Irrational Rationality: Kornai’s Existential Choice

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Abstract

In \textit{By Force of Thought: Irregular Memoirs of an Intellectual Journey"}, János Kornai states that his decision to break with communist party and adopt the model of rational choice as his “main conceptual framework” was inspired, in part, by his readings of Sartre and other existential philosophers on the centrality of human choice (2006: 132-133). In this paper, we provide a synoptic view of how the concept of \textit{choice} within rational choice theory aligns with salient themes in existential thought. In doing so, we hope to illustrate how the rules for generating rational choice explanations may still remain meaningful independent of the Neo-Kantian foundations they are often associated with. Kornai’s example highlights the ecumenical potential for rational choice within the social scientific community.

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References