

**Introduction: The
Privatization of Hope
and the Crisis of Negation**

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When this volume was first conceived shortly before the onset of the Second Great Crash in 2007–8, the title *The Privatization of Hope* was intended as a way of showing what had changed since the publication of Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* some fifty years earlier. I wanted to take a look at the way in which concepts of hope, utopia, liberation, fulfillment, transcendence, and all of the other things which contribute to what Bloch called the “warm stream” of human history had become subsumed under the “cold stream” of economic reductionism in its consumer-capitalist form. Happiness and optimism were now counted in cold hard cash and commodities. People were feeling happy about their ability to spend on the basis of their constantly rising house prices and low interest rates. Bingeing had become the international pursuit of pleasure by the wealthy West, encouraged by an economic system which saw it as the only way to maintain itself against the tendency of profit rates to fall in a capitalist economy. Expansion and growth at no cost to people or planet were the totems of the giant noughties Ponzi scheme and concerns about the “externalities”—from global environmental considerations to the Dickensian working conditions in India and China—were either denied *in toto* or pushed to one side as insoluble or, in any case, considered part of the price which had to be paid for economic advance. Living for the day had become the motto of society, and any sense that we were involved in any kind of process or dynamic that would lead to something different, something new, something better had

all but disappeared. Francis Fukuyama had proclaimed the end of history in 1989, and despite our objections to it on various grounds, usually ideological, everyone largely accepted that he was right. And for some fifteen years he was right. That particular end of history itself ended in 2008, however, but we have not yet found a new beginning. We are in a Gramscian interregnum in which the old world of the absolute hegemony of capitalism and its ideology is dying, but a new world, or even the semblance of a new world, has not yet emerged to replace it. What is important with Bloch's work now has therefore changed since the first conception of this book. Whereas once it was conceived as a counterblast to the shimmering illusions of the bright satanic malls, now it has become a way of maintaining the "principle of hope" against a growing darkness and uncertainty.

As the crisis has advanced, it has become clear that what was at stake was not only fundamental economic stability but also the political and ideological hegemony of the postwar social settlement itself. Class reappeared on the scene as a political determinant, and the cynical response to David Cameron's contention that "we are all in this together" was boosted by the almost daily revelations about corruption, manipulation, and distortion in the leading echelons of the state apparatus and ruling social groups. Politicians were seen to be feathering their own nests as much as the leading bankers; the press and wider media were seen to be in cahoots with the police and security services; and social inequality and disparity of wealth distribution became clear for all to see. In other words, there had come about an unmasking of the whole political and economic system of ideological control that had prevailed since 1945. The year 2008 was late capitalism's Berlin Wall moment.

As clear as it always was that capitalism is essentially a system of labor exploitation and generalized commodity production—even its more intelligent supporters are aware of that—it also became increasingly impossible to imagine anything beyond the confines of a capitalist order, even one in serious decline. Alain Badiou calls this a "crisis of negation," in which many of the apparent certainties about the way in which the breakdown of social order almost automatically leads to new social alternatives have become severely dislocated. Of course it can be argued that this belief was always naive, unfounded, or—as Henk de Berg argues in this volume—downright dangerous, but in the context

of the work of Ernst Bloch, the apparent loss of hope for change or improvement seems to have become a self-fulfilling and debilitating condition. As is so often said these days, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. Our thoughts now tend toward the apocalyptic not as the first breath of something new, as Bloch posited it, but as the final gasp of something old.

And yet when Ernst Bloch wrote his *Principle of Hope* he was, as a Jew, Marxist, and atheist intellectual in exile from Nazi Germany, able to maintain a commitment to hope in the darkest of hours. Indeed the first version of *The Principle of Hope* was entitled *Dreams of a Better Life*. It was only the publishers who prevented the use of that title. In many ways it was probably a good thing that they did so, because the title Bloch actually arrived at shows quite clearly that what is at stake is not simply the daydream of how things could be better but the underlying *principle* of how things could be made better and how hope functions in the world as a real latent force. Hope as a principle demonstrates that it is something linked not just to optimism but to the tendencies present in a material world that is constantly in flux.

The chapters in this book demonstrate quite clearly how Bloch saw the world as an experiment. Indeed, his last book was called *Experimentum Mundi* (1975). It begins: "I am. But I do not have myself as yet. We still do not know in any way what we are and too much is full of something that is missing."¹ Bloch was a Marxist process philosopher. For him, there could be no end to history because history itself is the process of the arrival at an autopoietically constructed truth of what it is to be human in the world.

Hope, for Bloch, was the way in which our desire to fill in the gaps and to find something that is missing took shape. But this sense of something missing, of desire, and of hope was not something which had a quasimystical character. For Bloch it started with simple physical material hunger, and yet he maintained a commitment to a dialectical understanding of the unfolding of human interaction with these material forces that give rise to desire and consequently to hope. Thus, while a materialist, he also saw that the route from hunger to hope had taken humanity on a series of ideological and theological byways. These byways were not always, however, blind alleys or dead ends. Instead he searched in them for what was valuable and productive within them.

The gamut of his interests ran from Hegel to Karl May (everything else is just an impure mixture of the two, he once said)² via religion, myth, fairy tales, and ideology. The whole of *The Principle of Hope* is thus not just a listing of the ways in which we exercise hope but an analysis of the ways in which hope can be achieved in the real, material world so that our hunger can lead us back home via hope and belief. In this sense he borrowed his categories not only from Marx but also from Aristotle, Hegel, Avicenna, Kant, Spinoza, Schelling, and indeed all those philosophers dealing with the complex and dialectical relationship between the human being and the material world. For him the human being and matter were one and the same thing. That we had not found the way home yet was down to the continuing disjuncture between what he called the *kata to dynaton* and *dynámei on*, between what is possible and what might become possible. Bloch is therefore in that group of philosophers who believe that a genuine and authentic humanity has not yet emerged.

The watchword of much of his thought can therefore also be encapsulated in the idea of the “Not Yet.”³ The process that would take us from a static concept of being to one of becoming and of coming to possess ourselves was at base a material one, but it was also one in which our desires, ideas, hopes, and dreams fulfilled a fundamentally important material function in overcoming the “ontology of the Not Yet.”⁴ Bloch constantly distinguished between two forms of hope, namely, the objective possibility of hope on the one hand and the always present hope and aspirations of the *noch-nicht-gewordene Mensch* [the human becoming] on the other. As he puts it in his Tübingen lectures: “Matter can be defined in the following way: According to Aristotle’s definition it is at one and the same time that which is possible [*das Nach-Möglichkeit-Seiende (kata to dynaton)*], in other words that which can appear in history as determined by historical-materialist conditions, as well as that which may become possible [*das In-Möglichkeit-Seiende (dynámei on)*], or the correlate of the objectively real possibility of that which is. Matter is the substrata of possibility within the dialectical process.”⁵

His attempt to marry the objective and the subjective carried within it both a sober recognition of real-existing possibility as well as the eternal drive of a quasitranscendental vitalism, an innate and irrepressible hope seeking constantly to replicate itself and drive the individual, and

thus—in dialectical interpenetration—economy and society, forward. His philosophical efforts were wedded to the human drive, and he was clearly convinced that simply being able to recite the whole of Marx's *Capital* would never move anyone to anything. He was a philosopher who took the Marxist interpretation of the objective development of the economy toward socialization and thus socialism/communism as read and yet wanted to inject the warm stream of human-centered life force into the cold stream of that objective trend and analysis.

The Principle of Hope

The question now—half a century after the first full publication of *The Principle of Hope* and long after the apparent death of the grand narrative of progress—is whether hope can still exist in anything other than an atomized, desocialized, and privatized form. Is the tragedy of late capitalism actually that culturally it has prevented itself from becoming “late,” precisely because it has reduced human hope to the lowest common denominator, whilst leaving those of us who would rebel against this apparently denuded and degraded world sighing the powerless quasireligious sigh of the unoppressed creature in a nonhostile world? Have we reached a stage of pure *kata to dynaton* with a *dynámei on* that has lost its driving power? In other words, what has happened to Bloch's “invariant of direction”: that drive toward human freedom which, though often suppressed, he claimed was always present? It could be argued that hope generally resides now in individual liberation through money or fame or both. The dreams of a better world are dreams of a better world for oneself or one's family. It is not just socialism which appears to have died but the very concept of the social itself.

In the past few years, and in step with the economic crisis, we have seen more traditional hopeful movements toward the overthrowing of despotic regimes which at least appear to give some hope for a revival of the chance of fundamental change. The Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia and spread throughout the Middle East and is still in its early stages, reminded us of the euphoria of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But, just as in 1989, the long-term outcome is open to question and, as with all revolutions, at the moment it appears to have been hijacked by forces that the original revolutionaries would not have sup-

ported. Equally, those who overthrow their old leaders today may well find that the new ones are not quite as magnanimous and liberal in victory as they thought they might be.

Despite an apparent turn to a pragmatic accommodation with real existing capitalism, it will be argued here that in philosophical terms Bloch's time might now have finally arrived. As Johan Siebers puts it here in his chapter, this is because "firstly, the idea of truth is recovering from its anesthetic; secondly, religion is back in philosophical discourse, as well as in the workings of geopolitics; and thirdly, questions surrounding the relation of human beings to the rest of nature are urgent." All of these were of central concern to Bloch and, as Loren Goldner claimed in a very perspicacious review of the English version of *The Principle of Hope*, published in 1986, "he [Bloch] still remains more a contemporary of the 21st century."⁶

Bloch was above all a Marxist philosopher who based himself in a Hegelian understanding of Marxism but who sought to reinvigorate a Hegelianism which did not simply present his thought as a dualistic teleology of spirit and nature. To put it in very current terms, he prefigures some of the thinking around contemporary continental thinkers in that he sees philosophy not as something separate from "the Real," or the "*an-sich*," but as a contingent part of it, with necessity playing only a secondary and indeed contingent role. Indeed I would argue that Bloch presents what might be called a *Metaphysics of Contingency*, that is, a philosophy that, though based in contingent materialism, sees matter itself as an unfinished category and carries within it a nonreal drive which contributes to and, as Catherine Moir argues here, creates its own entelechy. Quentin Meillassoux, to take the most prominent contemporary example of "speculative materialism," attempts to create an understanding of the absolute which is both nonmetaphysical and nontranscendental: a "*speculative form of the rational* that would no longer be a *metaphysical reason*."⁷ In other words it is an attempt to create a justification for facticity that does not rely on an *in-itself* beyond that which is. Again, Bloch already attempted to do this by talking of "transcending without transcendence."⁸

We might explain this link between contingency and speculative process by paraphrasing Marx's statement in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* to say that "*contingent events* make history, but they do not make it just as they

please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁹ By stating that every contingent point in history is its own telos, but one conditioned both by its own making as well as its determining circumstances, rather than being a part of some preexisting plan (religious or political-philosophical), Bloch sought to rescue agency and human desire from the dogmatists of determinism whilst defending Marxism against the dogmatists of idealist relativism. Things are neither fully determined nor fully contingent but a dialectical mixture of the two.

We might therefore say that he was a speculative materialist long before the term became adopted in current continental thinking. Indeed, Habermas called Bloch a speculative materialist and attached the label “the Marxist Schelling” to him as early as 1960.¹⁰ Catherine Moir sets out the ways in which Bloch approached the question of matter and the problem of materialism and speculation throughout his work, in particular in his *Das Materialismusproblem, seine Geschichte und Substanz*, and draws some very useful parallels between the work Bloch undertook in the 1930s and that which is going on now. For him, building on Hegel, contingent reality may well be the starting point, but it soon falls away and becomes necessary to the process of the emergence of new possibilities. In Bloch’s system of the Not Yet, contingency represents a *kata to dynaton* that carries with it its own *dynámei on*. By arguing for an understanding of history as process in this way, Bloch attempted to rescue both Marx and Hegel from the accusation of teleological thinking.

The only thing that is truly transcendent about humanity, Bloch says, is our desire to transcend. This can take many forms but, as Rainer Zimmermann sets out in his chapter, hope has to be learned as well. It does not just come about automatically, but is the product of experience, failure, and resistance to an everyday acceptance of reality. Bloch called this *docta spes* or educated hope. Hope therefore learns, but it also teaches as well as constitutes its own conditions. It is also the means by which we reach beyond pessimistic nihilism to give purpose to an existence which is objectively purposeless in any transcendental sense. As Bloch puts it, our nature as *homo faber* is what transforms “nature perceived as utterly purpose-free” (*POH*, 1130–31) to create a sort of optimistic nihilism in which hope is the wave and particle that carries us forward. Nietzsche contended that existence is fundamentally based in

the recognition (conscious or not) that “in some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of “world history”—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die (amended).”¹¹ However, it is this very pessimistic bleakness which also gives rise to hope. Hope is not happiness and bland optimism. Hope is what gives us strength in the face of the knowledge of entropy and death, both of the individual—what Bloch calls the greatest of all antiutopias—and of the universe as a whole. It is for this reason that hope plays such an important role in religious belief, of course. Any visit to a religious ceremony will remind one that it is there to hold a light against the darkness. Bloch tried to bridge the gap between the external, nonnecessary facticity of our existence and the internal importance which we give it in the process of dealing with our presence in the world. As he puts it: “*True genesis is not at the beginning but at the end*, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e., grasp their roots. But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts” (*POH*, 1376). The point of both philosophy and social action is to overcome dualisms of all kinds so that we might attain the “naturalization of man and the humanization of nature.” All this means that in *The Principle of Hope* consciousness comes to the fore not as something secondary to being but as a fundamental part of it. As Loren Goldner highlights, *The Principle of Hope* “exists as a long footnote to Marx’s remark that ‘humanity has long possessed a dream which it must only possess in consciousness to possess it in reality.’”¹² This would be achieved, as Bloch saw it, only by human activity in harnessing the power of nature around us.

In Vincent Geoghegan’s chapter we are shown how mastery of nature—rather than its exploitation—was at the center of Bloch’s concerns, placing him firmly on the side of modernity and the development of technology in order to overcome our physical limitations. In this, Geoghegan argues, Bloch must be differentiated from Adorno and Horkheimer who, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, saw technological utopias as the dark side of the human drive to exploitation.¹³ Hope married to class struggle and scientific progress were the means by which we could transcend our

material roots and speculate about what might be beyond the finitude of both our awareness as a species, as well as our given natural circumstances. In their contribution Francesca Vidal and Welf Schröter show how Bloch's ideas on the ways in which technology can be harnessed for humanity are prevented from becoming real by the ways in which capitalism takes the work that is liberated and turns it into more exploitation for those in work and a greater number out of work. For those in work, at least in the advanced economies, technology has not necessarily liberated them to become more creative but has meant rather that work as unwelcome rather than productive labor has spread into the private sphere so that the boundaries between work, pleasure, and leisure have become eroded.

In the knowledge that, for a great many people in the world, the fetters of being merely a factor of production in whatever economic system prevailed would never be enough to satisfy their desires, Bloch realized that class struggle was not something that could be rejected in favor of some sort of idealistic adherence to an abstract and antipolitical concept of progress, freedom, and liberty. Technology could only liberate in harness with a political struggle to take social control over the labor process. As Bloch puts it in *Atheism in Christianity*, "One should not muzzle the ox that treads the corn, however necessary the drivers may find it to do so, both inwardly and outwardly. Especially when the ox has ceased to be an ox" (2). There are shades of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* here, but there is also the same understanding of the power of class struggle within historical change. Even if people were not aware of their desires or understood them in religious or consumerist terms, with dreams of heaven or a lottery win in the place of social change, the sublimated desire could not help but rear its beautiful head in various preilluminations [*Vorscheine*] and daydreams. Vidal and Schröter show that this is still the case in the most advanced of computerized workplaces.

Caitríona Ní Dhúill argues in her chapter that you don't have to be a Lacanian (although it may help) to realize that desire is born of a sense of lack as well as the lack of a lack. Her chapter deals with an aspect of utopia that is often neglected, namely, that of the position of women. She deals centrally with the way in which traditional patriarchal philosophy sees woman as a vessel for reproduction and often extends this biological fact into a social metaphor. She does not exempt Bloch from

this critique, but she does point out that his dialectical understanding of utopia also has implications for feminism and the role of women in a future society which he saw as “eternally female” (*POH*, 1375). For example, when advising an artist friend on how to paint the possibility of revolution under fascism, Brecht said, “Paint a pregnant woman.”¹⁴ The trope that the present is always pregnant with the future has, of course, been a commonplace since at least Plato. In this interregnum period, however, we are living with a kind of phantom pregnancy. It is increasingly difficult to see what this historical period will give birth to, hence the sense of a lack of direction and the feeling that the future of humanity has gone missing. Hence also the concentration on one’s own private happiness or one’s own private paranoia.¹⁵

As both Bloch and Brecht claim, however, for most human beings the sense that “something’s missing” is both constitutive and provocative. This is why many of the contributions here deal not primarily with political questions but those of hope, faith, negation, negativity, and the void. Bloch was a philosopher firmly rooted in the continental and German idealist tradition, in which speculation about ontological questions plays a primary role and in which epistemological questions about precisely what we can know about our being and becoming are subordinated or, indeed, integrated into our being itself. This helps to explain why Bloch is virtually unknown today — particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world — despite the fact that many of his concepts have found their way into everyday German language. Phrases like *der aufrechte Gang* [the upright gait], concrete utopia, the darkness of the lived moment, the spirit of utopia, and, above all, the principle of hope appear frequently in journalistic articles without any hint of where they might come from or what their explosive content might actually be. Another reason is that much of Bloch’s more complex philosophical work, particularly on materialism, has not been translated into English (more exists in Spanish because of his influence in the 1960s and 1970s on liberation theology). In turn this is partly because Bloch’s writing style is very difficult terrain at times. David Miller maintains that rather than being frustrated at the way Bloch writes, it is necessary to recognize that his style is itself one of experimentation, both with his own ideas and with those of his readers. Bloch adhered to the idea that thinking was about transgressing, and in order to convey that transgression it was necessary to write in a way

that did not fit in with the traditional academic disciplines and that certainly doesn't lend itself to the analytic tradition. We might also say that Bloch's central interest in music as the birthplace of hope—rather than tragedy—means that to read Bloch, one has to read it with a musical ear. Just as it is necessary to give oneself over to music, then it is sometimes necessary to give oneself over to Bloch's writing. Over the coming years translations of Bloch's remaining works not yet available in English will be published by Peter Thompson, Cat Moir, and Johan Siebers with Brill publishers.¹⁶ Moreover, it is to be hoped that this volume will contribute to increased interest in a philosopher who has until now been largely neglected in the English-speaking world but who has substantial contributions to make in the twenty-first century.

The purpose of this book is therefore to make a contribution to rectifying Bloch's anonymity. There are essays here from some of the leading thinkers in Bloch studies both from Germany and the "Anglo-Saxon" world. Although these chapters deal with various areas of Ernst Bloch's work, there are red threads that run through the contributions and, I hope, add up to a more or less complete picture of what he is trying to address in his work. In fact, the subtitle of this book could well have been "something's missing." It appears in many of the chapters here, not only because it was one of Bloch's favorite phrases but also because it contains within its apparent simplicity a philosophical depth to do with presence through absence and the lack of a lack which allows an investigation of the question of what is possible and what might become possible in today's world.

Brecht's 1930 play *Mahagonny* presented a fictional world that bears an uncanny resemblance to the real world in which we find ourselves today. The worship of money has replaced the worship of gods, and it is not always clear whether this is a step forward or a step back. As a good dialectician, of course, Bloch would have said that it is both and that the apparent darkness surrounding us is a necessary precondition for the sparks of hope and the preilluminations of utopia to glow more brightly in the future. As Frances Daly says in her contribution here: "[And] whilst we might no longer face the same type of hegemony in which a dismal disbelief in another world than this gained easy traction, what a present dissatisfaction might mean is not in any sense straightforward." She traces the way in which, for Bloch, the "something's

missing,” or presence of utopia through its absence, means that nothingness and negativity are the very things which are a precondition for the positive realization of our dreams of a better world even when the darkness seems darker than ever.

The Spirit of Utopia

Adorno said of Bloch that he had restored honor to the word *utopia*, but Bloch’s concept of utopia is far from a straightforward one. Just as he talks about the *principle* of hope, so he also talks about the *spirit* of utopia. Furthermore, he is also famous for having described his utopia as *concrete*. And he uses the term *concrete* here in its Hegelian sense, where it should not be misunderstood to imply some sort of blueprint for the future. Rainer Zimmermann argues in his contribution: “concrete utopia in the Blochian terminology means thus what can be approached by reflexion and action such that eventually it would become reality, contrary to what is purely utopian and therefore impossible.” Bloch takes his understanding of concrete here from Hegel’s 1817 Encyclopaedia, in the section on logic setting a processual—we might say autopoietic—utopia against a preformed and programmatic one. The programmatic version is thus one abstracted from process. Linguistically, the nominalized form *abstract* is actually a solidified form of the verbal phrase *to abstract* or *abstrahieren*. The concrete, on the other hand, is derived from the past participle, *concretus*, of the Latin *concrecere* (to grow together, condense). In other words, the term *concrete* describes an ongoing process of growing together and condensation, whereas the term *abstract* means the extraction of a moment from that ongoing process. The abstract is, therefore, what Bloch calls a reified processual moment, crucial in its contingent role within history but meaningless in its own right. The truth of an abstraction or a fact can be discerned only on the basis of understanding it within the nonsimultaneity of past, present, and future as we experience and anticipate them.

The problem with an abstract(ed) fact, therefore, is that its truth is limited to itself. It is merely a paradigmatic screen grab from an ongoing film, valid for the moment in which it was taken but limited to that moment and the bubble surrounding it. It is for this reason that Bloch was extremely fond of quoting Fichte and Hegel, who, on being alerted to

the fact that their philosophy did not accord with reality, said: “Too bad for the facts!” The vast majority of utopian thinking could be said to rest in abstract utopias, in abstractions from the process in which the utopia becomes something really existing, whereas the concrete utopia is one which exists and does not exist at the same time because it is in the process of its own creation. Little abstracted sparks of utopia exist all around us in everyday life, but they cannot yet add up to a utopian process until and unless they become radicalized, grasped at their roots. The truth of history is, therefore, not an abstraction but the ongoing process of the emergence of the concrete and the growing together of contingency into necessity. History for Hegel and Bloch is thus a tendential process in which the abstracted moments of which we are aware coalesce and condense into a historical truth that has only a retrospective and nonteleological telos. In that sense all history is counterfactual and the future is one of endlessly open possibilities conditioned only by the real and rational outcome of the process to date.

What this in turn means is that a concrete utopia is one that has existence only as a possible outcome of an autopoietic process but that it contains within it shards of past and present utopian images—abstractions—that we carry forward with us on the journey but that also carry us forward, giving us the will to keep pushing forward and to become what we might be. To put this in Lacanian terms, the shards of utopia which we tend to carry with us are the fetishized *objet petit a*, which stand in for, but at the same time are part of, an as yet impossible absolute. Our hopes and desires and utopian impulses become fetishized into abstractions precisely because the process that will fulfill our desires is one that remains by necessity entirely invisible to us.

The Darkness of the Lived Moment

The fundamental opacity of the historical process means we live in what Bloch calls “the darkness of the lived moment” so that we are surrounded both by failure and success, utopia and dystopia, freedom and oppression. The crisis we face today, in contradistinction to Bloch’s ultimately optimistic position, is that, as Wayne Hudson puts it in his chapter, “The odds against a boom in utopia are high.” In her chapter Frances Daly concentrates on the idea, central to Bloch, of a “darkness of the lived

moment,” in which we are unable to really appreciate what is too close to us and are therefore thrown into hope as a mediated mood predicated on basic need and transmitted via pure desire.

It is the very absence of any light in the hollowed out spaces of modernity which provides hope in the form of the negation of negativity. Ruth Levitas points out in her chapter on the function of music in Bloch’s work—and in particular in *The Principle of Hope*—that he was constantly trying to show that even in the darkest darkness the trumpet call of liberation calls out to us. Bloch repeatedly used the trumpet call from Beethoven’s *Fidelio* to illustrate this. Darkness and negativity are prerequisites for their own negation in a mode of eternal hope, an “invariant of direction” as Bloch calls it. However, Daly also alerts us to how much Nietzsche there is in Bloch. But where Nietzsche saw himself as the philosopher with a hammer, determined to smash up all certainties and dogmas, Bloch perhaps becomes a philosopher with a hammer and sickle, determined to transgress but also to create.

What he adds to a consideration of being is a sense of becoming as a social rather than an egotistical goal. In this sense he is firmly in the post-1918 camp of Nietzschean gnostic revolutionaries committed to the overcoming of human limitations through social revolution.¹⁷ Daly reflects, however, that this processual optimism about humanity and the world and our ability to hope has not only been privatized but also brought down to a lowest common level. In other words we have become happy with very limited hopes located within a pragmatic and realistic nearness. The grand dreams have crumbled along with the grand narrative, and both of those were central to Bloch’s understanding of human liberation and fulfillment.

What also becomes clear in reading Frances Daly’s piece is that most of the time, in most historical epochs, it is the long hours of darkness and negativity that prevail over the sublime moments of hope, over what Alain Badiou might call “irruptions of hope.” Henk de Berg, on the other hand, raises the possibility that what has happened is actually all for the best in the best of all possible worlds. That desire for change has ended because there is no real sense of lack in modern capitalism and that this is a good thing; that the end of history is something to be embraced and defended rather than mourned and denied. Reports of the death of utopia have, for him, been far too few on the ground.

Against this, though, we also notice that our times are characterized by a sense of restlessness and apocalypse. Cultural production, especially film, is obsessed with the apocalypse. From the ecological dangers of global warming in *The Day after Tomorrow* to the apocalyptic visions of 2012, we are bombarded with images of destruction wrought either by ourselves or by external forces or gods. We are also experiencing a form of paralysis brought on by the recognition that, in response to this crisis, there appears to be no alternative to the wrong path, not least because the chances of finding a way of smashing out of the beautiful snow globe of capitalist triumph appear smaller than ever. This means that where before we worked with the concept of the Hegelian negation, which was a precondition for the negation of the negation and thus in turn for the transcendence or *Aufhebung* of the existing, we now work with a Freudian concept of negation, in other words, *Verneinung*, in which we repress the possibility of negating the negation and arrive at pragmatic accommodation. However, that which exists also contains within it repositories of past failures and future dreams that function as driving forces in a “noncontemporaneous” way.

Ungleichzeitigkeit: Noncontemporaneity or Nonsynchronicity

Bloch’s concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* functions in two different and contradictory ways in two of his texts: *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (1922) and *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1934) [*Heritage of Our Times*, 2009]. In the first he lays out the ways in which the “invariant of direction” of the desire for human liberation can crop up at inappropriate times and in inappropriate ways. The peasants uprising in 1525 and Münzer’s role in it are seen as early attempts to achieve communism based in collectivized property relations and social egalitarianism but whose time came far too soon, before the conditions could be considered correct. In Blochian/Aristotelian terms the *dynámei on* of what might become possible had rushed on ahead of its own *kata to dynaton*. But the revolutionary impulse rather than its failure was the important factor in that episode, and here one is very much reminded of the Beckettian adage that the lesson of history is that one must fail again and fail better until the conditions are right and one can succeed. Aspects of the past that may have gone awry or can be seen as failures can continue to inform

present-day events and their future. Rather than reject the failures of the past, we need to build on them.

The second example of noncontemporaneity is Bloch's early attempt to understand the rise of fascism not simply as the armed wing of the bourgeoisie (as the orthodox economic Left argued in the early 1930s) but as a cultural and quasireligious movement that managed to mobilize and captivate people in a way the Communist Party and the wider Left were not able to. By latching onto golden visions of a nonexistent past, fascism too represented an attempt to fill the void where something was missing. For that reason Bloch got into a lot of trouble with his fellow Marxists in the 1930s for taking fascism seriously, rather than dismissing it as a simple capitalist aberration or a delusion. His reason for this was partly that he saw it as a religious movement, and that all religious movements have their roots in human desire, for him the most powerful of all motivating forces. Fascism attempted to do this by mobilizing forces whose time had long passed but whose perverse utopian shadows projected into the future—a true conservative revolution that harked back and harked forward at the same time. However, while Bloch criticizes the romantic, the nostalgic, and the backward-looking, he does not criticize their impulses.

This attitude toward the rise of fascism therefore mirrored and was a part of Bloch's analysis of religion. Many of the chapters here deal with this central concern of the role that religious faith plays in human history and the way in which it is the carrier not just of delusions, as Richard Dawkins would have it, but also of allusions to a realization of human desires. The utopian drive is held in religion as a sense of light against the darkness of the lived moment. His support for religious impetus and messianic belief as a self-misunderstood revolutionary fervor was accompanied by an absolute opposition to the hijacking and reification of that fervor by churches and organized religions. As he says, the best thing about religion is that it creates heretics.¹⁸ In this field, too, Bloch anticipates much of the contemporary debate about faith, religion, and the relationship between theology and theory undertaken by Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou.¹⁹ The fidelity to an event, as Badiou called it, is pursued by Bloch, too, in his fidelity—despite all of his own personal doubts and experiences—to the Bolshevik revolution. For him, just as

religion carried the utopian spark in a perverted idealist form, so the Russian Revolution carried it in a perverted materialist form.

Religion, Messianism, and Atheism

Jürgen Moltmann has claimed that Bloch essentially stands in the tradition of Jewish Messianism and was influenced by members of the Weber Group and by Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin in particular rather than by Marxism. In his *Redemption and Utopia* Michael Löwy maintains that Jewish Messianic thought embodies five elements:

1. Restoration of a Golden Age;
2. Revolutionary cataclysm and apocalypse;
3. *Et Ketz* or creation of a totally new world rather than reform of the old one;
4. Theocratic anarchy in which there is no gap between the people and God;
5. Anarchistic freedom in which there are no laws because there is no need for law.²⁰

It is true that all of these are to be found in Bloch, and as Roland Boer highlights in his contribution to this volume, eschatology and myth play a central role in his thought. David Miller also calls attention to the fact that “Habermas also hints at a role for Lurianic ideas such as *Sheviret ha Kelim* (Shattering of the Vessels) in Bloch’s writings.” But Bloch’s theology is, in the end, essentially Christian in nature but materialist in form. It is this commitment to the violence of the revolutionary eschaton and the ability to love thy neighbor thereafter—Bloch equates loving thy neighbor with the withering away of the state under communism²¹—that gives rise to his famous saying from *Atheism in Christianity* that “only an atheist can be a good Christian; only a Christian can be a good atheist” (viii). In *The Spirit of Utopia* Bloch talks of the need for a new church that will help steer a people who have been made selfish by capitalism to a new fraternalism dedicated to achieving this on earth rather than in heaven. Bloch’s presentation of the revolutionary universalism that early Christianity represented—before it degenerated into Constantinian imperialism (*Atheism*, 43)—and the role of St. Paul in promoting

the idea of a sudden irruption of faith and change are highly reminiscent of Badiou's work.

The Alpha-Way-Omega structure of his historical model, in which, as he says at the end of *The Principle of Hope*, the true genesis comes at the end and not the beginning, is part of Bloch's Marxism, too, operating as it does with a tripartite and tendentially quasimetaphysical concept of the transition from primitive communism on to historical society through to posthistorical society or communism on a higher plane. Bloch's problem with Marxism as it had developed, though, was the way in which it had reduced the problem of human alienation down to its economic determinants. However, rather than being what Rorty calls another "whacked-out triadomaniac"²² looking for codes or a key to unlocking a pre-given mystery, Bloch maintained that there were no keys to a pre-existing Platonic ideal but only tools by which man could build his own future. Bloch saw it in the same way as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*:

When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of so-called "nature"? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution—i.e., the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick, an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not produce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?²³

Faith, belief, a confidence and certainty in the future of the totality of human becoming against all the pessimism of really existing conditions was also necessary and had to be based in the possibility of transcendence, if not the transcendental. Where William James maintains that the transcendent breaks in on us from some external realm, Bloch maintained, with Marx, that it in fact breaks out of us from the material realm and is the product of the creating, laboring human be(com)ing. What moves Bloch is the way that people do this, the way they hope for,

but also misunderstand, what is being done, place hope in things which can never bring exodus and liberation to fruition but which, within the totality, represent the invariant of direction which is the utopian desire for home.

Notes

- 1 Ernst Bloch, *Experimentum Mundi: Frage, Kategorien des Herausbringens, Praxis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 11.
- 2 Ernst Bloch, *Tendenz—Latenz—Utopie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 373.
- 3 Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan, eds., *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso, 1997).
- 4 Ernst Bloch, *Philosophische Grundfragen I: Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1961).
- 5 Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 233.
- 6 Loren Goldner, review of Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), available at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/bloch.html>.
- 7 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008), 77.
- 8 Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* (London: Verso, 2009), viii.
- 9 See <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/index.htm>.
- 10 Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 61.
- 11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, quoted in Bloch, *POH*, 1331.
- 12 See Bloch, *POH*, 1363, for the original.
- 13 See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- 14 Bertolt Brecht, *Me-ti, Buch der Wendungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965), no. 5, 164.
- 15 Anders Breivik even managed to privatize his fascist pogrom and invent his own fantasy international Knights Templar movement.
- 16 See <http://www.brill.nl/>.
- 17 Jean Juarès, for example, is reported to have said that the proletariat is the *Übermensch*. In 1924 Trotsky maintained that communism would allow the generality of man to become a socialized “superman.” He would become “immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.” Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2005), 207.

- 18 See also François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy* (London: Continuum, 2010).
- 19 See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), and Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
- 20 Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 19.
- 21 Rainer Traub and Harald Wieser, eds., *Gespräche mit Ernst Bloch* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 166.
- 22 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), 134.
- 23 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 488.