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## **Introduction: Theodor W. Adorno: Dialectics, Aesthetics, Anthropology, Society**

### **Introduction**

As is well-known, the year 2019 was an Adornian year because of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Adorno's untimely death on 6 August 1969. In a somehow similar way, the year 2020 was an Adornian year because of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the posthumous publication of his great but unfinished masterpiece *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann and first published by Suhrkamp Press in 1970. In this context, we can also remind the readers of "Scenari" that the year 2021 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of another masterpiece by Adorno, namely his famous collection of aphorisms, *Minima Moralia*, first published in 1951, soon after his return to Germany after many years spent in exile to escape the persecutions of the Nazi regime. In this work, Adorno tried to come to terms with two different but yet interconnected problems: on the one hand, the self-destruction of Germany and Europe with the triumph of Nazism and the terrible war that succeeded to it; on the other hand, the estranged condition of exile in the land of capitalistic success and so-called "land of the free", the United States of America. The bourgeois world of old Europe had tragically declined and ended because of its irreconcilable contradictions, while the new consumer society in the United States had inaugurated a new form of annihilation of the individual. Faced with a false alternative, in *Minima moralia* Adorno tried to remain faithful to the impossible possibility of a just and good life: *Minima moralia* thus presents a "melancholy science" because the possibility of a "good life" has become unrealistic.

Even today, in a certain sense we find ourselves compelled to come to terms with a world that is declining: our consumerist way of life is destroying day by day the possibility of life itself, let alone the possibility of a good life. In the same way as in Adorno's years, also today false alternatives present themselves as the only ones possible. It is the firm conviction of the participants in this section of "Scenari" on Adorno that his intellectual legacy is in this sense still very much alive today and remains

an important source of conceptual tools to develop a critical understanding of the real at various levels: in fact, dialectical thinking is nothing else than the refusal of false alternatives and, at the same time, the deep understanding of the truth moment and content that is present in them. Dialectical thinking invites us to keep on understanding the real events in their radical negativity but without any resignation to their apparent absoluteness. Thus, in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic that tragically affected the whole world in 2020 and 2021, intensifying the effects of atomization and reification, we believe that a critical and dialectical philosophy like Adorno's has a lot to offer not only to philosophers but also (in general and potentially, so to speak) to the development of the critical consciousness of every human being, with its unique capacity (especially testified by such works as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Philosophy of New Music*, *Minima Moralia*, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*) to hold together an extremely rigorous, uncompromising and non-conciliatory critique of the existing reality, on the one hand, and a sincere but not at all naïf openness and hope for the possibility of a future emancipation and reconciliation, on the other hand. As Adorno wrote in *Negative Dialectics*: "Reconciliation would release the nonidentical, would rid it of coercion, including spiritualized coercion; it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them. Reconciliation would be the thought of the many as no longer inimical, a thought that is anathema to subjective reason". It is thus only the "powerless hope" of a possible reconciliation – as Adorno wrote in an aphorism of *Minima moralia* – "that allows us to draw a single breath" and to keep on thinking and writing, especially in these times where all former certainties are fading away and solitude and impotence seem to prevail.

With the present short monographic section of this issue of "Scenari", entitled *Theodor W. Adorno: Dialectics, Aesthetics, Anthropology, Society*, it is our aim to inquire into some fundamental but sometimes overlooked dimensions of Adorno's vast, multi-faceted and versatile thinking. In fact, our section of "Scenari" dedicated to Adorno starts with an original contribution by Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, entitled *Theodor W. Adorno und Arnold Gehlen: Politische Gegensätze und kulturkritisches Einverständnis*. Rehberg's article is aimed at inquiring into the interesting, complex and stimulating, but still little-known, relation between Adorno and Arnold Gehlen, one of the main figures in 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical anthropology, with whom Adorno had an intense (but still unpublished and thus still accessible only to a few scholars) correspondence during the 1960s that also led the two philosophers to organize several public debates on radio and television. Then, our section of "Scenari" on Adorno includes an original contribution by Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, entitled "*Jenseits der ästhetischen Immanenz*". *Natur und Gesellschaft in Adornos Theorie*

*des Ästhetischen*. Schweppenhäuser's article is aimed at investigating the fascinating dialectical constellation of nature and society in Adorno's philosophy, as especially exemplified by his theory of the aesthetic, understood as related to both the philosophy of art and the philosophical reflection on the specific and peculiar processes of the *aisthesis*. Finally, the present section of "Scenari" on Adorno ends with an original contribution by Rolando Vitali, entitled *Theory, Praxis and the Primacy of the Object: Some Remarks on Adorno's Conception of Dialectics*. Vitali's article is aimed at offering a renewed analysis of Adorno's negative-dialectical conception of the relationship between theory and praxis, with a special attention paid to the question of the so-called primacy of the object: the dimension of praxis in the context of Adorno's theory of philosophy and society is thus analysed in relation to its implication for the dialectical critique of epistemology.