

Theodor W. Adorno

The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture.

Edited with an introduction by Stephen Crook.

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Nearly everything about this book, from its title to its existence, is wrong. The first part of the title of this collection is innocuous enough since it merely repeats a portion of the title of the Adorno essay reproduced here—written in English in 1952-3 and published in the journal *Telos* in 1974, (though Stephen Crook, the editor of the collection, neglects to inform us that the essay first appeared in 1957 in the *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* under its complete title: "The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column; A Study in Secondary Superstition"). But the latter part of the title of the collection, *and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* is false *and* misleading, for there are no other essays here nor is what does appear here appropriately described as concerning the irrational in culture.

There are four items in this collection. The first is the above-mentioned 90-page essay. The second is a five-page extract (not an essay) with the heading 'Theses Against Occultism' from Adorno's *Minima Moralia; Reflections from Damaged Life*. The third is a piece more honestly described as a research grant proposal than an essay, entitled 'Research Project on Anti-Semitism: Idea of the Project,' originally published *anonymously* in 1941 in a volume of the house journal for the Institute of Social Research, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, and which Crook neglects to inform us appears there under the heading 'Notes on Institute Activities' after a three-page introduction signed by Max Horkheimer. Crook concedes that according to Rolf Wiggershaus (author of the monumental study *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*) the research project was 'drafted and re-drafted since 1939 by Adorno and Max Horkheimer, with inputs from Leo Lowenthal and Franz Neumann' (28). Presumably, had Adorno considered the piece to have been authored by himself, he would have allowed it to appear under his name (perhaps yet more telling is that the piece fails to appear in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*). The fourth and final item reprinted here is a nine-page piece entitled 'Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda' which Adorno prepared as a précis of his essay *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* and that itself only appeared posthumously in 1975 in volume nine of the *Gesammelte Schriften*. The précis here was previously published in 1946 as a contribution to Ernst Simmel's collection *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*. That the final item in this collection does not qualify as an essay—though perhaps a reader of this volume nonetheless should be grateful that *this* piece was in fact authored by Adorno—is apparent in Adorno's opening paragraph: 'Facts and interpretations, generally known to those familiar with psychoanalysis have been omitted. The goal has been, rather, to point out some findings, which, however preliminary and fragmentary, may suggest further psychoanalytic evaluation' (162).

Crook seems wholly unaware that Adorno elaborated—in one of his best-known writings, 'The Essay as Form'—a very precise philosophy of the essay, and that by Adorno's own criteria not one of the four writings reproduced here would qualify as such.

If we turn to Crook's introduction to the collection for an explanation of, and justification for, the items selected here for republication we encounter on both counts a tissue of muddleheadedness. Since two of the items collected here concern themselves with anti-Semitism, and one of these directly concerns itself with fascism, it is not encouraging to read the following by Crook: 'The account of Nazi anti-Semitism offered in the "Research Project" is curiously thin, superficial and unconvincing ... Paradoxical as it may seem, Adorno's most important insights into fascism and anti-Semitism arise out of the study of non-fascist societies' (5-6). If the editor of this collection believes this, and since his attempt to explicate the items reproduced here occurs only by way of extensive reference to the 'important insights' contained elsewhere in Adorno's writings, why should any rational reader continue with this collection?

Further, Crook complains that 'Adorno was blind to gender issues and to questions of sexuality. For all his insistence on the "libidinal" character of the tie between fascist leader and follower he does not explore the most obvious questions about the implication of gendered forms of eroticism in fascist politics' (21). Note first the qualification which admits that Adorno does in fact insist on the libidinal nature of fascist relations; note also that Crook gives no indication whatsoever as to what the 'most obvious questions' actually might be (I guess that is what it means to be obvious). If Adorno was 'blind' to questions of gender and sexuality (and I believe he was not), pray tell who in the 1940s had such vision?

Crook also complains that 'the spirit of Adorno's project for a critical theory of authoritarianism and its relationship with the wider culture requires a closer attention than he himself gave to the rhetorical, persuasive, dimension of authoritarian discourse' (20). This is a patently silly complaint to make in regard to the author of *The Jargon of Authenticity* and nearly all of whose writings display an unrelenting struggle against the authoritarian command of language. This complaint becomes quaintly ironic when one hears within Crook's own language the finely tuned hum of a well administered division of labor: 'More positively, an assessment must identify core themes in Adorno's analysis which continue to merit attention and to warrant further development' (18). Can't you hear the memo in the phrases 'must identify', 'continue to merit attention' and 'warrant further development'? And speaking of silly, when Crook writes that there is in Adorno's work 'a little that is frankly silly' (2) doesn't he owe us some indication of what he has in mind?

To turn to what is misleading in Crook's title on the irrational in culture one need only cite a statement that Crook himself quotes from Adorno's study of Martin Luther Thomas's radio addresses: 'Thomas' radio speeches offer an excellent example for one of the basic characteristics of fascist and anti-Semitic propaganda, namely, the entirely calculated, highly rationalistic nature of its irrationalism' (17). What's irrational about a culture with a thriving, productive barbarism? And what to make of this book? Kindling.

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