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**The Human Being in Contemporary  
Philosophical Conceptions**

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# THE THEORY OF HUMAN ACTION AND ECONOMIC GENETICS

OLEG INSHAKOV

The Global Economic System (GES) is constantly changing as both a result of and perspective of the world system evolution, as a part and product of social evolution.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, we can trace the extension of GES that follows a “global firm” coming into being; on the other hand, we can admit its complicated character and considerable growth of variety of human activity at the nanolevel. The task of raising the economic activity effectiveness lays down an imperative of taking into account both tendencies.

However, the GES researchers are now at the stage of negotiating the methods of epistemology, adequate to the level of essence and complexity of the subject of matter. They consider it passing from mechanistic and physical interpretations to the combination of genetic and functional approaches to the analysis of economic systems.<sup>2</sup> But the following question arises: can genetic analysis within the boundaries of an evolutionary approach introduce some effective contributions to economic theory?

Mankind has commenced a new technological revolution based on nanotechnologies which radically change the surrounding world, the ways of making the human artificial world and the very human being. But the transition to nanotechnologies is impossible without a similar transition to nanoeconomics. This statement has been declared by some researchers. However, no essential advancement has yet been achieved in the system development of nanoeconomics and nanotechnologies of economic analysis and control production. There exists a simplified understanding of nanoeconomics as a sphere of relations and ways of the economics

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Boulding, “What is Evolutionary Economics?” in *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* 1 (1991): 9–17.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Nekipelov, *Stanovlenie i funkcionirovanie ekonomicheskikh institutov: ot “robinzonady” do rynochnoi ekonomiki, osnovannoi na individual'nom proizvodstve* [The Becoming and Functioning of the Economic Institutions: From “Robinsonade” to the Market Economy Based on an Individual Production] (Moscow: Economist, 2006).

management at the level of reactive behavior of discrete economic subjects to mega-, macro- and microeconomic changes in GES, and this approach is open to criticism.<sup>3</sup>

In the methodological aspect, all systems are thought to have general principles of forming and functioning. To a greater degree, only evolutionary close systems might be characterized by a common context, made possible by applying a genetic approach to economic studies and interpreting economics at different levels with a focus on their specific role and value in GES. Economic genetics can be used for a strict description of the nanolevel of economic activity. This should provide for a considerable rise of its effectiveness by means of creating and employing nanotechnologies in management, planning, discounting, analysis, financing, marketing, etc.

No small number of publications, both in Russia and in other countries, have focused on the issue of the "genetic" approach to economic theory which, strictly speaking, can hardly be referred to as an economic genetics field, though they influenced the choice of conductive approach to it. On the whole, these were judgments on the necessity to take into account the historical experience of ethnic groups and countries, different non-economic exogenous factors (climate and landscape, parameters of allocation, mentality and psychology, culture and religion, politics and institutions). However, these processes are mainly confined to the level of interactions of economic organisms and phylogenesis of GES, the nanolevel of which is just now taking shape as the subject matter of theoretical analysis. That is why evolutionary economics is slowly beginning to formalize its postulates, though even more difficulties lie in creating effective tools of economic analysis for practical needs.

The transition to genetic analysis of GES presupposes a well-grounded choice of the sphere and level where variability, selection and heredity of its elements and links, functions and relations, scales and boundaries are initially accomplished. To bring out the mode of formation and evolution of isolated economic units in the changing conditions, it is necessary to impenetrate these economic organisms, prepare and differentiate their functional subsystems and organs, processes and actions. These are followed by the structure and changing factor combinations for each discrete act. The essence of evolution at the initial nanolevel of GES is revealed through acquiring adequate knowledge about the factor structure of a discrete action as an elementary unit of the production

<sup>3</sup> Georgy Kleiner, *Evolutsia institutsional'nykh sistem* [An Evolution of Institutional Systems] (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), 70.

process from which specific operations are made up: they are logically connected in creating concrete types of products and possess original properties.

However, economic genetics as a basic part of evolutionary economics, which should study the initial grounds of GES, has not been widely accepted so far. Further advancement to the nanolevel in economic research is an objective of long standing: it is necessary and inevitable. Analysis of labor process by the classics or various interpretations of "Robinsonade," theories of the production factors or social action, etc., can serve as examples of it. At the current stage, awareness of the necessary advance towards the nanolevel, to elementary grounds of GES by economists, has been growing.

An actual objective of the economic theory consists in defining the abstract-universal genetic grounds which form expenses and results of human activity in any concrete condition of its realization. The search of these universal grounds is necessary for providing a unity of the inner logics of theoretical analysis and practical synthesis of the effective economic structures, as well as their aggregates of various profiles and scales in all their diversities.

Only under combination of the global core of the artificial goods production and the necessity of its realization at the nanolevel, is it possible to display a concrete interaction of endogenous factors of production as a specific process of forming expenses and uses and to pass in the future to an analysis of business expenses and market prices.

According to Thorstein Veblen, the process of cumulative changes which should be taken into account by the economic science lies in a consistency of changes in the methods of doing work, i.e., in the methods of treating with the material means of existence. But the works are always done by actions which compose operations. Therefore, during the production process, "the detailed content can only appear in the process of action. But this is a foreseen product, and, probably, its realization is a concrete aim."<sup>4</sup>

In a general sociological aspect, the above mentioned issue was formulated in the theory of the "simple moments" of labor (Marx). However, his interpretation of labor as a simple moment was a mistake similar to one made by creators and supporters of the theory of three production factors, when they regarded labor as a factor of production but not its main content. It is surprising how contemporary economists

<sup>4</sup> Talcott Parsons, *O structure sotsial'nogo deistviya* [The Structure of Social Action], 2nd ed., trans. Leonid Sedov (Moscow: Academic Project, 2002), 100.

manage to use this out-of-date and completely metaphoric formula, despite accurate criticism of its vulgarism. But Karl Marx's example was important.

These types of studies were continued. As well as Alfred Marshall, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, Talcott Parsons, Thorstein Veblen, Nikolai Kondratiev, Joseph Schumpeter, Ludwig von Mises, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Niklas Luhmann and others have made considerable contributions to the theory of action, necessary for economic evolutionism and economic genetics. The most impressive and well-grounded results were obtained by Parsons in his work on the structure and general theory of social action, as well as on the functional theory of change.

Marshall made considerable strides working out the conception of usefulness, side usefulness and the principle of substitution, having introduced not only an organizational factor into the production function, but the system of values shared by big groups of people, thus applying the principle of independence of the concrete actors aims.

Pareto introduced the notion of "logical action" connected with the concrete goals and means as a core of the process of their realization, as well as "non-logical action" which does not meet logical criteria, but its content is broader than that of an economic action. The author proposed the notions of technical, economic and political sectors of the logical action, the final value orientations and aims that are shared by the majority of the society actors. Pareto's differentiation of elements of the action structure is of greater importance than Marshall's.

Durkheim believed society is a peculiar reality and predicted the necessity of interpreting specific factors of production in the form of functional, structural and restrictive relations (but which had not transformed into the form of institutional, organizational and informational relations) as a process of action, hence, labor and production as well.

Parsons highly appreciated Durkheim's thesis stating that the social environment imposes a number of conditions which are out of control for the given concrete individual but are available for the control of people in their aggregate. From this viewpoint, "the system of normative rules supported by sanctions is the most important aspect of social environment."<sup>5</sup> This environment, including the integrated system of norms, gives rise to the corresponding system of an actor's orientation to the finite values of action. Pareto and Durkheim admit a system of values and principles as a factor of action, which is recognized and imposed onto

its structure by the society. Hence, the getting of value, recognized by society in the manufactured product, presupposes the presence of a system of norms and rules as its factor, which has the value. Thus, the recognition of the rules, norms and values as elements of the environmental process of action means that the environment (condition) penetrates (attracts by the actor) into production as a factor forming internal regulations, norms and rules, to form the social value of a product.

Pareto and Durkheim considerably stretched an institutional aspect of action at the empirical level of research. Then, in Weber's interpretation, the action acquired double normative orientation to institutionalization and effectiveness. He appeals the actors' interests, who differentiate the inner content of an action and can contradict the accepted norms of institutional control. Thanks to his concept of "anomia," some actor's actions can become non-standard, mistaken and impede the general working norms; by this, however, it is possible to preserve rationality on the whole. But accentuation on the institutional element of action, realization of directions and norms in it require both special structures in the form of organization of actions in the production activity and information on the rules in these structures. The element of the action organization remains for a while in shadow, but Durkheim focuses on working out a symbolic (information) side of action as a means from the actors' anomia.

In Weber's neoclassic conception of the action system, an initial logical point is a standard of the inner rationality embodied in the norm of effectiveness with a certain accounting of the institutional environment with its values, orientations and rules. Weber's analysis of the structure of a generalized model of action has four aspects. The first one deals with heredity and environment, considered by an actor as the finite means and conditions of action, as well as sources of "ignorance" and "determinants of mistakes." These components give basic data for an analysis of action, since the knowledge of their changes serves as a fundamental ground for all the theories of action.

The second aspect concerns the content of the middle sector in a logical chain of "aims—means," which is divided into a technical element, economic interest and controlling power. The third one focuses on a group of components determining the finite value of an action and its result by means of the integration of social regulations and norms into it. The fourth aspect touches upon the collecting component, which is related to an economic understanding of the factor as a creative power,—"effort." According to Parsons, this is the name of the factor which combines normative and conditionally related elements of action. Its necessity is determined by the fact that norms are not realized automatically, nor

<sup>5</sup> Parsons, *op. cit.*, 245.



should they be—only through action. This is an element, the analytical meaning of which in the theory of action is probably absolutely equivalent to the notion of energy in physics.<sup>6</sup>

Parsons believed that in the process of scientific conceptualization a concrete phenomenon is inevitably divided into units or elements. The first peculiarity of the conceptual scheme consists in a specific character of the units used for such division. The main unit can be called a “single act.” He argues that the units of the action systems also possess some essential qualities, without which it is impossible to consider such a unit as “existing.” He defines four major components of the action unit structure (a). The agent (actor) is an individual or group acting as a person (A). The aim (end) is the future *status quo* which is an orientation for an action, teleological in its essence (P). The situation (S) in which the action is carried out includes two types of elements—conditions and means within and beyond the actor’s control. A certain way of interrelating all elements with one another (N) presupposes an obligatory normative orientation of the action. As a result, the action is expressed as follows:  $a = g(A, P, S, N)$ .<sup>7</sup>

Since the action is always a process continuing in time, it is characterized concerning an aim as “implementation,” “realization,” “achievement.” Every moment of the action presupposes the range of choices available to the actor concerning the aims and means, where innovation is combined with the normative orientation. Here is the basis of Schumpeter’s theory. The probability of a “mistake,” missing an aim or “wrong” choice of means is equally possible: then the different types of luck and mistakes in combination with the factors causes them to become one of the main questions of the theory and practice to be studied by scientists and businessmen<sup>8</sup> at the nanolevel.

Many characteristics and elements of human action, as formulated by Parsons, are close to the system description. However, the concepts of actor, agent and subject have required reasonable differentiation up till now.<sup>9</sup> The aim is inseparable from the actor, even if it is imposed on him

<sup>6</sup> Parsons, *op. cit.*, 258.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–5.

<sup>8</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Evolyutsia* [Evolution], trans. Alexander Antonovsky (Moscow: The “Logos” Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Tatiana Zaslavskaya, *Sovremennoye rossiyskoye obshchestvo: Sotzial’nyi mekhanizm transformatsii* [The Contemporary Russian Society: The Social Mechanism of Transformation] (Moscow: Delo, 2004), 278.

from outside and he himself makes the action meaningful.<sup>10</sup> The “situation” includes general conditions too widely inaccessible for the action, accessible to the actor’s resources and supplies as well as immediate factors of every concrete act of activity. Besides the actors, the natural materials involved in the production process and techniques of its realization should be defined. A way of interrelating all the elements needs further definition: norms, values, motives, links and signals as the phenomena of different functional essence and structural content are not substantially differentiated. Such a method should include institutional distribution and functional fixation, their organizational connections to concrete structures, the information setting of the borders of the elements and parameters of action and its results concerning other actions and results.

Parsons recognized that

it would be too brave to claim that the description of the action structure (presented by him—O. I.) ...is complete even from the viewpoint of simple listing of its basic elements, not to mention the connections between them. It can only be solved as a result of thorough verification of the theory in the course of particular scientific research. For the present stage of the theory of action, it is impossible to fulfill the requirement of complete and clear understanding of all its elements and connections.<sup>11</sup>

Economists have more than once undertaken to create simple model structures of action, but they have failed to find those basic elements of which any economic system could be built. Qualities, relations and other characteristics of economies, established as such basic elements, appeared to be too complicated and often arbitrary. Scholars failed to demonstrate the authenticity of the theory which brought them to criticism by their “workfellows.”

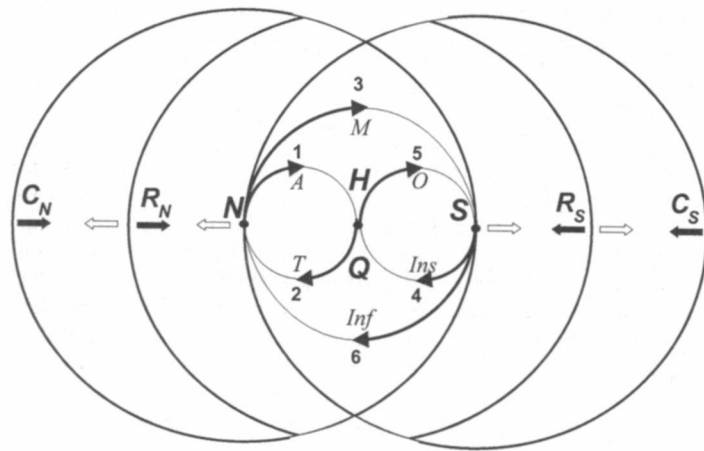
Only a combination of interacting endogenous factors of a particular action provides the key to the structure, functioning and genesis both of a discrete economic element and the whole GES. Synthesizing the results of the structural analysis of a discrete act of the action and conceptual anthropocentric model “nature-human-society” (NHS), built by the author of this paper, allowed to express the production process in a generalized

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Chelovecheskaya deyaatel’nost’: Traktat po ekonomicheskoi teorii* [Human Action: A Treatise of Economics], trans. Alexei Kuryaev (Moscow: NPO “Economica,” 2000), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Parsons, *op. cit.*, 267.

form by means of the function:  $Q = F(A, T, M, Ins, O, Inf)$  where  $Q$  is a product,  $A$  – human factor,  $T$  – technical factor,  $M$  – material factor,  $Ins$  – institutional factor,  $O$  – organizational factor;  $Inf$  – informational factor of the product making.

These necessary components and constructive forces in the content of human labor always exist in two forms: as the material, tangible transformational factors (human being, technics and materials) and the field, intangible transactional factors (institution, organization and information).<sup>12</sup>



In the given model, the spheres of existence interact consistently, permanently and cyclically: nature ( $N$ ) and society ( $S$ ) through the human activity ( $H$ ). The model specifies natural and social conditions of human life ( $C_n$ ,  $C_s$ ) and available natural and social resources ( $R_n$ ,  $R_s$ ). The connections and relations of this interaction form its factors: 1 – actor –  $A$  ( $NH$ ), 2 – technical –  $T$  ( $HN$ ), 3 – material –  $M$  ( $NS$ ), 4 – institution –  $Ins$  ( $SH$ ), 5 – organization –  $O$  ( $HS$ ), 6 – information –  $Inf$  ( $SN$ ).

<sup>12</sup> Oleg Inshakov, “‘Yadro razvitiya’ v kontekste novoi teorii faktorov proizvodstva” [“The Core of Development’ in the Context of the New Theory of the Production Factors”], in *Economic Science in the Contemporary Russia 1* (2003): 11–25; Oleg Inshakov, *Economicheskaya genetika i nanoeconomica* [Economic Genetics and Nanoeconomics] (Volgograd: Volgograd State University Press, 2007).

The NHS model is formed in accordance with philosophical tradition and evolution of the world outlook formed and established in science. It is not only graphically presented but in a way is given as “a mathematical structure,” which naturally connects the relations within it. In this anthropocentric model of the interaction of nature and society, one may see that the development of any individual organism always antedates any social order.<sup>13</sup> It becomes possible to present and study the main, necessary and sufficient, connections and factors of human existence. The obtained system of factors proves Schumpeter’s conclusion that if one shares the labor theory of cost, “...the three-factor scheme that we praised for its simplicity faces analytical difficulties regardless of any philosophy.”<sup>14</sup>

The movement started from nature and must go through all the connections and relations in NHS, forming endogenous basic factors of public production, and return by means of “negation of negation” to “the so-called initial point,” i.e., to the beginning of the movement but at a new level, with a new measure of space and time of the movement result. The natural character and necessity of such movement corresponds to the spiral construction of many natural systems (galaxy, biosphere, geosphere, fauna, flora, etc.). The results of these elaborations have already been applied for investigation of the “artificial world” (technical objects, architecture, painting, science, music, writing, etc.).

It is important that “three things should coincide in their conditions: the condition of sense, the condition of reality and condition of creativity” in the model.<sup>15</sup> The necessity of cyclicity—treated not as a circular restraint, but as a spiral character of self-development of the organic system, which is determined by its genetic core—becomes increasingly clear according to its permanent renewal and to the direction of movement. “More stratification and replacement rather than continuity and continuation again represent here the *law of change*, dominating in

<sup>13</sup> See: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Sotsial’noye konstruirovaniye real’nosti: Traktat po sociologii znaniya* [The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge], trans. Elena Rutkevich (Moscow: Medium, 1995), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Istoriya ekonomicheskogo analiza* [The History of Economic Analysis], vol. 2, trans. Vladimir Avtonomov (St. Petersburg: Economic School, 2001), 733.

<sup>15</sup> Merab Mamardashvili, *Filosofskie chteniya* [The Philosophical Readings] (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-classika, 2002), 265.

history."<sup>16</sup> The constancy of the repeated cycles, forming an invariant basis for human life, determines the very life existence and brings man an immeasurable gift—freedom of evolutionary change due to his creativity. But “in order to understand it, first of all, one should reject an assumption about some complete and finished world—without us, before us and not for us.”<sup>17</sup> These principles are embodied in the model worked out by the author of this paper.

The essence and directions of the movements of forces and links in the NHS model proves the following discourse:

The social being which determines the consciousness really goes beyond the biology of the *homo sapiens* type. It is the only thing that gives individuals and every social community an opportunity to make a choice... In other words, the human conscious activity can be directed to one of the existing sides, while the activity connected with biological functions does not have the right to choose.”<sup>18</sup>

Losing the biological or social component, man likewise ceases to be a human being, turning into an information or natural object.

In the model suggested, we can abstractly reflect on “the meaning of activity, completeness of being, creation, i.e., on life through some creative work, on an attempt to live in a *different* way... For we are talking... about being which is one thing if we do it or another thing if we do not do it.”<sup>19</sup> The deed, doing, action and activity determine the possibility of being. Hence, we should begin studying the different spheres of society (and economic activity above all) from studying human activity in general.

The production function built on the NHS model reflects the fact that “openness-to-the-world, typical for the biological nature of human existence, is always transformed (and as a matter of fact should be transformed) by a social order into a relative closeness-to-the-world.” The transformational factors (*A, T, M*) are the first in this process. There is no doubt that “this closeness will never come up to the closeness of animal existence just because the first one is created by humans and has an ‘artificial’ character.” But it is capable of ensuring management and

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Fenomen cheloveka. Vselenskaya messa* [The Phenomenon of Man. The Universe Mass], trans. Nikolai Sadovsky (Moscow: Iris-Press, 2002), 207.

<sup>17</sup> Mamardashvili, *op.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Lev Gumilev, *Etnogenez i biosfera zemli* [Ethnogenesis and the Earth Biosphere] (Moscow: Rolf, 2002), 490.

<sup>19</sup> Mamardashvili, *op.cit.*, 54.

stability of the larger part of human behavior.<sup>20</sup> The function makes it clear that humans continually externalize themselves by performing repeated activities. This necessity is rooted in the living human organism.

But the social order arising due to the interaction of transactional factors (*Ins, O, Inf*) is a product of incessant human production, which is created in the process of externalization of its actors. The social order “exists *only* as a product of human activity.”<sup>21</sup> This order exists only because humans reproduce it permanently as a transactional form of being. People’s social products come from their biological context and the natural environment, but externalization as such is an endogenous anthropological necessity to create one’s own artificial world.

Only those resources that are directly involved in the production process and form the value of the product can become endogenous production factors.<sup>22</sup> To become such a factor, any condition of human activity has first to become a resource available to the producer and then through marketing get involved into the process of production. There are no factors “in general:” they acquire their meaning and content only in relation to certain phenomena and processes, they are not identical to the conditions, resources, supplies and reserves in any such relations. The identification of conditions, resources and factors of production that remains in the contemporary economic theory delivers ambiguity to many of its postulates and conclusions, reducing their adequacy to reality and practical value.

Some arguments of this function (*A, T, M*) stand for the expenditures of transformational factors (*Tf*) on production of the product content, while the others (*Ins, O, Inf*) stand for transactional factors (*Ta*) expenditures on creation of its social form. So the function can be represented as follows:  $Q = F(Tf, Ta)$ , since the product is a result of the interaction of content and form, and its character is determined by their relation. The transactional and transformational factors (their costs and expenses) are divided according to origin and purpose, function and structure, content and forms of appearance in the process of production and in the very product. The content or structure, feature or function, status or image, contour or scale can be a factor product or part of a product taken as whole.

The endogenous factors are interdependent, and that is why every one of them may be presented as a function from other factors and a produced item. The rule of mutual substitution in certain limits can be applied to all

<sup>20</sup> Berger, Luckmann, *op. cit.*, 87–8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Valery Makarov and Georgy Kleiner, *Microeconomica znanyi* [The Microeconomics of Knowledge] (Moscow: Economica, 2007), 42.

complementary factors and their groups since all of them take the forms of the production costs. The use of advanced (even more expensive) technology ( $T$ ) may comparatively reduce the costs on employees required ( $A$ ), and the introduction of more progressive rules and norms of activity ( $Ins$ ) may cause the reduction of the costs on support and development of the enterprise structural parts ( $O$ ). The use of higher technologies ( $A - T$ ) may reduce organizational and institutional costs ( $Ins - O$ ) of production at the enterprise on the whole. Therefore, the complementary character of the transformational costs ( $Tf$ ) to transactional ones ( $Ta$ ) enables one to talk about the necessity of their tendency to mutual correspondence and possibility of their mutual substitution within certain limits.

Externalization of actors, already at the nanolevel of their activity, contains a genetic code of the whole "artificial world" created by people, all of their object and field public appearances in their new reality.