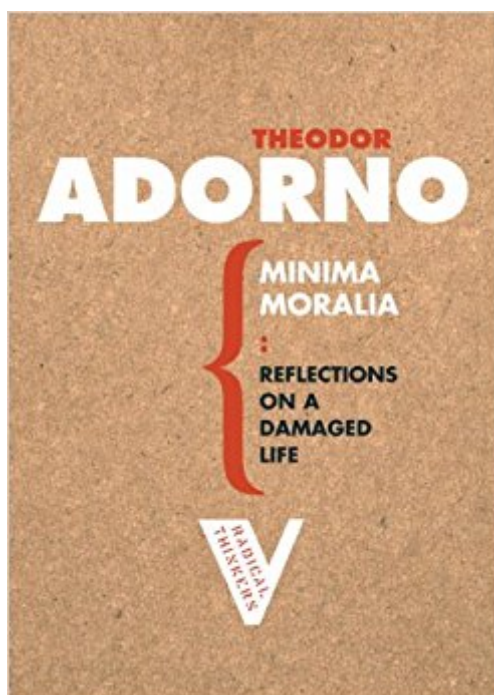


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# Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life (Radical Thinkers)



## Synopsis

A reflection on everyday existence in the "sphere of consumption of late Capitalism", this work is Adorno's literary and philosophical masterpiece.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The best thoughts of a noble and invigorating mind." "Observer" "A primary intellectual document of this age." "Sunday Times"

Text: English, German (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was glad to see this listed

For a long time, I'd wanted to read "Minima Moralia." I knew it would be a daunting task. And, it was. But, it was worth the time and the increased folds in my brow. I came into contact with one of the world's great minds and critical thinkers. His words expanded both my world view and my inner view. It's best read in small, incremental doses. That's the way it is written. It's not pleasure reading. It's like reading for a college exam on a multitude of esoteric subjects. But, it's time well-spent.

Adorno at his undisputed best.

Good read

oh i love this book and carry it everywhere

When reading Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, I've found it useful to bear in mind a specific metaphor or ideal-type. Specifically, think of the world as a 1950's vintage factory in which everything that exists is produced. Even the people, who ostensibly operate the factory, in a darkly dialectic twist of irony, are produced by the factory. Ideas, too, are factory products, manifestations of technology intensive means-ends, dollar-valued rationality. The factory, thus, has become the source -- the producer -- of its own ethos, where all measures are stubbornly quantitative in a thoroughgoing positivistic sense. In view of the all-encompassing breadth of its task, the division of labor is immeasurably complex. The behavior of any person in any productive role is nominally free, at least within the constraints imposed by maximally productive technique, especially as that is manifest in the material means of automation. Leisure time, moreover, is nominally devoid of productive constraints, equipment, and procedures manuals. Adjustment to the factory regime is the strongest evidence that a person is a mature adult. While the factory putatively includes everyone and all benefit accordingly, compensation for the occupants of the role of Big Capital is exaggerated to a degree that is commensurate with its ostensibly over-riding importance. Individual manifestations of Big Capital are aware of their contribution and the presumed justice of their material reward, but they are blithely oblivious to the fact that they, too, are factory products, as is their dollar-valued contribution. For them to think otherwise would approximate an unimaginable act roughly comparable to viewing the outside of the entire outer rim of the universe from the inside. Just as that image makes no sense, there is no vantage point from which late capitalism, the referent for the factory metaphor, could look at itself from the outside. Only when we address the position and role of Big Capital do we begin to come to grips with the primary substance that runs throughout Adorno's *Minima Moralis: Reflection from Damaged Life*. The damage to which Adorno refers has been visited on all of us, not just those who were forced to flee Nazi tyranny and the horrors of its death camps. The damage is inherent in the factory metaphor introduced at the outset, and that encumbers us as we continue with our lives. In truth, following Adorno, the productive freedom and unfettered leisure attendant to occupying a role in the factory are, in fact, intrusively scripted. However, since everyone was born, raised, and socialized into adulthood within the

factory, a rationally scripted life is second nature to all. Readers who have worked through Adorno's book *The Culture Industry* will understand this in concrete detail, and the factory metaphor is useful shorthand for a fully developed sociology of critical knowledge. The factory is all there is, and it constitutes the totality of individual and collective experience. The factory is all that can be known. Within the factory, the only rationality is intrinsic to the readily measurable process of production. Much as in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, alternative standards have neither precedent nor purpose. After all, production is for capital accumulation and consumption, and the commodities consumed are meant for those who fill the manifold positions throughout the factory. When presented in this way, in the context afforded by the factory metaphor, no other form of rationality seems useful or even conceivable. The exclusive pervasiveness of a model of rationality based on purely quantitative means-ends relationships seems as sensibly and destructively prefigured as Horkheimer described it in *Eclipse of Reason*. Adorno's excursions into areas seemingly not subsumed by the commoditizing factory ideal-type, including considerable attention to the lives of women, are not adventitious. Instead, they reveal the consequences for people and their social context when, though for some it may seem otherwise, all of life is contained in the factory and imbued with the factory culture. People produced as commodities and reckoned in terms of exchange value and who think and feel accordingly bring very little joy to themselves or others. This is something for which they have not been scripted. The cumulativeness of work by Adorno and other members of The Critical School is no accident. The constraints, compulsions, relationships, and cultural substance intrinsic to the factory metaphor are pervasive throughout the work of Critical School theorists. Their brilliance inheres, in good part, in their shared sensitivity to the ways in which the processes they described have imbued all institutions, organizations, and modes of expression that we, in our various locations in the factory, have come to take for granted. The all pervasiveness of the rationalized, standardized, and scripted social and cultural influences invoked by Adorno may help to explain why *Minima Moralia* took its particular aphoristic and short essay form: using a multitude of examples from a broad range of topically distinct domains, Adorno emphasized the immanence of his theme. Adorno's ability to adopt a thoroughly critical position, something unimaginable from inside the metaphorical factory, seems closely tied to his position as a German emigre who moved to England and the United States, returning to Germany after the end of World War II. Adorno, as with other members of The Critical School, spent much of his life as an outsider. Unassimilated but enabled by the tools of rigorous scholarship, Adorno gained access to insights and an over-arching perspective available only to one who was marginalized, and in that sense independent of the taken-for-granted substance of the world view that cripplingly inculcated

so many others. The War destroyed Adorno's native Germany, gave horrific meaning to otherwise unexceptional names such as Auschwitz and Treblinka, and demonstrated that the cold and indifferent logic of the factory metaphor was intrinsic not only to capitalism but to the most extreme forms of fascism. Furthermore, writing in the 1940's, the processes that were creating what has become an international capitalist system, when compared with present circumstances, were at a relatively early stage of development. The factory metaphor had not yet come to cover the entire world, including nominally socialist states. Spontaneity, eccentricity, and creativity were still occasionally possible without calling into question the fidelity and sanity of those exhibiting these non-standardized ways of behaving. The rationality of the factory model did not yet completely preclude them. Social and cultural domination was still incomplete, and the workings of Big Capital were primarily a national rather than an international phenomenon. *Minima Moralia* is a dense, wide-ranging, and difficult book. Its primary concerns, however, are pretty simple: the domination and denaturing of human beings, rendering them to the status of commodities, made and unmade in terms suggested by the factory metaphor. I think that Adorno sometimes ranges too far afield and covers too much too obliquely, now and then with a hint of banality. Nevertheless, this is a brilliant book, written by one whose scholarly attainments are beyond question and who demands a great deal of his readers.

Dis is puro...firme vato locs. Down for Adorno por vida..Smile now, Cry later..

Theodor Adorno's late theoretical masterwork is called *\*Negative Dialectics\**, but these earlier aphoristical comments on war and fascism might have been titled *\*Negative Socialism\**. As Lenin and the Communists had earlier reacted successfully to the failures of the Socialist International in the First World War, the Frankfurt School looked at the failures of Communism at midcentury; at a time when many on the left viewed peace with Russia as the only aim of agitation, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and others proclaimed early the dangers of "state capitalism" and the need for the intellectual left to think through problems of mass culture and totalizing domination clearly. Adorno's comments on every type of insidious and insipid standardization and failure to think are unrelentingly critical, but on a closer reading his attempt to carry the socialist standard into a new era is unstinting and generous; every goal of the worker's movement is secretly approved, every attack on popular freedom tilted at. Critical Theory, away from the endless exegesis of Hegel and obscure Marx works -- in a format more than suggestive of Nietzsche's aphoristical works -- actually makes for pleasant reading, and this work is surely a minor classic of Twentieth-Century literature

and thought. The book is also notable for its emigre perspective on America. Officially, Adorno and Horkheimer hated the philistine gum-chewing of the United States: however, a recent biography makes it known that for a time Adorno contemplated a sort of "rentier" existence in California. Really, *\*Minima Moralia\** -- written towards the end of the Second World War, then published in Germany in the early postwar era -- is a sort of warning to the "master race" that there was an even more ruthlessly limiting and banally evil way to run a society than they knew. In this way, the book is part of the Faustian bargain with German *\*Kultur\** and barbarism that constituted Adorno's whole life. The translation makes lovely English of what is called *\*Adorno-Syntax\**: although the new Verso discount line has discarded the powerful older cover, it does make the work available at a price affordable to everyone. I first read *\*Minima Moralia\** in high school, and thusly suggest that older radicals might give the book as a guide to the "blessed life" for an adolescent or young adult who is politically intelligent but insufficiently contrarian. Definitely a book to read before you become old and, well, immoral.

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