

(...)

Of the 426 pages [of János Kornai's memoir] those that display his *thoughts* greatly outnumber those that discuss his *life*. It might even be impossible to separate the two, because the episodes of his life (even the events of his childhood) appear to constitute a background to the works themselves, or to serve as a "fore-study" for the papers that Kornai presents in details in his book. The life of the author of *Economics of Shortage* is motivated by research, and every other component loses momentum in the shine of the relevant works. The 50-year-long career of the Harvard University Professor and Professor of Collegium Budapest is dominated by one passion. This passion could be best described with a comment on Socrates: "There is a characteristic moment in Book 4 of The State describing Socrates and his mates managing to define *an abstract truth* in the course of a debate. They shout with joy like hunters after raising and capturing the plunder (...) Rather than for the glory, or for the salvation of humanity, or for social justice, or for material profit, they are motivated by something that is *more powerful than love, and even hate*, and this is nothing else but *interest in something*. (...) ¹"

(...)

Upon reading [Kornai's] irregular memoir, the writer of this review thinks to have found the explanation [for the question of what makes Kornai the most successful scientist in his field of research] in the *simultaneous prevailing of five [personal] characteristics* that have been features of his work since the beginning of his career: 1: swimming against the mainstream; 2: sense for reality; 3: ability to work out theories; 4: ability to see structures; and 5: dual "mother tongue".

(...)

With his critical view of things, Kornai does not belong anywhere. He refuses every pressure in research, be it a primitive, 'Made in the East' ideological prison, or a more subtle "expectation" prevailing in the West towards young and ambitious scientist candidates. He always maintained his position of disassociation from the domestic "mainstream" in the entire period, ranging from harder times to reform periods.

When the progressive stream of Hungarian economists submerged from tip-to-toe in politics and made efforts to reform socialism, Kornai presented his anti-thesis against this idea in the form of the *Economics of Shortage*, in which he gave clear evidence that the system is, in fact, inherently beyond reform.

(...)

¹ Steiner, George (1989): Has Truth a Future, In: Dixon, Bernard (ed.): From Creation to Chaos. Basil Blackwell, Quoted by Calvin, William H: *A gondolkodó agy. Az intelligencia fejlődéstörténete*, Kulturtrade Publishing House, Budapest, 1996. pages 165-166.