

Agency in a Praxiological Approach

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Abstract. The paper presents issues of agency in the approach proposed by Tadeusz Kotarbiński, the Polish philosopher from the Lvov-Warsaw School, author of the philosophy of practicality with its dominant: praxiology. It also outlines a number of other approaches to this notion as well as notions similar and related to the notion of an agent. The conclusion points out that praxiology provides an insight into the reality it studies, but the use to which this is put depends on the users themselves. That use is indirect more often than direct, since it requires reflection on the agent's own practicality and some meta-skills that should characterize reflective practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Agency is one of praxiology's fundamental notions. It was introduced by Tadeusz Kotarbiński, the author of the philosophy of practicality (Gasparski [7]). This philosopher's praxiology triptych consists of three volumes from his complete works, namely *Prakseologia - Część pierwsza* [*Praxiology: Part One*] ([11], 462 pages) containing papers published before World War II and post-war works that featured the expression "dobra robota" ["good work"], *Traktat o dobrej robocie* [literally *A Treatise on Good Work*, published in English as *Praxiology: An Introduction to the Sciences of Efficient Action*, Pergamon Press, New York 1965] ([21], 220 pages) and *Prakseologia - Część druga* [*Praxiology: Part Two*] ([22], 699 pages) containing papers published after World War II. This volume opens with a work called "Abecadło praktyczności" ["ABC of Practicality"] which in concise form presents the main issues of praxiology; the volume also includes meta-praxiological works and papers on science studies. The indexes in the three volumes show that the notions of "agent" and "agency" appear on 91 pages.

The present paper presents issues of agency in Kotarbiński's approach and further elaboration by his followers. A number of other approaches to this notion as well as notions similar and related to the notion of an agent are also outlined.

2. Agency in Tadeusz Kotarbiński's Approach

2.1. The Beginnings

The term "agent" first appears [12, p. 1] in an essay entitled "Cel czynu a zadanie wykonawcy" ["An Act's Goal versus the Doer's Task"] which Kotarbiński delivered as a lecture in 1910 in Lviv at a session of the Philosophy Club and which was published in the volume *Szkice praktyczne* [*Practical Sketches*] in 1913 [11, pp. 5–85]. This essay [13, pp. 6–19], inaugurating the general theory of action that was yet to be called praxiology, listed its basic notions, among them the "agent, creator or doer" (op. cit., 7). This notion served to define "action" as follows:

"The entirety of work, but exclusively that performed by the doer of the deed, his activities, such as kneading dough and putting it in the oven; walking to the station, buying a ticket and taking one's place in the carriage; manipulating the injection device and a child's skin – let each such entirety be called the 'action' of a given person" (op. cit., 8).

Kotarbiński distinguishes action defined as above from an "act", which is:

"The whole process of forces operating, taken together and being the necessary condition of the goal [of a given act] – let this be called an 'act'; hence, for example, the entirety of the baker's muscular effort, the effect of high temperature on the dough, the effect of the yeast's growth power; the entirety of the efforts of the man going to the station, the work of buying a ticket, getting on the train, the work of the train moving; the efforts of the doctor to inject the serum and the effect of different forces of nature in the child's body after the injection, all taken together" (op. cit., 8).

The goal of a given act "is the production and existence of the given loaf of bread, the given person's getting to and staying in Kraków, the child's recovery and continued good health", while the goal of an action is "the production, or coming into existence, the lasting of the formed uncooked loaf placed in the oven in the first case, the sitting down and staying in the carriage of the person in the second case, the serum getting under the patient's skin and staying there in the third" (op. cit., 8). Further in the essay the author considers the relations between the two goals, namely: sameness, divergence, opposition, the paradox of acting "in spite of", concurrence, sequential succession, the paradox of indirectness of effect and others. As a result, the goal of an action stops being set in opposition to the goal of an act. Hence:

“We separate (...) from the entirety of the act, as our action [i.e. of us as agents – WWG], part of it on the basis of any of its breakthrough features, meaning those that are materially or methodologically important, which separate all of the activities, including our own, from the rest of the activities which are independent of us. The notion of the goal of the action changes accordingly” (op. cit., 12).

An answer is sought to the question: “Where is this directness of our activity [as agents – WG] exerted on external objects (of course as long as we are understood in mental terms, as bodies wanting and acting, and not physically as our bodies)?” (op. cit., 13). After discussing misunderstandings connected with mixing up the two kinds of goal, of an act and of an action (superficial imitation, opposition, primacy and subordination, collaborating counteraction), Kotarbiński proposes: “Let us now assume that there exists such a direct activity, in external work on matter or in internal, purely mental work (...) and let us call it ‘absolute action’” (op. cit., 14).

The final issue is the question: “What is the agent of an act morally responsible for?” Kotarbiński offers the following supposition for consideration:

“Perhaps the solution is found in the fact that we are morally responsible for a component of the complex of forces we call an act, one which depends wholly on us and is equal to our effort; [we are responsible] for the component that we sought above in vain, whose existence we assumed and to which we gave the name ‘absolute action’” (op. cit., 18).

Kotarbiński adds “the shadow of the supposition”, as he writes,

“that in each act of a moral nature, this absolute action is always ethical, and only the resultant can be bad; that therefore there is no blame in human acts but only the advantage of alien forces over an absolute action, which always constitutes, even in cases of glaring crime, our ethical merit” (ibid.).

2.2. Further Reflections

The above was supplemented with some detailed issues discussed in the next two chapters of *Szkice praktyczne*. In the essay “Zagadnienie istnienia przyszłości” [“The Issue of the Future’s Existence”] Kotarbiński points to the double-edged nature of being able to do or not to do something. He illustrates this with a rather unpleasant but very instructive example, especially for lawyers:

“It is a certainty that every living being has to die; therefore a killer is not the agent, the author of its death, he is at best only the agent of the kind of death this is and of its acceleration. But whoever punishes a killer with death for a death also is not his death’s agent, for the same reason, that’s that, if there are no other

reasons that would justify condemning this form of retaliation” [14, p. 70].

In the next essay, “O rozszerzaniu sfery czynu” [“On Expanding the Sphere of the Act”], we read:

“Who knows if the moment of capacity for performing an act is not always different from the moment of the act itself, just as surely as the moment of that performance is always different from the moment of its product’s presence; he is surely not in stark disagreement with common understanding who thinks that before the agent performs the act, he can perform it sooner, and not always just at the moment of the act” [15, p. 73].

2.3. Analytical Definition of Agency

A rather short paper entitled “Pojęcie zewnętrznej możliwości działania” [“The Notion of External Possibility of Activity”], published in 1923 in *Przegląd Filozoficzny* (vol. 26, 64–67), is important for the notion of agency. Kotarbiński attached great importance to the analytical definition of agency provided in this paper, as its being quoted in full in [12] testifies. The definition is as follows:

“Due to impulse I of person S , belonging to moment k , S is the agent of fact D from the later moment r and D is the work of S always and only when a set of facts from k containing I defines D and no set of facts from k not containing I defines D ” [16, p. 104].

This definition is the result of abandoning the indeterminism of “the future’s unpreparedness prior to activity” due to the danger of “reduction to a contradiction” [12, p. 2] and of adopting an assumption that is a “demand of determinism” [16, p. 105]. Further on in the treatise Kotarbiński analytically defines the negation of agency and the external possibility of agency, summarizing his thoughts as follows:

“The above reasoning serves to show that it is possible (and how) to select definitions of agency and external possibility of agency, with the help of certain terms, in such a way that they will contain the common meaning of agency and the external possibility of agency and that a certain common supposition will be expressed within determinism. This supposition is that if someone does something, they could have done it and at the same time not have done it, and that abstaining from an act that one could have performed is also an act” [16, p. 107].

Kotarbiński points out the discrepancy between the theoretical approach to agency and its common understanding, for example the assertion that a person who had the possibility “to cause what happened later” at the same time “did not have the possibility to prevent it” (op. cit. 107). This is because the common understanding of the possibility of taking action assumes the motive of a “lack

of obstacles” and the motive of “sufficient competence”, whereas the presented theoretical approach only takes into account the former (op. cit., 108). To conclude:

“... even just the condition of the possibility of agency on account of a free behaviour from moment k , concerning that very moment k , in combination with the assumption of that behaviour, results in agency” (ibid.).

This condition carries with it conditions concerning any moment, which enables the conditions for moments g and n to be drawn as theorems.

In the same year¹ the theory of action was given the name praxiology²; this was an initiative that Kotarbiński put forward at the First Polish Philosophy Congress, presenting *Zasady teorii czynu* [*Principles of the Theory of Action*] [17]. In this paper Kotarbiński outlined the programme of praxiology, mentioning the notion of the agent as one of the fundamental praxiological terms. As an example of “defining the meaning” of this notion, he once again defined the relationship of agency, slightly modifying the style of his earlier definitions. This was the new definition:

“... person S is the agent of fact D , and this fact is that person’s doing, always and only if at a moment earlier than the moment of fact D there occurs the fact of a free behaviour of person S , namely impulse I , such that: (1) a certain set of facts contemporaneous with impulse I , containing that impulse, determines fact D due to the inherent law of the sequence of events, (2) no set of facts contemporaneous with impulse I and not containing that impulse determines fact D due to that law” (op. cit., 133).

The author continued further on:

“... if person S at the moment of his impulse I and due to that impulse has the external capacity to cause fact D , then: (1) he also has the external capacity to cause the negation of fact D , (2) or he is the agent of fact D ” (ibid.).

Two years later Kotarbiński published an essay on the agency relationship, illustrating his thoughts with examples serving to highlight the qualities “in which one is usually inclined to see constant traits of an agent” [18, p. 122]. This approach to the problem, which Kotarbiński preferred to a formalized approach, served to prepare the ground, as he said, for presenting an analytical definition of the notion of an agent, adjusted “to the scope of the common understanding of an agent” (op. cit., 128). The definition goes like this:

¹The paper was not published until 1927.

²Tadeusz Kotarbiński described praxiology as the science of efficient action. Praxiology according to Ludwig von Mises (1987) is the science of means and not goals of action. Both founders of praxiological schools – the Polish and the Austrian school – referred to the French initiator of praxiological research, Alfred Victor Espinas, who focused on analysing the means of achieving goals (realizing intentions). Let us add that in his sociological theory of action, Florian Znaniecki (1988) favoured indicating the intention of the acting subject rather than the goal of the activity.

“John is the agent of a given fact (and that fact is the work of John) means the same as: an earlier free behaviour of John’s was an essential component of the all-encompassing complex of contemporaneous facts that creates, in accordance with the laws of nature, the essential condition of that fact” (ibid.).

Compared to the earlier approach, the formalized approach is supplemented with the notions of a system and the law of sequence of events. Here is the expanded analytical definition of agency in a formalized version:

“With respect to impulse I of person S , belonging to moment k , S is the agent of fact D from the later moment r , and D is the work of S , always and only if a certain set of facts from k – in system U that includes S – containing I , determines D due to some inherent law of the sequence of facts, and if no set of facts from k , in the same system U , but without S , not containing I , determines D due to such a law” [17, p. 128].

The system has to be “sufficiently separate”, meaning one “whose parts are not subject to the action of forces from outside it” (op. cit., 129). The law of the sequence of events is meant to “take advantage of the intention contained in the colloquial word ‘must’ (‘... that must have happened after this’)” (ibid.). This does not just mean the laws of nature but also “laws” established by people as regulations, but only when acting in accordance with them has become a regularity “of a psychological kind”, i.e. “such a disposition has developed in people that they regularly follow this regulation in relevant cases, so a certain regularity of events has developed from this particular structure of people’s preferences” (op. cit., 129-130).

To supplement his definitions and disseminate them, the cited author published the entry *Czyn* [*Act*] in volume one of an encyclopaedic outline of contemporary knowledge and culture entitled *Świat i Życie* (*The World and Life*; 1933). In it we read that:

“An acting person is called different things in different cases: an executor, perpetrator, author, agent. We have chosen the last of these words as a technical term of the theory of action, i.e. praxiology. (...) every time one is an intentional agent of something, one is also an unintentional, i.e. involuntary agent of a great many other events” [19, p. 135].

The following year saw the publication of a treatise carrying the same title, *Czyn*³ [*Act*], in which it is stated that “There is no act without an agent. But who do we call an agent? It is the one who made an intentional effort to some aim. He is the agent of everything that occurred as a result” [20, p. 141]. The notion of an agent was extended to include a set of people and to distinguish “the kind of participation in a collective act when a given participant is an agent of the work

³Subsequently published as *Czyn* (1934).

accomplished by the act, from participation when he is only a co-agent but not an agent” (op. cit., 144).

2.4. Acting Subject

Kotarbiński also used the term “acting subject”; probably the first time he did so was in the essay “O rozszerzaniu sfery czynu” [“On Expanding the Sphere of Acts”] from 1913, where he indirectly expressed the notion’s meaning.

“By the sphere of acts of a given subject I mean the totality of things that he can create, in other words, those that remain in his power, whose existence at a given moment or whose indecision, the beginning of nonexistence or indecision, are – as we say – dependent on that subject, in the sense that the subject can cause an affirmative statement about any of those things to become true at a given time, or can cause it to remain suspended, in that middle that is allegedly excluded from logic, that in other cases the subject can cause that affirmative statement to become false from a given moment, and he can also cause it to remain indecisive, and finally, in some special cases, the subject can cause an affirmative statement about a given thing to become true from a given moment, but can also cause it to become false from that moment” [15, pp. 73–74].

Kotarbiński distinguishes between different acting subjects, as follows: (1) an isolated subject: such a creative individual “whose sphere of acts does not overlap with the spheres of acts of others, and thus whose sphere of acts throughout the entire isolation time does not contain objects that would belong to the entirety of things of another’s sphere of acts in the time from the moment of isolation” (op. cit., 74); (2) a non-isolated subject: one who “could at a later time have the possibility of action that he or she did not have earlier” (op. cit., 82), but “the power of creating something is weaker in one who shares it with others” (op. cit., 83). The term “acting subject” appears in Kotarbiński’s works in the context of collaboration, positive cooperation (organization), negative cooperation (fighting), creating culture, practical mistakes.

2.5. The Agent and the Issue of the Cause of an Effect

Chapter two of *Traktat o dobrej robocie* is devoted to simple acts, the agent and free impulses [21, pp. 15–21]. Using examples, Kotarbiński explains the notion (law) of the inherent sequence of events (e.g. death occurs *after* birth and not simply *later*) essential in order to connect a cause with an effect of action, in other words to determine “a causal link understood in the sense that we will have to consider when defining the notion of the agent of a given outcome” (op. cit., 16).

“Event B is the effect of earlier change A filling moment t , and change A – the cause of event B , always and only if change A is a significant component of the sufficient condition of event B due to

moment t and due to the inherent rule of the sequence of events” (ibid.).

In this, “any component event of that condition without which the system of the other component events would not be a sufficient condition” (ibid.) is a significant part of the sufficient condition. Thus formulated, this explains a cause in its ordinary, everyday sense, Kotarbiński writes (e.g. “snow melting was the cause of flooding”). He also notes that we usually see multiple causes “in the group of mutually contemporaneous components of a given sufficient condition for a given effect, and multiple causes of a given effect belonging to its different sufficient conditions, each of which belongs to a different moment” (op. cit., 17).

After this groundwork we can move on to defining the relation of agency, which is the relation between the agent and the work, i.e. the result of activity, meaning an effect that constitutes a change or a state of affairs (being); a cause is always a change. Hence:

“The agent of a given event is the one whose free impulse is the cause of that event” (op. cit., 18).

In this, an impulse is a generalized concept of “pressure” understood literally as physical or metaphorically as mental, and “free” means intentional in accordance with the will of the acting subject.

The acting subject is the agent of both what he intended and what he did not intend to do but did do by mistake.

“In the entirety of an event, we are the agent due to the given free impulse, and therefore each such event is our work, its distinguishing feature being that the free impulse was its cause, even if we did not bring about the event intentionally or consciously, and even if we were erroneously convinced at the moment of the impulse that the event would not or could not come about” (op. cit., 19).

As a formality, Kotarbiński reiterates that the acting subject “is a flesh-and-blood living person, wanting one thing or another, moving in one way or another, or making a mental effort to achieve what they want” (op. cit., 21). A simple action of the subject thus understood is a single-impulse act (ibid.).

A further chapter of *Traktat* characterizes the notion and types of compound action. A compound action is the fulfilment of the condition that

“a relation of positive or negative cooperation occurs between its components” and when “two acts are linked by such a relation always and only if one of them causes, enables, facilitates, prevents or hinders the other, or when the two have the same impact on a third action. (...) A set of contemporaneous acts (i.e. such that each shares at least part of a moment with another) that form part of a compound action shall be called a chord of actions; a set of consecutive acts (even if parts of their moments overlap)

that form a part of a compound action shall be called a series of actions. A series of chords of actions shall be called a complex of actions” (op. cit., 48).

The notions of positive cooperation (developed in the chapter on the principles of collaboration) and negative cooperation (developed in the chapter on the theory of struggle) are discussed in the chapter of *Traktat* devoted to collective action. Kotarbiński also discusses the subjectivity of institutions, as follows:

“in our praxiological thinking we will sometimes approach institutions as if they were persons, acting subjects with a special mental and physical structure, even though in our view, no institution is ever, strictly speaking, an acting subject” (op. cit., 73).

In the chapter on mental activity, this idea is presented as follows:

“The area of intellectual work is full of reminders of the truth that a team, strictly speaking, is never a subject but only a functional union of subjects, incapable of replacing the subject in acts of learning or acts of decision” (op. cit., 191).

2.6. Recapitulation

The notions of an agent and agency are also legal terms, so it is no wonder that Kotarbiński published a recapitulation of the essence of the notion of agency in the law journal *Państwo i Prawo* [22, pp. 42–46]. Let us cite some excerpts from this brief treatise to add point to our report on the history of praxiological analysis of agency in Tadeusz Kotarbiński’s approach.

To begin with, we have the notion of a free impulse:

“If someone moved not involuntarily but voluntarily, we shall say that he performed a free impulse; we extend this notion to the sphere of inner efforts by believing that a free impulse was also performed by someone who, for example, curbed the desire to shout out loud or who accomplished a short-term focusing of the attention to remember a forgotten name. (...) Stating the freedom of a given impulse does not mean being grounded in indeterminism, which accepts freedom of will understood as intentional impulses being independent of preceding causes. That an impulse was free only means that someone made the effort that they wanted to make” (op. cit., 42).

As for the notion of agent:

“Whoever performed a free impulse at a given moment became the agent of a specific subsequent event always and only if the impulse was a necessary component of a given set of circumstances contemporaneous with it, and that set was a sufficient condition in that moment of the event due to the law of the causal sequence of events. (...) sufficient conditions are sets of events that are mutually contemporaneous. An event is always a change of an

object. (...) We accept the deterministic doctrine in strong form. It states that an event has a causal sufficient condition in every earlier moment” (op. cit., 43).

Then, characterizing agency in compound actions, Kotarbiński lists examples of compound actions performed by the same acting subject – this is an individual compound action. Next, he discusses a team compound action. He also draws attention to the paradox of co-agency:

“Is it possible (...) that a team is an agent even when there is a lack of agency on the part of all of its members?” (op. cit., 45).

The paradox disappears when the free impulse of the other participants in a team action was a part of the sufficient conditions of the compound action. This issue is related to the earlier-discussed question of a team, i.e. two or more acting subjects, as an agent.

“... this occurs whenever no system of events from a [given] moment containing a free impulse of one of those subjects but not containing the free impulses of all the other subjects, is a sufficient condition of that result, but there exists such a sufficient condition of that result belonging to that moment which contains the whole set of impulses of all those acting subjects as its necessary component” (op. cit., 46).

Tadeusz Kotarbiński believed that the problem of agency had not been exhausted yet and thus deserved further consideration. Therefore let us look at some other sources.

3. Other Approaches

3.1. The Agent and His World According to Jakob Meløe

The title of this subchapter is a reference to the ideas of Norwegian praxiologist Jakob Meløe presented in the work *The Agent and His World* (1983). The notion of “our world” defines the frame of studies on the agent in his world. Our world is the world of practices – the totality of operations performed by one or many agents – in which use is made of what is available, giving it the form of existence. According to Meløe, the basic form of a practical operation is as follows:

“*x operates on y*, where ‘x’ marks the place of the agent, or the subject of the operation, ‘y’ the object of the operation, or its target, and where the verb ‘operate’, or ‘operate on’, is a stand-in for some suitable verb of action” (op. cit., 15).

Meløe calls the thing towards which an action is directed a “tautologous object”, while the “tautologous subject” is the one who performs a given operation, i.e. the agent.

“To each operation in our world there corresponds a well-defined cut of our world, or a well-ordered niche within it. Without that niche, the operation does not exist as *that* operation. The agent’s necessary knowledge of his own operations, or of what he himself is doing, includes necessary knowledge of that niche. That is, the agent necessarily has knowledge of the agent’s necessary world.

The agent’s necessary world is also the smallest intelligible system within which his operations are intelligible” (op. cit., 27).

3.2. The Approach of Evandro Agazzi

The notion of an operation as a type of action is also used by Evandro Agazzi, who states that “man’s actions are always directed by an explicit or implicit confrontation with an ‘ought’” [1, p. 107]. An operation is “any human action aimed at the production of a specific and concrete result (in general, an object)”, while those actions “for which instead the ideal of perfection concerns the *manner of execution*” – are achievements (examples: language, reasoning, dance etc.). These actions are evaluated on the basis of how they follow the rules of performance. Activities that Agazzi calls pure actions, or simply actions, are activities evaluated not according to their goal but according to an ideal. They are considered right or wrong in themselves (op. cit., 108 onwards).

3.3. The Approach of Mario Bunge

Mario Bunge from McGill University in Montreal also defines action by pointing to rationality and morality as dimensions typical of human change-inducing activity.

“The action that one thing or its proxy (the agent) exerts upon another thing (the patient) may be defined as the difference that the former makes to the history of the latter. (...) In human action theory the agent is a human being, or an animal or a machine under his control, and the patient may be any concrete thing, whether human or not, that coexists with the agent at least during part of the period under consideration. There is interaction if the patient reacts upon the agent, as in the case of work, play, and conversation. And the action is social if both agent and patient are members of the same animal species.

Humans are distinguished from other things not for being doers but for being capable of acting rationally in a morally right or wrong way, i.e. for being able to use knowledge to do good or evil” [2, p. 323].

3.4. The Modern Praxiology Approach

Researchers dealing with praxiology⁴ propose different factors as the foundation of human activity. Some, as we remember, point to free impulses [11, p. 140],

⁴Presented here are excerpts, with minor editing, from the author’s earlier works listed in the references.

others – to a lack of satisfaction with the state in which someone finds themselves [24, p. 27], others still – to change⁵ as the primary goal of every transformation, including transformations caused by humans, i.e. actions [8, p. 18]. What exactly do humans transform? They transform their *practical situations* and/or their contexts from unsatisfactory to satisfactory ones.

What is characteristic of humans, according to modern praxiology [4], is that they act – that each one of us acts – with respect to practical situations of which they – we – are the subjects. Every such situation is an *oikos* of its subject, and the set of these is an *ecology* (*oikos* and *logos*) of practical situations. The practical situation of a given subject is determined by the facts that the subject distinguishes from among other facts due to that subject’s values. Values give facts meaning on the basis of which the subject considers them satisfactory or not. If a practical situation is unsatisfactory to the subject, then the subject strives to change the facts in such a way as to achieve a satisfactory situation, But even when the subject considers a situation to be satisfactory, change is still needed. In this case, it is not the kind of “therapeutic” change described above, but a “prophylactic” one serving to prevent any disturbance of the satisfactory situation by natural or artificial (i.e. human-induced) processes. The former type of change applies to the inside of the practical situation, while the latter type concerns the context of the situation – “the rest of the world”.

Modern praxiology considers the “existence of action”, i.e. the reality connected with activity, in terms – so to speak – of the ontology of practical situations. The practical situation of a subject can be interpreted as a generalization of the concept of personal space introduced by proxemics – a discipline dealing with individual and social space and its perception by humans. Hence, on the one hand praxiology would be a generalization of economics with respect to efficacy-focused behaviours (the “double E” of effectiveness and efficiency), while on the other being a generalization of proxemics with respect to the “bubbles” of practical situations in which each and every one of us is immersed [8].

Humans behave actively because they have to (e.g. breathing) and because they want to (e.g. driving a car). The former kind is called behaviour while praxiology calls the latter “activity”, defining it as a free (i.e. compatible with the acting person’s will), conscious human behaviour directed towards a chosen state of things called a target (making it a targeted behaviour). Only a small range of relatively simple actions can be performed by a person – the acting subject – by themselves. These are single-subject actions. All other actions are multiple-subject actions, i.e. actions in which other people (other acting subjects) participate.

Effective accomplishment of intended targets requires the use of appropriate means, and doing this in a way that ensures a surplus of result over cost (economy

⁵Change is also indicated by Mises, who writes that human activity is one of the factors that cause change, it is an element of cosmic activity and becoming; it cannot be reduced to its causes but must be treated as an ultimate given and studied as such [24, p. 32].

or efficiency) is the condition of the efficacy of actions. This applies to both single- and multiple-subject actions.

Collaboration of people establishes society as the harmonized activity of many subjects whose actions complement, overlap, support and compete with one another, and also (consciously or not) impede one another, often in brutal and bloody ways. This last element means that actions are considered not only with respect to their praxiological core (subject/subjects and their goal/goals) but also with respect to their context. That context is defined by social consensus subjects (which in itself is a collective activity) – social contract subjects – setting down conditions regarding the targets and means of action which should be met for an activity to win the consent of society. The axiological character of consent is linked to values, i.e. things society treasures above all else. In this sense, praxiology is situated between logic (core) and ethics (context).

Metaphorically speaking, human collaboration from the point of view of praxiology is caused by factors similar to how communicating vessels function: a shortage in one vessel is supplemented with the surplus from another. In activity, some people's lesser dispositional capacity for action is made up for by the greater dispositional capacity of others. To this is added an external factor: unequal distribution of resources causing the necessity for resources to flow from places of surplus to places of shortage. It is thanks to people's conscious efforts to improve unsatisfactory practical situations and/or maintain satisfactory situations, where the conglomerate of these situations is uncountable, that people collaborate. In such collaboration, they achieve the primary targets of organized actions while also meeting their own targets, for which fulfilling the primary target is a means and vice versa [9].

4. Conclusion

Praxiology offers an insight into the reality it studies, but the use that is made of this depends on the users themselves. Such use is more often indirect than direct, since it requires thinking about one's own practicality as an agent, who acts the more efficiently the more of a "reflective practitioner" he is [26]. The meta-skills that reflective practitioners should have for their actions to be suitably efficient for our times are: the ability to gain new skills, the ability to obtain knowledge, the ability to design, and the ability to perform multi-dimensional value judgments within the space defined by the "triple E": effectiveness, efficiency, ethicality [10, p. 35].

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