
Preface

Even after I had written most of these memoirs, I was still unsure why I was engaged in this undertaking. What was prompting me to think back? Whom was I addressing?

I am somewhat reserved, and discuss my life rarely and sparingly. During the most exciting days of Hungary's transition from single-party state to democracy, a journalist pressed me to give, at last, a long biographical interview. "It will not interest anybody later," he argued. That was fifteen years ago, and I hope now I am not too late.

For many years my wife urged me to write my life story, but I kept putting it off. I finally sat down to the task in mid-2003, and these memoirs occupied my time and energy for the next two years to the detriment of some other projects.

My wife's insistence is motive enough. If I were asked to name the single reader for whom this book has been written, whose satisfaction and approval it is designed to win, that person has to be Zsuzsa.

I hope my autobiography will also interest many other people: my children and grandchildren and other family members, my friends, my colleagues past and present, my students, and readers of my books and articles. This is no small circle. Those who know me personally or through my previous written works already will have some impression of me. I would like them to meld that picture with the self-image I present in this account of my life. Several hundred reviews of my books can now be compared with my self-assessment. In these memoirs, I discuss how I saw my work at the time it was written and how I see it now. I have never reacted publicly to reviews. Only on rare occasions have I engaged in a dispute when I have encountered someone who disagreed with me. Here in my recollections I want to provide a comprehensive and chronological "review" of my work.

Though my memoirs are roughly chronological, this is not a diary. Each chapter is arranged around a subject, whether a single event, one of my works, or a place where I once lived. Therefore each chapter title includes the time period covered.

From chapter to chapter, these periods merge into each other and may overlap, if the topic requires it.

Readers may include some people who have not read any of my earlier writings but are simply interested in the era in which I lived. This book does not take on any of the tasks of a historian: it does not seek to give an objective, comprehensive description and an interpretation of major events. There is an extensive literature available for those wanting to study the socialist and post-socialist period in Hungary or in other formerly communist countries. I was just one participant in those eras, and not a major one. All I say about each is what impinged on my own life—the social and historical context in which the events of my life unfolded.

For those, however, who are interested in Eastern Europe, my memoirs may provide details to *complement* other sources on Eastern Europe, on the rise and fall of the communist system, and on the dilemmas facing the Eastern European intelligentsia. The various reports, diaries, and autobiographies of people who lived through the period are indispensable source materials for future scholars. Through my memoirs I try to contribute to that material, acting as a witness to what occurred. In fact, I also intended my earlier, academic writings as testimony to their historical periods, and I tried to make them as objective as possible. These memoirs are a subjective augmentation of my scholarly work. I have now tried to include what stayed out of *Economics of Shortage* or *The Socialist System* because the material was too personal in nature or because something else prevented me from stating my opinion. This book's genre allows me to present my personal credo on several ethical, political, and scientific questions. For me, it was not possible to squeeze subjective position statements and personal declarations into scholarly works on well-circumscribed topics.

I thought a great deal about what this book's title should be. I was initially inclined to call it *Understanding* It was myself, first of all, that I wanted to understand. I have sought to explain what I thought when and why, what influenced my thinking and actions, and then how my thinking changed. I also would like to better understand those with whom I agreed and those with whom I disagreed, those who stood by me and those who turned away.

“Understanding” can imply moral approval or at least acquiescence. That is not the kind of comprehension I have in mind. By no means am I looking to exonerate myself or to judge others here, any more than I was in my earlier academic works. I want to understand what I have experienced. Sometimes it is quite hard to discover the motives behind events, the flaws in an argument, the deep forces that motivate people, and the declared or concealed reasons for conflicts. It was no easy feat to examine my own past, and obviously it is harder still to analyze the pasts of others.

In the end, I chose a different title: *By Force of Thought*. I felt that these words most effectively summarized one of the main themes of these memoirs. I have striven

neither for power nor riches but rather for a life of ideas. When from time to time I exercised some influence on the course of events, it was not because I dictated to others from a higher position or bought their cooperation at a high price. If I have had any influence on anyone or anything, I have had it through my thoughts, spoken or written.

One reader of the manuscript expressed his reservations: "It is naive to believe in the influence of argument, conviction, or thought. The real driving force behind historical events is interest." As a professional observer and analyst of social changes, I have no illusions, and I try to take into account the various causes of observed effects and handle them according to their weight. However, the dominant possessors of power and wealth are people of action, individuals who are able to choose between alternatives. There are all sorts of factors influencing them, and values, principles, and ideas are surely not among the least significant. Moreover, the course of events is certainly influenced as well by the thoughts and beliefs of the millions or hundreds of millions of those who are less powerful and rich. My whole life's work would lose its meaning if I were not convinced that thought has force.

Of course, this force of thought has its limits. Indeed this is one of the main themes of these memoirs: when and why my own thinking faltered and then was reconsidered, how others' ideas affected me, and how my line of thinking, analyses, and recommendations clashed with those of others. Thought is subject to a continuous test of strength. Every chapter recounts such tests, whether these led to success or to failure.

In the subtitle I call these memoirs "irregular," because they differ from most memoirs in two respects. While recounting the events of my life, I pause from time to time and express my thoughts on specific episodes. The emphasis is not on telling the story but on analyzing the problem and its circumstances. Such commentaries, which relate to some aspect of sociology, political philosophy, ethics, the process of research and creation, the sociology of science, or various other subjects, may be considered miniature independent essays. This book is thus a combination of memoirs interspersed with a series of essays that are more detached in nature. Hence these are "irregular memoirs."

Second, most memoirs treat the author's private life. Although I have written an account that is personal and subjective, essentially it is an *intellectual* autobiography. This term can be broadly interpreted to encompass the political and public aspects of my life, and also my friendships and other personal relations associated with my professional activities and public service.

I mention family members and family events many times throughout the book, but that private domain, with its countless pleasures and problems, is given much less space and emphasis in these memoirs than it had in my real life. The photographs may perhaps show something of this personal sphere that is not expressed

in words. The book is thus an irregular autobiography also in the sense that I hardly mention what are considered strictly personal matters.

Let me say a few words about the genre and style of the book. I have spent the past fifty years writing analyses, trying to present what I have understood in clear, comprehensible arguments. I am not going to suddenly become a man of letters. Do not expect me to produce fine descriptions of scenes, recall conversations, pen portraits of friends, or offer graphic, impressionistic accounts of tense moments. Literary writers, whether by design or accident, leave problems open and thoughts unresolved. A scientific researcher cannot do that. I remain a scholar even when writing my memoirs. I try to avoid ambiguity in style, structure, and means of expression.

When I was writing my earlier books, I generally had before me a well-defined picture of those whom I was addressing, and that audience largely determined what I had to explain and what I could assume readers already knew. This time the situation is different. I trust that readers of this book will be economists and other professionals, members of older and younger generations, Hungarians and foreigners, people living in the East and in the West. I have done my best to make it easy for all to follow what I mean to say. I faced a serious dilemma at several places in the book. Should my aim be maximum precision, which would call for detailed definitions and qualifications, and a full delineation of the initial assumptions behind the theory? There was a danger that this approach would make life too hard for readers who are not economists. So should I then choose a simpler form of expression, with a concomitant danger of oversimplification? Since I am not writing an academic treatise, I preferred to risk the latter. For those who have not read any of my academic work, this book gives a sense of what I have to say in my books and articles. For those who have, perhaps it may serve to remind them of those writings. Let me apologize in advance to those who feel I have given superfluous detail in certain places.

It goes without saying that my own recollections were the most important source for this memoir. But I did not see the writing process as a test of memory: I not only relied on my own thoughts and feelings but checked the factual references as carefully as possible in other published works.

I had many sources at my disposal. As I already mentioned, I went back to the works of mine I consider the most important.* Once these appeared in print, I normally did not look at them again. Now, however, I have reread them in succession, together with many contemporary reviews and later commentaries on these primary works.

* The selection can be readily grasped from the table of contents. When a chapter discusses one or more of my publications in some detail, the title or titles appear as a subtitle of the chapter.

I have never kept a diary, but since I have been primarily a researcher, I have saved many notes and built up an archive of all sorts of documents. These are maintained in a form that is easy to access, catalogued in hundreds of files. I have kept most of the letters sent to me, as well as copies of my own letters. In writing this book I immersed myself in this wealth of documentation.

The material in my own collection was supplemented by research in various public archives, where my colleagues and I found much interesting information. Studying the documents of Hungary's former secret service proved to be very exciting. Recent Hungarian laws make it possible for citizens to access the material relating to them. It was a depressing and at times appalling experience to read informers' reports, records of police investigations made in preparation for political trials, and the notes of state security and intelligence officers. I describe in this volume many of the political police and secret service documents pertaining to me.

While I feel it is important to assure the reader in advance that the book is based not only on its writer's memory but on the study of other documents too, I do not want to discourage a wider audience. Its emphasis is not on giving a dry account of archival research but on the personal treatment of memories. What follows is an account of a long and adventurous intellectual journey, with light and dark episodes, and animating and embittering experiences. I hope that by the end of the book, readers will have gained a better understanding of my life, my works, and the age in which I have lived.

The Osiris Publishing House/Osiris Kiadó published the Hungarian version of my memoirs in April 2005. The present book is the translation of the Hungarian text with some modifications.

I have corrected some minor errors and inaccuracies that had been recognized only after the initial publishing of the book. I made an effort to clarify the phrasing at some places where the reactions of readers suggested that the passage was ambiguous. I also attached a glossary and a chronology to the English edition in hope of easing the way for non-Hungarian readers.

Between the completion of the Hungarian manuscript and the finalization of the English version, more than a year passed. Of course, life did not stop; but with few exceptions, the events of that period are not included in the text of the present edition.

To make reading easier, it is worth giving a bit of practical advice to the reader. At the end of the volume is a reference list limited to works mentioned in this book. It cannot, then, be considered a comprehensive bibliography covering the subject areas dealt with. For books that have been through several editions, I have listed, to the best of my knowledge, the most recent edition, adding the year of the first edition in parentheses.

The text of the book is supplemented by two types of notes: footnotes and endnotes. I chose this somewhat unusual approach to make things easier for the reader. A work neither of fiction nor of scholarship, my book belongs to an intermediate genre that justifies this solution.

The footnotes contain information that I could, in fact, have inserted in the main text, given the book's genre and style. It appears in footnotes because each represents a minor digression from the line of thought of the main text. These digressions offer illustrative examples, data, episodes, and sometimes anecdotes or jokes. I hope those who decide to read the main text will also read the footnotes.

The endnotes contain what researchers call the critical apparatus. As I explained above, this memoir is based on a broad range of material. If the source of certain information was an archival document, the endnote gives the citation in customary form. There are frequent references to published works as well. If they are simply mentioned in the text, readers may find full bibliographical data in the reference list. But if the reference in the text is less direct, or if a work is directly quoted, an endnote is supplied.*

I expect that many readers do not wish to closely track the sources of the various pieces of information. I have tried to assist them by placing those sources in endnotes. The book's points can be followed without ever consulting the endnotes. However, those who wish to follow up on one problem or another (including those doing research in the subject areas dealt with in the book) will find all the necessary information in the endnotes.

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* Because notes cannot themselves be annotated, the footnotes also contain the references belonging to them.

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