

| Dossier: Adorno's *Minima Moralia* at 70

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This year is the 70th anniversary of the publication of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. Written on the occasion of Max Horkheimer's 50th birthday, these "reflections on damaged life" (as the subtitle reads) became, after publication in 1951, widely read also outside of academic circles, and established Adorno's reputation as an essayist and public intellectual in post-war Germany. Jürgen Habermas later referred to it as the author's "Hauptwerk", ("that one can study as though it were a *summa*") and while it may have to compete for this title with the later-written books *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, it is safe to say that *Minima Moralia* is in any case the richest of Adorno's books, in thematic scope, emotional depth, and most certainly in literary style.

In the canon of philosophical works, it is difficult to find anything like it. There are of course precursors, like Pascal's *Pensées*, Nietzsche's *Morgenröte*, and Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*, but still Adorno's aphorisms are quite unique, weaving together parodies of poems or lullabies, personal memories, dense philosophical prose, art and literary criticism, and social and cultural analysis. Some of his most quoted lines, like "The whole is the false", "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly", and "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass", come from this work, even though Adorno himself would shudder at the thought of his philosophy being reduced to set of catchphrases.

Adorno's work has, in recent years, again gained a lot of interest, but one might argue that his use of the genre of the philosophical aphorism has had little follow-up (nor, for that matter, by Adorno himself, who did not write anything resembling it in later life). Today, especially, the practices and institutions of academic publishing, and the cultural hegemony of analytic philosophy, all but forbid anything differing from the "steel-hard shell" of the journal-article.

This is why, on the occasion of this anniversary, *Krisis* decided to make a dossier devoted to *Minima Moralia*, which is at the same time dedicated to the aphorism form. We asked a diverse group of authors to write a short, aphoristic text. The topic was of their own choosing; it didn't have to deal with Adorno's philosophy, let alone would we dare ask authors to write in an "Adornian" style. Rather, we asked the authors to pick a quote and/or fragment from *Minima Moralia*, and use it as a point of departure for their own reflections.

Either explicitly or implicitly, the contributions in this dossier together address the question whether life, seventy years after publication of *Minima Moralia*, is still damaged. Although we might not compare our own time and experiences to the ones that Adorno lived through, we have in recent years, and are still, faced with numerous catastrophes, not in the least the ecological catastrophe that puts grim truth to Adorno's lines that "even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror." (§ 5)

While *Minima Moralia* was written only by Adorno, such was not the case in many other texts produced by the Frankfurt School. Following the latter example, we want to thank the many authors who contributed a text and the four co-editors: Samir Gandesha, who was a guest editor on this dossier as well as Thijs Lijster, Tivadar Vervoort and Guilel Treiber from the *Krisis* editorial board. Finally, a note on referencing: since

the authors used different translations of *Minima Moralia*, or sometimes chose to amend an existing translation or use their own translation, we decided to refer in all cases only to the aphorism number. With this strategy we also encourage readers to read the entire aphorism when they are interested in the reference.