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(...)

The material [of János Kornai's memoir] is selected and arranged in a way that gives priority to the author's life work over his life itself. In this context life was subordinated to the life work. The author stands behind his works and only initiates readers to those layers of his life that affect his life work intellectually and existentially. He does not let them go deeper. (Or he only does so barely.) He keeps the reader in a distance from which communication is pleasant, useful and sensible, and would not let them come closer. But it would be indeed unnecessary, anyway. This is a distance ideal for understanding that aspect of a life that is of public interest. This is a book of public settlement, rather than a self-revelation. A detailed recollection of the author's private life stops at the part discussing the end of his childhood, which is, in fact, the beginning of his public life.

(...)

Kornai was able to become the most successful researcher into the socialist system, because he had found and consequently adhered to a perspective that offered the most comprehensive view of the system. This perspective could be best defined by "being outside and inside at the same time." (...) In Kornai's case 'outside' and 'inside' were obvious concepts; outside the party, the decision-making processes of dictatorship, Marxism and the official ideology of Hungarian science, but inside the institutional system of official Hungarian science, inside the country and within the confines of the legal opportunities for scientific research and data collection. Consequently, this meant to be outside opposition movements and samizdats, but inside contemporary economics and the circle of Western economists.

Kornai's life work has emerged as a result of an insider's level of information, direct experience and involvement, and an outsider's unbiased approach, intellectual liberty, system of global connections and excellent quality standards. Everything has evolved from two decisions; namely "I will not emigrate" and "I wish to become part of the Western economic profession".

In order to maintain this position, one needs to be highly disciplined and decline many things, as well as to refrain from saying or doing certain other things.

One needs to say 'no' to Jenő Fock about involvement in reform efforts after 1956, to refrain from making a political loyalty oath in order to avoid being fired from the Institute of Economics [of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] and to consequently disregard regulations requiring authorities' approval for the publication of scientific articles abroad.

(...)