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REVIEW ESSAYS

THE PRINCIPLE OF HOPE. By Ernst Bloch. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986. 3 vols. Pp. xxxiv, 1420.

The problem of Ernst Bloch is only compounded today by the larger question of what will become of Marxist thought as Communism is overthrown, collapses, and/or transforms itself in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. After all, the century's greatest exponent of utopian hope devoted himself young and old to showing that all human longings worthy of the name point towards, indeed, lead to, a socialist society. For over twenty years he spoke not only generally of the dreamed-of classless society, but specifically of the one being created *there*, in the Soviet Union during the years of Stalin's ascendancy. And he completed his greatest work while a philosopher in its German satellite, although his final years were spent in West Germany. What then does his life's work mean *after* Communism? What can the intellectual structure he built upon Marxian theory mean to us today, as societies once inspired by Marxism have been so extraordinarily rapidly transformed from below?¹ Does the major work of Bloch, this painfully self-conscious harbinger of a new era who lived in East Germany between 1949 and 1961, indeed read, as in one reviewer's withering judgment "like the dusty tome of a darker age, the remnant of an age of faith long ago routed by the demonstrations of reason and the hardships of experience"²

Today, broader questions about Marxism's entwinement with and survival after Communism merge with two others, more specific to Bloch. Just what is the relationship between Bloch's theoretical search for the ultimate homeland and the grim but in the end astonishingly flimsy world within which he completed it? And second, why is it that he who sought to integrate all of Western culture into Marxism (by synthetically comprehending all its hopes, longings, wishes, images of gratification, and daytime dreams, from the most personal to the most public, as ultimately intending a classless society) finds his audience today primarily among theologians? These questions demand to be explored in relation to Bloch's major work, *The Principle of Hope*, the three volumes of which

1. When historians and political theorists reflect on the events of 1989, one of the stunning facts needing explanation is that with the exception of Ceaușescu no leadership opened fire on the people demonstrating against it. In other words, the peaceful revolutions had two sides, arguably the most remarkable of which is that Communism yielded power peacefully.

2. Leon Wieseltier, "Under the Spell of Paradise," *New York Times Book Review* (November 23, 1986), 44.

were published in East Berlin in 1954, 1955, and 1959, and which have recently been translated into English.

The intertwining of Bloch's philosophy of hope and Eastern European Communism,³ the possibility that the one can outlast the other only thanks to its absorption into religious thought — such questions seem light-years from what absorbed Bloch as he labored on his major work in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. His project, yielding a gargantuan study of well over a half million words, is actually rather straightforward. After introducing the subject by describing our tendency to daydream, he distinguishes this activity — as future-oriented — from nocturnal dreaming's preoccupation with our past, and in so doing develops a theoretical foundation for talking about hope based on his hallmark category of the not-yet-conscious. Then, sweeping across all of Western culture, he presents sketches from the histories of every conceivable area of such human forward-dawning. First are "wishful images in the mirror," which stretch from culturally manipulated efforts to become slim or beautiful, to fairy tales, to "the lure of travel," "the wishful images in the dance," the paradigmatic character of the theatre, the function of comedy, and to the wishes for a happy ending that pervade popular culture. The next part ("construction") presents explicit "outlines of a better world." It contains an extended survey of social utopias, discussions of medical, technological, architectural, and geographical utopias, as well as "wishful landscape" visions contained in opera, painting, literature, philosophy, and finally a discussion of leisure. The final part turns back in an individual direction, sketching "wishful images of the fulfilled moment," including lengthy discussions of the active and the contemplative life, *Faust*, *Don Quixote*, music, death, and religion.

All images of satisfaction, from the humblest to the grandest, flow into a single stream: the meaning of human history. The stream flows towards a better life which becomes historically realizable only in the contemporary world, as technological and social development make utopia possible. Our hopeful desire shows at every moment: wanting to lose weight, to travel, curling up with a good book, in paintings, in gardens, in our dreams of physical fitness, of being loved, even of aging and dying. Explorers pursued golden cities, fully humanized worlds, fountains of youth: art, literature, philosophy, and music remain driven by, and express to those who can decode their longing and its satisfaction, the same wishes. Framing all of these expressions of "the working, creating human being," sometimes consciously, more often not, is utopia: "Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland" (1375–1376).

Upon close study two things stand out immediately about *The Principle of Hope*. First is its encyclopedic character. As Eric Hobsbawm said in an early

3. Because of this, according to Wieseltier, "In its time, in our time, Bloch's hope is obscure." (*Idem.*)

review of the German edition, this makes any summary impractical beyond the driest oversimplification.

How many philosophical books, Marxist or otherwise, contain analyses of the relation between music and medieval scholastic logic, discussions of feminism as a variant of Utopia, of Don Juan, Don Quixote and Faust as myths, of Natural Law in the eighteenth century, the evolution of Rosicrucianism, the history of town planning, yoga, the baroque, Joachim of Fiore, fun-fairs, Zoroaster, the nature of dancing, tourism and the symbolism of the alchemists?⁴

That Hobsbawm's is a random and minutely partial list is shown by another, more recent reviewer's tactic of opening the book's second and third volumes at random:

On page 630, for instance (and this is typical), Bloch makes reference to Brand, Cagliostro, the "Grand Cophta," Balthasar Bekker's *Enchanted World*, Swedenborg, La Mettrie, the Golem Legend, Rasputin, the Rosicrucians, and Hallman's *Marianne*. On page 1186 (another one chosen randomly), he speaks about subjects as varied as Joseph Smith and Mormonism, Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*, Edward Meyer on Mohammed, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Mme. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, and the "occult journalism" of Rudolph Steiner.⁵

As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, in one of the few extended treatments of Bloch in English, Bloch's philosophy of hope offers a hermeneutic for absorbing the entirety of Western culture into Marxism.⁶ And so Bloch does: demonstrating this means nothing less than moving, without warning and with astonishing juxtapositions, into any and every area across the entire sweep of thought and culture.

Second, the reader cannot help but be struck by the goal of this kaleidoscopic display, and by the energy driving it. Bloch joins together the hundreds and thousands of wishes for a better life expressed in over 2,500 years of images, reflections, cultural works, and ideas to the hundreds and thousands of less explicit wishes, as well as complaints, as well as unconscious longings confusedly expressed, as well as dozens upon dozens of cultural expressions seemingly having nothing at all to do with the good life — structures of logic, for example, or crime stories, or magic. All are brought together, and thought together, under the claim — one could hardly call Bloch's method of *ex cathedra* assertion an argument — that all embody longings for a better life that is only possible in a different social world, and that this social world *is coming into being*. Before evaluating his sweeping claim, let us simply appreciate its integrative force, which Bloch would say he has not invented, but observed and reflected. All daily longings and wishes, all of human culture, are a single, decipherable, comprehensible *system of hope*. Throughout history (and now ever more ur-

4. Eric Hobsbawm, "The Principle of Hope," originally a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1961, in *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (New York, 1973), 141.

5. David Gross, "Bloch's Philosophy of Hope," *Telos* 75 (Spring, 1988), 190.

6. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, 1971).

gently because it is no longer technically impossible), this hoping animal the human being has (implicitly and sometimes explicitly) imagined and dreamed and foreshadowed and longed for a utopian state of existence.

Certainly the claim is stirring in its scope, the richness of its melody, its boldness of vision, its sheer force, and its intimate anchoring in the daily lives of ordinary people. It is a scheme of conceptualization so large, so all-inclusive, as to be dazzling. Not only because Bloch unifies so much on paper, but because he would give us conceptual tools for seeing, integrating, unifying *so much more*: the daily life of everyday, everywhere, all the time. Moreover, his keys for interpreting an entire civilization's all-but-infinite expressions are not cultural in the narrow sense, but rather are rigorously existential: daily life, its hopes, its hurts, shortcomings, its longings, is the source. Every behavior, work, idea he discusses is both (viewed from its spring) a way of *doing something about daily life* and (viewed from its goal) a harbinger of utopia.

And yet something is wrong. It appears in two problems that sympathetic readers may regard as external to the book's philosophical contribution: its overwhelming, often scarcely comprehensible character; and Bloch's frequent glowing references to the Soviet Union as the place where utopia is being constructed. Critics may note, but rarely dwell on, the first problem; after all, Bloch's stylistic quirks aside, it appears to be *our* problem as his readers. In an age of the closing American mind, Bloch's encyclopedic accomplishment only seems to reveal our own cultural weakness and overspecialization. We are simply not educated enough to keep up with him. Still, what does it say about a book that "no single individual knows the broad range of things Bloch did"? And what does it mean that "there are not more than a few dozen people around who can comprehend all that Bloch talks about"?⁷

Much of the book's second and third volumes is not only a torture to read, it is impossible to follow. But the reasons have less to do with how much Bloch knows or "the opacity, the homeliness, the clumsy neologic rush of his German," or even the turgid character common to ecstatic writing,⁸ than with the *way* he presents his claims. As I mentioned earlier, Bloch does not argue.⁹ Instead he asserts his point as if every intelligent person knows full well what he means ("It goes without saying"); instead of developing his general claim, presenting it clearly, and making it more precise, he heaps on case after case, not as proof or example of a more general point but as the point itself, allowing each analysis to illuminate the finer points of the other with no apparent concern for the larger claim. *The Principle of Hope* does not develop forwards, as argument, stated, explained, defended, exemplified but *sideways*, as inner dialogue with the world of Western culture, as aside, case in point, exegesis, story. It lacks paragraphs,

7. Gross, 190.

8. Wieseltier, 44.

9. The reviewer, David Gross, discerns, quite correctly, "a structure, a direction" behind Bloch's variety, and presents it with great clarity. See Gross, 191–196.

lacks a sense of discursive order, lacks a sense of inner hierarchization. We are presented at one and the same time, it seems, with the entire wealth of Western culture and Bloch's own subjective appropriation of it: as if we are at the mercy of a tiresome old man who cannot separate the point from its garb, who does not deign to argue it, who has a sense of the way but has lost the path. True, no one will understand all of this — because it is not *meant to be* understood. To criticize Bloch on this point is not to celebrate philistinism or to undervalue culture, but rather to say that *The Principle of Hope* is not only not written with the reader's understanding in mind, but that it seems rather to be written to be *not* understood. If Bloch persuades us, it seems, it is not by the force or clarity of his argument or the evidence behind it, but by the sheer massive weight of his references and his flagrant, and exclusivist, intimacy with them. In the end, we do not have hope communicated to us: we are pummelled by hope.

In short, it is not the reader's weakness that is demonstrated time and again by Bloch's all-but-incomprehensible inner dialogues, but a fundamental weakness of *The Principle of Hope* itself. Is he trying to overwhelm his readers, bludgeon them, or show off his vast learning? Is the force that drives the book onwards Bloch's chiliastic enthusiasm, or is it a kind of nervous, disordered energy? Or, we might ask, more to the philosophical point, why must argument be banished from *The Principle of Hope*? Why can't Bloch's hope submit itself to tests of evidence, of logic, of history? Why must hope be dumped on the reader, as *ex cathedra* assertion and encyclopedic tonnage?

If sympathetic readers don't know quite how to describe, or deal with, the turgid, bombastic, troubling, irritating, absurd aspects — to use some of the terms that have been employed — of *The Principle of Hope*, antagonists touch on them and then go straight to Bloch's politics. They are infuriated by the many positive references to the Soviet Union under Stalin. Thus one reviewer sees *The Principle of Hope* as “the most monumental apology for the Soviet Union that I have ever read.”¹⁰ Another points out that most of Bloch's quotations from Stalin in the East German edition have been omitted from the West German edition from which the English translation was made (as if Bloch was thereby hiding something), and further cites Bloch's hostility to the United States alongside glowing quotes about Soviet man. At stake, of course, and clearly reflected in *The Principle of Hope*, is Bloch's acceptance of Stalinism until the late 1950s.¹¹

10. Wieseltier, 44.

11. Bloch's subjective Marxism was tolerated during the early years of the GDR, and he was loyal to the Ulbricht regime, but by December 1956 no less a person than Ulbricht himself wrote an article attacking him. He rapidly fell from favor, his students were arrested, the journal he directed was taken out of his control, and he was briefly forbidden to publish. In West Germany during the building of the wall in 1961, he decided to stay in the FRG. See Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (New York, 1982), 11–17; Jan Robert Bloch, “How Can We Understand the Bends in the Upright Gait?” *New German Critique* 45 (Fall, 1988).

In a remarkable exploration of his father's relationship to Communism, Bloch's son Jan describes how he went beyond supporting Stalin against Hitler and regarded the Soviet Union as embodying the utopian dream of his philosophy. In so doing, he justified the Moscow Trials, accepted the Hitler-Stalin Pact, ignored the evidence of the bloody purge of his German exile colleagues in Stalin's Russia, had nothing to say about the workers' uprising of June 17, 1953, ignored the various witch hunts under Ulbricht—until he himself was singled out in 1956. Even then, forbidden to teach, Bloch remained loyal until 1961, when he moved to the West.

Bloch had an everlasting compassion for fictitious or long-dead historical victims. His heart, however, was so much with the new Jerusalem, with Lenin, that until our times he shut his eyes to the victims of the “red tsars” of Soviet reality, whose existence he himself had suspected early on. He never grasped the scope of the disaster and was not able to: just as love makes one blind.¹²

The underlying questions about both its stylistic/structural problems and its political commitments must be pursued precisely on the level on which Bloch's work presents itself, namely as *philosophical questions*. As Jack Zipes asks, “Do the expressionist tones and apocalyptic pronouncements in his writings conceal the inadequacy of his philosophical categories to come to terms with the actual political conditions of his times?”¹³ Jan Bloch also asks the question directly:

Does Bloch's conduct regarding the Stalin trials express the structure of his thought? . . . This question might open the philosophical task with respect to a systematic analysis of this structure. In critical comradeship, it would pose a sort of Kant-question: How is it possible that the revolutionary-utopian Humanum went along with inhuman despotism, the upright gait with the execution of the upright by the upright?¹⁴

To answer this we must begin with the evident fact that Bloch was simply wrong about the Soviet Union. It was not utopia-in-the-making. Anyone writing honestly about its great historical accomplishments in the 1940s and 1950s would have had equally to stress the destructive frenzy that accompanied them.¹⁵ In any case, rhetoric aside, Bolshevism's main historical task, it turns out, was not to build the new upright man but to industrialize backward Russia and to whip it into the modern world. The philosophical problem is not that Bloch made a political mistake—like so many intellectuals of his century, be they liberals, radicals, conservatives, or fascists, Bloch wrongly celebrated a brutal, corrupt,

12. Jan Bloch, 24.

13. Jack Zipes, “Ernst Bloch and the Obscenity of Hope,” *New German Critique* 45 (Spring, 1988), 7–8; David Gross also suggests that his philosophy may have been implicated in his political mistakes. See Gross, 197.

14. Jan Bloch, 15.

15. Which is to say, of course, that few contemporary writers of any political stripe wrote honestly about the Soviet Union. Where Stalinism's great accomplishments are stressed, its great catastrophe is glossed over, denied. Where the catastrophe is presented, Stalin's accomplishments are discounted. See my *The Dialectics of Disaster: A Preface to Hope* (London, 1983), chapter two.

exploitative regime as the promised land. It is on a philosophical level that the notion that utopia has become *realistic possibility and current project* undergirds *The Principle of Hope*. The question is, what can Bloch's celebrations of possibility mean if, as we now know to be true, utopia was not in sight when he wrote, and is today nowhere in sight? What becomes of the not-yet-conscious if no force is acting before us to make it conscious?

To answer these questions we must look at what Bloch means by "hoping beyond the day which has become" (9). To hope, most simply put, is to anticipate a better world in the future—the "still unbecome, still unachieved homeland" (9)—and to act to create that world, based on real tendencies in the present. Thus hope is world-improving expectation and action and it is rooted in the not-yet-conscious, which Bloch accordingly takes as his major philosophical contribution and terrain of study. Philosophy has ignored the future, and thus has lacked the tools for discerning how the utopian function operates in the "nearest nearness" of the present. But artistic genius grasps, and presents, material that is beyond "what has previously been consciously given, what has previously been explicated and finally formed in the world" (126). "Every great work of art thus still remains, except for its manifest character, impelled towards the latency of the other side, i.e. towards the contents of a future which had not yet appeared in its own time" (127).

The concrete meaning of latency, the key to Bloch's theory, is grasped fully only by Marxism, which has a genuine premonition of what is coming up. Marxism makes authentic, expectant emotion possible not by abstract utopianizing but by a "solely real realism which only is so because it is fully attuned to the tendency of what is actually real, to the objectively real possibility . . . and to the properties of reality which are themselves utopian, i.e., contain future" (145). Marxism thus contains a warm (eagerly expectant) stream and a cold (reality-based) stream. It grasps, and struggles on behalf of, the Novum, or genuinely new, contained in the Front, or the leading edge of historical movement. Bloch spurns "social-democratic automatism," which sees a world becoming better all by itself. On the contrary, human action is required, indeed, human will and "militant optimism." But to avoid Jacobinism or putschism depends on scientific analysis of what is possible, knowing that "the real itself has a heavy gait and seldom consists of wings" (208). "The very power and truth of Marxism consists in the fact that it has driven the cloud in our dreams further forward, but has not extinguished the pillar of fire in those dreams, rather strengthened it with concreteness" (146).

Bloch's stirring language and synthetic power may be dazzling to behold but they contain, and evade, fundamental problems. He brilliantly sketches an historical-materialist definition of hope that is useful beyond specifically Marxist political commitments. "But," his son asks, "does utopia need the eschatological horizon?"¹⁶ His work sweeps blindingly beyond what, it must be stressed, is a

16. Jan Bloch, 35.

specific *kind* of hope, different *in nature* from daydreaming or dressing up or imagining an afterlife or gardening or Goethe's image of Helen of Troy ("Stay awhile, thou art so fair."). Under the tent of this specific, secular, sociopolitical hope for democracy, equality, and social justice, surrounded and enriched by its halo of ages-old utopian longings, Bloch draws every conceivable hope humans have ever hoped. Admirable and bold as this may be to behold, Bloch's attempt to intermingle all hopes, and point them towards a future classless society (whether or not it is truly a-building anywhere in the world) is too all-encompassing. Indeed, it deforms hope by raising expectations beyond human possibility.

The main problem is *not* that he unites all conceivable ways of projecting a better individual and collective existence, with dozens of transfigurative and normative practices, with hundreds of different kinds of longings and wishes, with the form and content of all art, in a unifying grand vision. This is certainly plausible, if the tent under which they are gathered is generous enough to give each type, form, and mode its due, and critically to explore and express what they all genuinely have in common. But that tent would not be political, nor would it be the tent of action. There would be much that is strictly individual in it (daydreams of love, for example), and much that is deeply civilizational (images of the kind of integral gratification that is intrinsically limited by all reality principles¹⁷), and much that is totally unrealizable (images of everlasting life, for example). What all these forms of hope have in common is *not* a not-yet-conscious premonition of life under socialism, let alone state socialism in the Soviet Union as Bloch was writing. More to the point, Bloch is surely wrong to claim that "every act of anticipation identifies itself to the utopian function" (150). Many of the expressions of hope catalogued by Bloch are too extensive to be encompassed by *any* sociopolitical order; indeed, many of them imply no world-improving sociopolitical action. Many of the hopes Bloch presents do not even imply action, and are not even anticipation, but are rather poignant longing for the unattainable (a return to youth, for example). How much of longing remains passive, resigned to not having one's object in this life, indeed is hopeless?

Certainly Bloch's hermeneutic invites us to see the most pained and resigned, indeed, manipulated longings (like the desire to become thin or beautiful) as unconsciously intending utopia. This indeed is how he reads the history of Christianity and Judaism: properly understood, their kingdom is a here-and-now realm. But even if this specific claim can be effectively argued — and Bloch only begins to do this — what are we to make of those aspects of religion that reach beyond any possible social order? It is simply an unfounded assertion to see all hopes as being convertible to sociopolitical purpose, to action. And such eschatological hoping — well beyond Bloch's Marxist insistence on real-world

17. Herbert Marcuse, in *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, 1954), seeks to distinguish between the kinds of repressions necessary to civilization as such and those characteristic of societies governed by regimes of scarcity (whether these repressions are inherent in scarcity or artificially maintained).

possibility as central to hope today — is bound to be shattered when faced with any reality, let alone Stalinist reality.

So hopes must be interpreted, in a structured, disciplined analysis. Some may be pointed towards real-world projects, some not. But how do we know what to discard in previous hopes, and how to discard them? What to maintain and how? And how does this change in different historical periods, and why? For Bloch hope is everywhere and always of a single piece, singing a single song if we only know how to interpret it. But he does not teach us how to interpret it. Moreover, Bloch's subjective map of hope everywhere leans on an objective belief that the world is headed homeward and that our subjective longings produce objective results. Does hope-activity become progressively more active and secular over time, progressively less individual and more social? Strange to say, hope does not seem to have a history, properly speaking. With Marx it becomes real; until then, it was not. What, specifically, is the forward-dawning social vision that hope expresses? Does that vision itself develop historically? How, and why? What is its interaction with the concrete fruits of human social struggles — for example, the abolition of slavery, the end of colonialism, the advent of democracy?

These questions bring us to the fundamental philosophical weakness of Bloch's conception of hope. As we have seen, Bloch himself would agree that answering such questions requires more than a catalogue of subjective hopes. He is talking about a subjective drive united with the objective tendency of the world. "Reason cannot blossom without hope, hope cannot speak without reason," he says, in a statement that has become famous. He adds: "both [are] in Marxist unity — no other science has any future, no other future any science" (1367). If so, we can ask Bloch, are indeed, required to ask him: what is the reason for his hope? The problem is that *The Principle of Hope* does not argue the reason for his hope. Rather than, as he says, using science to study the basis for hope, Bloch *assumes* it. With warrant, he would no doubt say: his entire analysis assumes that Marxism is coming-true in the world. *The Principle of Hope* turns on two interconnected thoughts, the one considerably longer than the other: "The very profusion of human imagination, together with its correlate in the world (once imagination becomes informed and concrete), cannot possibly be explored and inventoried other than through utopian function; *any more than it can be tested without dialectical materialism*" (15; my emphasis). It is worth noting that he does *not* test it, and that he thinks not in terms of "historical materialism" but "dialectical materialism." In other words, Marxism-Leninism as interpreted by Stalin furnishes his reality-test and basis, and Bloch takes his task as being to develop the subjective side of the picture. This side presupposes its reason, its coming-true in the world at every moment — as an article of faith.

To ask what is the reason of hope is to ask about its real-world basis, about actual historical tendencies of social and economic and political life. But we need not insist that Bloch leave his chosen terrain, the subjective side, to undertake political studies. The question can be approached *through* the subjective. For

example, Bloch operates with an inadequately specified concept of the not-yet-conscious. It is a wonderfully appealing notion that we think and dream and imagine in forward-dawning ways, but how are genuinely possible perceptions distinguished from those that are only formally possible? Bloch's general discussion of Marxism as a tendency-science begins this distinction, but he does not apply this to his concrete studies of hopeful consciousness. Not yet conscious of what, we may ask? How is any specific consciousness validated, and how do we know it corresponds to genuine tendencies of the real world? Similarly, Bloch assumes a teleological view of human development as forever forward-dawning and apparently being driven by its possibilities. Are the positive capabilities alone doing the driving (which is what Bloch, in a non-Marxist Aristotelian turn, seems to be suggesting)? If so, how do we explain the catastrophic character of so much of the twentieth-century history? How does he account for the many negative, destructive, brutal, cruel drives of everyday life and contemporary history? Although answering this is urgent within the parameters of his historical-materialist hope, according to the notion of a union of the "pillar of fire" with concrete reality, Bloch neither answers nor asks these questions.

Writing in exile from Nazism, then under Stalin, then going westward when the watchtowers of the Berlin Wall were constructed, Bloch assumes that there is abundant reason to hope, that Marxism has amply demonstrated this, and that no such questions need to be posed. Yet if we follow his own logic and seek to unite warm streams and cold, vision and reality, hope and reason, then certainly it was absurd to speak of hope without confronting the century's crisis of hope, including Nazism and Stalinism. It is astonishing that Bloch could write *The Principle of Hope* without really paying heed to the cold stream of reality, its graveyards of hope. After all, Bloch sought to avoid "banal, automatic-progress optimism" and instead to root hope in "real, present tendencies." But *The Principle of Hope* hides from every negative tendency of the age except for American capitalist culture (which is the book's great adversary). As Jan Bloch says, "In the ontological claim to fulfillment at the end of man's journey, the problem of the Stalinist darkness and the question of the concrete paths to the natural home of man (*menschliche Naturheimat*) is lost."¹⁸

No hope without reason: Bloch's fellow German-Jewish Marxist exiles Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse found it necessary to rethink and expand their starting points in response to the century's catastrophe of hope. Indeed, their entire work was an exploration of the many levels of the crisis, including how to think about it. Bloch alone chose to write a study of hope — to accentuate the positive rather than plumb the negative. Bloch alone buried his head in the sand and hid from the crisis. For example, he treats fascism as a simple regression, a response by the "nonsynchronous" or sociohistorically obsolescent German lower-middle class. To treat its hysterical politics as the

18. Jan Bloch, 33.

response of an obsolescent social class is brilliant and useful, but misses the utter contemporaneity of fascism. In contrast, the members of the Frankfurt School sought to explain fascism in terms of contradictions and drives rooted in the present, as a response *to* the present by those driven politically mad by it. Bloch's sense of the irrationality of Nazism is more cheerful: when all social groups finally live at the same historical "now," such brutalities will seemingly vanish.¹⁹

Even after leaving East Germany Bloch never confronted the brutality and irrationality of Communism. Indeed, "he persisted even after the watchtowers [in Berlin], regardless of all historical experience, in Marxism and the dream of the absolute, in the same gait and plan of attack, without seriously reflecting on the conditions that made him leave."²⁰ His subsequent reflections on the shortcomings of Soviet Communism are not unintelligent;²¹ the problem, however, is that he never rethinks, or even questions, his basic concepts.

The Principle of Hope, then, is a hope which refuses to confront its own internal crisis. As Jan Bloch says, "the philosophy of hope did not let itself be disturbed and did not want to let itself be disturbed."²² Written in a world in ruins, a German world, a Jewish world, a Marxist world, a world of Western civilization, *The Principle of Hope* nervously, even feverishly in the style of Serenus Zeitblom, Thomas Mann's narrator of *Doctor Faustus* (his book about the catastrophe), ignores all these catastrophes and reaffirms German culture, Jewish messianic ethics, Marxism, and Western culture. No disaster appears, nothing but the highest of hopes, as if nothing terribly serious has happened. This denial can be understood as Bloch's response to the crisis: hopes soaring so high and so wide as to be beyond earthly containment, yet calling for practical, real fulfillment in a world which cruelly mocks them.

I would suggest that this is why Bloch's hope is never argued. It cannot be, it no longer corresponds to the real world. History has made it, alas, into a purely subjective hope, unmediated by reality. As such, it can only be asserted, accepted on faith or authority, not validated. Moreover, as concrete anticipation of the real tendency towards a future classless society, Marxism has long since been unable to present its reasons. I would suggest that this is why Bloch bludgeons us with his hope and overwhelms us with his learning, rather than treating his reader with — shall I say it? — democratic respect. Sartre once splendidly argued that the future classless society was foreshadowed in the relationship of mutual respect between author and reader (and this at a time when Sartre was expressing his first rush of political hope and activism, in postwar France).²³ In contrast, it is strikingly clear that Bloch treats his readers without respect.

19. See *The Dialectics of Disaster*, chapter one.

20. Jan Bloch, 37.

21. See Michael Landmann, "Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korcula, 1968," *Telos* 25 (Fall, 1975).

22. Jan Bloch, 33.

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?* (New York, 1949); this is discussed at length in my *Jean-Paul Sartre—Philosophy in the World* (London, 1980), 122–141.

And I would also suggest that this is why Bloch is of more interest to religious thinkers than to students of the tendencies of the twentieth century and their possibilities (both disastrous and utopian). Bloch's thought is ultimately an all-inclusive faith in the dawning of a better world, one neither demonstrated nor demonstrable, drawing much of its sustenance from religion. It expresses this faith by taking totally seriously—indeed, more than many religious thinkers—the hope bubbling up in the Jewish and Christian Bibles. But this is, in Bloch, we now know, as in religion, a hope without reason.

But is his defeat, expressed so seemingly triumphantly, the defeat of hope itself? The great sorting-out of Bloch's lifework in order, in his son's words, "to liberate the philosophical gold" from its debris, leads us back to his starting point: "to be human really means to have utopias."²⁴ Any one who, as Bloch says, would open windows rather than blow soap bubbles, must see, as a serious utopian thinker or exponent of radical social change, that there are indeed marvelous possibilities lying within our existing world. But they exist alongside, and intertwined with, catastrophically destructive ones, and these stand alongside other negative tendencies. Moreover, it goes without saying that not all changes are positive, that some tendencies seeking to perpetuate the social world we live in are humanly preferable to those entailing change. For every "forward-dawning" tendency there are others less promising, more negative, as well as impassive, as well as tendencies of no clear harm or benefit. Whether automatically or through human intention, history does not seem to be gathering into itself, and moving towards the fulfillment of, the deepest kinds of human hope.

Do we then abandon hope? This must have been the suppressed question roiling beneath the surface of *The Principle of Hope*, the tension that, suppressed, so undermined Bloch's project. Indeed, he apparently saw no alternative to intensifying his hopes, widening their claims, refusing critically to explore them, overwhelming his readers with them. But there is an alternative: a chastened hope, one that is humbler, more tentative, narrowed, even if just as profoundly (but now critically) connected to some of humanity's deepest longings and visions. Realistic hope, grounded in the world we live in even if inspired by utopia, demands seeing how narrowly the window is open, how difficult and dangerous are the currents blowing in. At the same time, emancipatory struggles, of many different sorts, have continued, will continue, and sometimes will prevail. Sociopolitical action, sometimes conscious, sometimes spontaneous, can indeed make a difference about which possibilities win out, but no one, certainly no party, has the right to talk about which are "going to" prevail. Even if Marxism retains its analytical power, and can still help us to understand history, it is not allied to any force capable of bringing about utopia.

Socialism may still be a meaningful vision for some, but there is no longer any reason to consider it "true," let alone the wave of the future. Nor to present

24. Quoted by Jan Bloch, 33.

(as Bloch does so often) Platonic incantations about the ideal society which begin with “socialism is.” There is no reason to anticipate that a single emancipatory tendency, or even a constellation of emancipatory tendencies, will become dominant and win the day, even though some such unity arguably may be an admirable goal to hope and work for. Those who wish to make utopia (Which utopia? How will it be organized?) the meaning of history will wish to, and be able to, read it in the paths to the present. They will find many movements, scattered across time, from which to gain inspiration, and may even be able to discern, among other historical patterns, patterns of cumulatively increasing human dignity. Is a trend towards democracy one such pattern taking clearer shape? It does seem to be one genuine possibility, alongside others that are less heartening. Human beings do seem increasingly to demand national self-determination and liberal democracy. Ironically enough for Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope*, some of the most powerful evidence for such a hopeful pattern is offered by the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe.

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GESCHICHTSSCHREIBUNG ZWISCHEN AUFKLÄRUNG UND HISTORISMUS. Johannes von Müller and Friedrich Christoph Schlosser. By Michael Gottlob. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989. Pp. 359.

German historiography has been one of the last bastions to resist the so-called “linguistic turn.” But grudgingly, in part because of writers like Jörn Rüsen, Hans Michael Baumgartner, Hans Robert Jauss, and Ursula Becher, concerns about language, discourse, and emplotment are beginning to be incorporated into historiographical analyses.¹ Whether new avenues of research and interpretation have been automatically opened up by these first forays into virgin terrain is still questionable. Michael Gottlob’s recently published dissertation, *Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Aufklärung und Historismus*, offers us a case in

1. For representative works dealing with narration and representation see: Jörn Rüsen, “Wie kann man Geschichte vernünftig erzählen? Über das Verhältnis von Narrativität und Theoriegebrauch in der Geschichtswissenschaft,” in *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte: Beiträge zur Historik*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Thomas Nipperdey (Munich, 1980), III; Hans Michael Baumgartner, *Kontinuität und Geschichte: Zur Kritik und Metakritik der historischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt, 1972); Hans Robert Jauss, “Der Gebrauch der Fiktion im Formen der Anschauung und Darstellung der Geschichte,” *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung, Beiträge zur Historik*, ed. R. Koselleck, H. Lutz, and J. Rüsen (Munich, 1982), IV; Ursula A. J. Becher, “August Ludwig Schölzer: Analyse eines historischen Diskurses,” *Aufklärung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. H. E. Bödeker, G. Iggers, K. Knudsen, and P. Reill (Göttingen, 1986).