropriate to a certain goal. It can also be observed in the case of a commercial transaction between partners, as a commercial action implies the hypothesis of a common knowledge about the objects involved and their magnitude as well as the common identification of the situation and of the action which becomes a source of reciprocal commitment (Boltanski and Thévenot 1987). But it adds to the notion of coherence more intimate and more personalized connotations which define a specific way of doing things, resulting from a selection of the action which is appropriate among other ways which could theoretically be considered.

The passage from the personal suitability of an action to a collective convention is not a mere extension of the former to the latter, as if what suited one person necessarily suited several, but a more complex process which implies a certain generalization and a common mode of justification. Coordination cannot happen without a double requirement being respected: a common judgement and a revision of this judgement in case of failure or of defect. Collective action can exist only if a common suitability emerges and this requires a series of negotiations, with initially or momentarily different judgements converging or even being similar. What explains the passage from individual to collective action is less an impersonal normativeness than a personalized normativeness that could just as well be called common intentionality.

As a last point, we shall mention the interest found by the philosophy of action in the relation between language and action, and we shall deal more particularly with certain aspects of the thought of the philosopher P. Ricoeur (1977). According to him, on a philosophical level, there is no fundamental opposition, although there is an amount of divergence,