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„My autobiography may contribute to the knowledge – obtained from other sources – of people interested in Eastern Europe, the communist socio-economic system and its collapse, the ways the Eastern European intelligentsia found its way and lost it, in the exploration process of economics, as a science, and many other comprehensive issues; knowledge that they obtained from other sources”, says János Kornai in the introduction to his memoirs *By Force of Thought*. The economist, author of numerous Hungarian and English-language studies and books, including *Economics of Shortage*; *The Road to a Free Economy*, and *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Socialism*, one founder of Collegium Budapest, set up on the model of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, held professorship at perhaps the best university of the world, Harvard University for nearly 20 years. He, however, did not leave Hungary for good. He returned regularly.

(...)

He was considered to be a “heretic and a renegade” for many years, but he persisted that there was such a thing as rational choice based on conviction. At the time of the 1956 revolution he knew enough to understand that he would have a good reason to be afraid, nevertheless, he stayed at home. Due to emotional reasons and out of professional considerations he rejected the idea of emigration even later. About his emotional reasons he says that Hungary is the country whose fate has always been the most important for him. His professional argument was that his credit as a specialist of socialist and post-socialist transition is constituted by – among others – living in a country where he can obtain personal experiences about his subject matter.

János Kornai calls his work, structured in a chronological order and organised around several specific issues, irregular memoirs. He writes his memoirs with a scientific method; primarily by analysing the circumstances and the problems. His work is indeed a mixture of a memoir and an essay serial, just as he mentions in the introduction. This autobiography is also irregular in the sense that it is an inherently personal, but fundamentally intellectual review in which the family sphere is “far less dominating than it is in real life.” This book, instructive for several generations, is a confession and an easily comprehensible scientific analysis. (...)