

# Ernst Bloch and the Philosophy of Hope

By

Jack Zipes

The German philosopher and socialist Ernst Bloch saw all human history as the story of the hope of a classless society, without which life would be meaningless.

*This is an edited extract from 'Ernst Bloch – The Pugnacious Philosopher of Hope' which is now out from Palgrave.*

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Ernst Bloch was born in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in 1885. His parents were assimilated, well-to-do Jews, who had clear, but narrow expectations for Bloch and his future. At that time, however, during his youth he was more bothered by the void in his own life. His home was characterised by what he called “musty” — dreariness, lack of love, understanding, and stimulation. The Jewish religion played a minor role in his life and was meaningless in his family. He could only compensate for the gaps between him, his family, and their beliefs by filling the void with daydreams, voracious reading of fairy tales, popular literature, classics, philosophy, music and visits to the opera house and theater as well as letter-writing to eminent philosophers, rebellion against traditional schooling, and concern for social democratic politics.

To make up for the lack in his home and in Ludwigshafen, Bloch left in 1905 to study philosophy and German literature at the University of Munich and then at the University of Würzburg, where he focused on experimental psychology, physics, and music and took an interest in the Kabbala and Jewish mysticism. After receiving his doctorate in philosophy in 1908, he moved to Berlin to study under the renowned sociologist Georg Simmel, and it was in Simmel’s seminar that he made the acquaintance of Georg Lukács, the great Hungarian political theorist, who became one of his best friends and later one of his foremost

philosophical antagonists. Bloch studied with Simmel until 1911 and was strongly influenced by Simmel's notions about the "lived moment" and the impossibility to know the immediate. More important, Simmel was one of those remarkable intellectuals who believed that a philosopher must be concerned in everyday occurrences and minutiae. He had a broad range of interests and expounded on everything he encountered. In fact, Simmel was a man after Bloch's own heart, and he left a lasting impression on him even after Bloch broke with him due to Simmel's defence of German patriotism during World War I.

Aside from Simmel's influence, the period between 1909 and 1914 led to major changes in Bloch's life. Like other young Jewish intellectuals of this period such as Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Lessing, Bloch took a strong interest in the question of Jewish identity and Zionism and reflected on these issues in an essay entitled "Symbol: Die Juden" (1912/1913): "finally there is a certain pride to be Jewish that has awakened in us Jews and beats restlessly." By this time, Bloch had moved to Heidelberg to participate in Max Weber's seminar with Lukács. Here, it was not so much Weber, who drew Bloch to Heidelberg, but Lukács with whom he shared a great deal, especially a concern with developing a philosophy that would transcend the rationalism of the enlightenment and provide more intuitive means for understanding experience and dealing with such problems as alienation, commodification, and instrumentalisation. Most important for Bloch at this time was his work on the important category of the *not-yet-conscious* that was to be related to the *not-yet-become*. Here, he began to connect messianic aspects of his thought with a study of everyday phenomena and art and literature to critique existing sociopolitical conditions.

It is not by chance that the conception of some of Bloch's most radical philosophical categories coincided with the outbreak of World War I, which compelled him to link questions of individual awareness and cognition with the need to transform if not revolutionise sociopolitical conditions. Though an anarchist, Bloch sided with the left social democrats and opposed the Wilhelminian government's militaristic policies. His efforts now went toward bringing an end to the war, but it was extremely difficult to act against the German nationalism because the state took emergency and police measures to prohibit the publication of protest articles and books and because the German people became caught up in the chauvinistic furore of the time. Due to his opposition to the war, there were few opportunities for Bloch to earn a living and make his ideas known, once he left the university.

So, in 1917, Bloch decided to emigrate to Switzerland with his wife, who was suffering from an ailment that would eventually take her life in 1921. There, in Bern, Bloch undertook a study of utopian currents and political strategies for the journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. In addition, Bloch hoped to earn money as a political journalist because most of his articles could not be published in Germany due to censorship. However, he overestimated his chances in Switzerland, and, despite a small monetary subvention from a wealthy businessman, he and his wife endured many hardships due to lack of money and political squabbles and intrigues. His contact with Hugo Ball, founder of the Dada Movement in European art at this time, reinforced his own position of religious anarchism and led him to explore the ideas of Franz von Baader and Thomas Münzer, early radical theologians of the Reformation. In addition, he wrote numerous articles against the war and Germany (often

under pseudonyms) while also conceiving his first major philosophical publication *Spirit of Utopia*, (1918), but the poor living conditions caused Bloch often to act in desperate ways, so that his first major work on utopia was his concrete means of countering harsh social and personal realities.

## The Spirit of Utopia

Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*, which he revised and expanded in 1923, indicated the path that he was to pursue during the 1920s. This book was an expressionist and utopian effusion that rejoiced in the apocalyptic ending of Wilhelminian rule and the breakdown of the alienating conditions that had existed in Germany. According to Bloch, the apocalypse would allow for a "warm" messianic redemption, but one that depended on communal action: "Life is going on all around us and does not know where it is going. We ourselves are still the lever and motor. The external and especially the revealed sense of life is faltering. But the new ideas have finally broken out, into the full adventures, into the open, unfinished, dreaming world, into Satan's rubbles and darkneses, providing the cutting off itself. Life also goes around girded with despair, with our spiteful presentiment, with the tremendous power of our human voice, to name God and not to rest until the innermost shadows are expelled, until the world is doused with that fire that is behind the world or shall be ignited by it"

This passage is typical of the elliptical, metaphorical, and prophetic style that Bloch was to use for the rest of his life. It was his way of cultivating the "form of the inconstruable question" that would need art and literature to illuminate the way forward toward utopia. To be sure, as the last chapter of the book entitled "Karl Marx, Death and the Apocalypse," indicates, Bloch was turning more and more toward the basics of Marxism to provide the framework in which he would pose questions about ontology, aesthetics, and utopia for the rest of his life. In fact, despite or because of his mystical and expressionist leanings, Bloch became more and more an iconoclast Marxist in his political opinions during the 1920s. The blend of religious mysticism and communism can be seen most clearly in his study *Thomas Münzer as Theologian of Revolution*, (1921), in which he depicted Münzer as a forerunner of Marxism by interpreting the chiliastic aspects of Münzer's thinking in relation to the Marxist notion of the classless society. Such an unorthodox interpretation of Münzer opened new approaches to both religion and Marxism. All Bloch's writings, even the numerous articles he wrote for newspapers and journals from 1919 to 1933, were now related to the elaboration of Marxist principles in a manner disturbing to most orthodox Marxists, particularly Bloch's friend Lukács, who had completed *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), a superb study of reification, and was more inclined toward following the Communist Party line than exploring the messianic-religious ties between Marxism and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet, these were the very ties that Bloch endeavoured to grasp because their elaboration, he believed, would determine the political future of Germany if not Western civilisation as a whole.

During the 1920s in Berlin, Bloch sought to grasp and learn from political expressionist writers and painters and used the montage technique and elliptical symbolism in his own writings to induce estrangement from the familiar. Here, he wanted to provoke his readers to break out and away from forms that prevented them from becoming conscious of what they were missing, things they had to define for themselves. Bloch's emphasis on estrangement was similar to Bertolt Brecht's estrangement effect and the open endings of many of Brecht's plays. In this sense, Brecht's dramas were models of anticipatory illumination as can be seen in Bloch's comments on his works in *Traces* (1930) and *Heritage of Our Times* (1934) and in such later essays as "The Stage Regarded as a Paradigmatic Institution and the Decision within It" (1959).

On one of his forays from Berlin, he made the acquaintance of Karola Piotrkowska, an art and architecture student in Vienna, and his attachment to her lent his work new meaning and vitality. By 1930, he and Karola decided to move and take an apartment together in a "red district" in Berlin, where numerous writers and artists of different left-wing persuasions lived and mixed. Both took a more active interest in politics, especially as the danger of fascism grew and life became more violent in Berlin. Karola drew closer to the Communist Party and eventually became a member in 1932, while Bloch maintained a critical distance from the Party. Indeed, Bloch felt that one of the reasons that the fascists were able to gain control in Germany was due to the fact that the Communists spent more time attacking the Social Democrats and on spreading a meaningless, rhetorical propaganda than addressing the needs, dreams, and wants of the German people, suffering more than ever due to the Great Depression of 1929. He wrote numerous insightful articles on mainstream politics and culture, often criticising the inadequacy of bourgeois art and literature and the dangers of Nazi ideology and practice while at the same time trying to analyse why it was that the National Socialism appealed to the German people and captured their imagination.

## Heritage of Our Times

Bloch never had time to complete this analysis of fascism in Berlin. On March 5, 1933, when the Nazis "legally" took power in Germany, Bloch was in Ludwigshafen, and he received a phone call from Karola telling him to leave the country as soon as he could, since he was on a Nazi list of enemies and was scheduled to be arrested. The very next day Bloch fled to Switzerland, where Karola soon joined him. In Zurich, both he and Karola were active in resistance groups, but their activities were frowned upon by the Swiss authorities, who expelled them in 1934.

Right before the expulsion, Bloch was able to complete *Heritage of Our Times*, a penetrating study of fascism, in which he elaborated the categories of synchronism and non-synchronism or temporal equality and non-temporal inequality to explain what it is that makes people susceptible to fascist movements and what the communist movement lacked that made it

ineffective against the rise of fascism. Bloch was never tired of pointing out the mistakes by social democratic and leftist movements and their failure to recognise how modern technology and industrial change had created huge gaps in people's lives, and how all social classes had difficulty synchronising their lives to keep in step with the swift temporal changes in socioeconomic conditions. He maintained that "progress" brought about disorientation, especially for the agrarian and petit-bourgeois classes, and that the longing for bygone days, for conserving the old ways of life, for solid traditions, was not to be dismissed as reactionary. He called for creative and inventive communist programs that contended with modernism in all its forms so that the oppressed masses would not feel left out or left behind.

Since the Communist Party and other left organisations used empty slogans and imposed paternalistic programs on the people that failed to capture their imagination and speak to their needs, it was no wonder that Hitler, a false messianic leader and National Socialism with its mythic ideology and concrete welfare programs, gave the Germans a sense of stability and hope for a better life. Bloch sought to expose the regressive and fallacious policies of the Nazis while keeping alive the genuine revolutionary impulse for change. After all, he nursed the notions of utopia and hope as though they were his own children, and he insisted that the communists and socialists could only combat fascism if they recognised the different types of contradictions they had to resolve.

Bloch was already preaching the necessity of a common front between communists and socialists even before the Popular Front became the official policy of the Communist Party. Moreover, there is already a tendency here to hypostatise the proletariat in a way that would lead to his support of Stalinist politics. But, there is also politics of reading signs that emanated from his book *Traces* (1930) and contradicted Bloch's own political observations. Crucial in *Traces*, an unusual collection of anecdotes, stories, evidence, political commentaries, and essays, is the designation and detection of traces in everyday events and cultural artefacts of the past and present that are harbingers of a better future. Bloch pursued these traces but became caught up in his own contradictions because of his eagerness to identify with the potential of revolutionary change that, he thought, the Soviet Union symbolised.

During the exile years in Europe, 1934–1938, Bloch married Karola, and they both contributed to the popular front movement—Bloch as unorthodox critic and Karola as courier for the Communist Party. In 1935, they moved to Paris after stops in Switzerland and Austria, and Bloch participated in the International Congress for the Defense of Culture (June 21–25), where he gave a speech entitled "Literature and Socialist Objects," in which he introduced his notion of *Vor-Schein* or "anticipatory illumination" and spoke out against the pessimism of many writers, who doubted that Marxism could combat the expansion of fascism. According to Bloch, "truth is not the reflection of facts but of processes; it is ultimately the indication of the tendency and latency of that which has not yet become and needs its activator."

Therefore, literature and art contain the anticipatory illumination of that which has not become, and the role of the writer and artist is similar to that of a midwife who enables the creative conception of the latent and potential materials to assume their own unique forms.

At this point in his life, Bloch was committed both philosophically and aesthetically to Marxism as the only critique that could clarify what was missing in life, what obstacles had to be overcome before a classless society could come into its own, and what direction we had to take, for the realisation of individual autonomy was only possible if we came into its own as the collective agent of our own destiny.

Given his attacks on the cultural politics of the Soviet Union during the 1930s and his general unorthodox Marxist position, Bloch had no desire to seek “refuge” in the Soviet Union. In 1937, after the Blochs moved to Prague because Karola was given a new assignment as courier for the German Communist Party, they kept hearing gruesome stories from friends who escaped persecution in the Soviet Union. Bloch was relieved when the Moscow Trials came to an end in 1937 and rationalised them as drastic measures to prevent the rise of fascism in the East. However, he was realistic enough to perceive that the Soviet Union would not harbour an unorthodox Marxist of his kind, and when it came time to think of leaving Prague — Karola gave birth to their son Jan in 1937 and the fascists were about to invade Czechoslovakia — the Blochs chose the United States as a place of refuge.

As a result, they spent eleven years in the United States, 1938–1949, the first three in New York and New Hampshire, and the last eight in Boston, where Bloch worked diligently in Harvard’s Widener Library on various parts of *The Principle of Hope* and *Subjekt-Objekt*. It was practically impossible for Bloch himself to earn money. He was shunned by members of the Frankfurt School, particularly by Max Horkheimer and his old friend, Theodor Adorno, because of his defense of the Soviet Union, and many former friends refused to help him obtain teaching or publishing jobs. Karola became the breadwinner of the family, working first as a domestic and then in a Boston architect’s office.

Meanwhile Bloch wrote political articles for the anti-fascist journal *Freies Deutschland* and became a member of the National Committee for a Free Germany. His major preoccupation, however, still centred on the further elaboration of his primary categories of the not-yet-conscious and not-yet-become in relation to hope, utopia, and wishful thinking. Since Bloch’s English was very limited and remained limited during his exile in America, and since there was virtually no audience for his works, Bloch felt isolated most of the time he was in the States and longed to find a situation in which his philosophical teachings might have some effect.

By the war’s end in 1945, both Karola and Bloch had already obtained American citizenship. However, many of their close friends were under surveillance by the FBI and were called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Indeed, Brecht, Hanns Eisler, and Alfred Kantorowicz, to name but just a few, left due to the hostile political climate in the United States and returned to the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany. In 1948 Bloch, who was sixty-three years old and who had never lectured at a university, received an offer to assume the chair of professor of philosophy at the University of Leipzig in East Germany. Knowing that there might be objections on the part of the orthodox Communists with regard to his work, Bloch insisted on absolute freedom to teach what he wanted to teach. He received a guarantee from Professor Werner Krauss, one of the leading Marxist literary scholars in

French literature and Bloch's chief supporter in Leipzig. This guarantee plus the Communist witch hunt in America contributed to Bloch's decision to go to Leipzig in 1949.

## East Germany and the Principle of Hope

From the outset, Bloch was perceived by the students as playing an oppositional role to the official politics of the state and the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland), the new Communist Party of the German Democratic Republic. His lectures and works contained innuendos critical of Stalinism insofar as Stalinism represented a mechanical base–superstructure position and disregarded the vital role that culture played in the formation of social relations. Moreover, Bloch always stressed the dialectics of individual and social freedom and placed great emphasis on creative experimentation and the unfinished nature of the socialist project. On the other hand, Bloch continued to defend the Soviet Union and Stalinism as real existing socialist formations that set the material conditions for the qualitative development of communism.

Without carefully studying the political history of either the United States or the Soviet Union, Bloch continued to make “hard-line” materialist pronouncements about both countries. In various articles published in East Germany up through 1953, Bloch associated the United States with fascism and imperialism and a danger to world freedom, whereas the Soviet Union was portrayed as that state which acted as the guarantor of genuine freedom throughout the world. He rationalised the police measures and restrictions on freedom in the Soviet Union and also in East Germany just as he had justified the Moscow Show Trials. However, he believed if the Soviet Union were not threatened by the imperialist tactics of Western capitalism, it would be able to get on with the socialist experiment and allow for greater civil liberties.

Aside from schooling numerous students in dialectical Marxism and utopian thinking, students who went on to assume important roles in the Communist Party and state leadership, Bloch helped found the journal *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* with the help of Lukács, and one of his prize pupils, Walter Harich, became the editor-in-chief. In addition, his major works began to be published—the first two volumes of *The Principle of Hope* in 1952 and 1954—so that his impact now extended beyond the university and made its way into West Germany as well. The publication of *The Principle of Hope* (the third volume appeared in 1959) established Bloch at that time as the foremost unorthodox Marxist philosopher writing and teaching in perhaps the most Stalinist of the

orthodox Eastern Bloc countries. It is an enormous work consisting of 55 chapters in which Bloch endeavoured to map out the formations of the not-yet-conscious as they take shape in daydreams, wish-landscapes, and religious, scientific, political, and artistic events of signification. The signification can be traced in the anticipatory illumination and is

determined by the manner in which it gives rise to hope within the cultural heritage. The centrality of art and literature in Bloch's chiliastic Marxism, that is, the emphasis he placed on the possibility of the transformation of the material base through superstructural developments, is apparent throughout the three volumes.

The entire corpus of *The Principle of Hope*, which encompasses a reading of Marxism and the world in direct opposition to the Marxist-Leninism professed by the East German state, contains crude criticisms of "fascist America" and bombastic statements about the proletariat, communism, and the Soviet Union. Yet, the overall thrust of the utopian

project was and is subversive in view of developments in both the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite all its inconsistencies and ramblings, *The Principle of Hope* recalls concrete moments in history and illuminates their human creative features as indelible marks that point the way toward actual transformation of our material world. The luminous aesthetic quality of these concrete moments, even if they are fragmentary, allows them to be utilised and reutilised for realising what has not yet become but can become, namely the classless society. Insofar as the aesthetic formations illuminate what is missing and might still come, they instill hope in viewers/readers and provide the impetus for individual and collective change.

Bloch himself felt the need for greater change the more he came into contact with the contradictions in the realities of East German socialism. By 1955, he had received numerous awards from the government and felt more confident about openly criticising the state in public, its rigid form of teaching the basics of dialectical materialism, and the limitations imposed on individual freedom and human rights. In 1956, after the 20th Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, when Khrushchev criticised Stalinism, Bloch thought that the hour for major democratic reforms in the East had finally come.

However, he did not believe that the mistakes that had been made in the Soviet Union and the mistakes that were being made in the German Democratic Republic were caused solely by a cult of personality. He saw the problems as stemming from the dogmatic tendencies of the Communist Party and the rigid bureaucratic system that hindered change and democracy. More and more, Bloch tried through discussions and articles to foster changes in the university and government. Yet, he overestimated the extent of Khrushchev's break with Stalinism and did not perceive how the new Soviet policy would be used to legitimise the interests of the new oligarchies within the Soviet Union and to reinforce the power of Walter Ulbricht in East Germany. Thus, as Bloch began to speak out more openly for reforms, the German Democratic state and party leadership, which had always tolerated Bloch, as long as he had served their propagandistic purposes and had kept his voice of dissent low, came to view Bloch as an enemy, who had to be isolated.

The SED seized its opportunity to isolate Bloch in 1956. Under the leadership of Walter Harich, a group of intellectuals in Berlin had actually begun planning a coup. Bloch had been informed about these plans but had refused to join the group. The government discovered the plot and arrested Harich and several other collaborators and sentenced them to prison terms. Since they were all closely connected to Bloch and his institute for philosophy in Leipzig,

Bloch came under severe attacks in the newspapers and magazines. In January 1957, he was forcibly prevented from continuing a series of lectures at the university, and throughout the year, public conferences were held about the errors and faults of Bloch's philosophy. Articles were published attacking his mistaken notions about Marxism, and finally, Bloch was forced to retire and was banned from holding public talks. All his present and former students were obliged to break with him or recant his teachings. Some fled to West Germany; some lost their jobs; one committed suicide; and some protected their careers by turning against him.

Though Bloch endeavoured to remain active by participating in meetings of the section of philosophy at the Academy of Sciences in East Berlin, he was for all intents and purposes silenced and isolated by 1958. Consequently, aside from privately trying to help some of his students, Bloch concentrated his energies on publishing and lecturing in West Germany, for he was allowed to travel and give talks outside of the German Democratic Republic. Though he could have remained in the West during this time, Bloch did not want to give up the struggle for civil rights and socialism in East Germany, nor did he want to abandon the friends, who sided with him. However, during the summer of 1961, while the Blochs were vacationing in Munich after Bloch had delivered several talks at Tübingen and Bayreuth, they learned about the building of the Berlin Wall on August 13, and they decided to remain in West Germany.

## Can Hope Be Disappointed?

His decision caused a great sensation in the German newspapers East and West. In the East, Bloch was attacked for being a renegade, traitor, and criminal, and in the West, he was mocked for having had "hope" in communism and scorned for his defense of Stalin and the Soviet Union, although some critics praised him for his courageous stance. Due to his outspoken critique of capitalist West Germany and its militaristic policies, Bloch was considered by many to be an unwelcome guest in the Federal Republic, and it was only with great difficulty that his supporters obtained a special position for him as professor of philosophy at the University of Tübingen.

On November 17, 1961, Bloch held his first public lecture to a packed audience at the university and significantly entitled it "Can Hope Be Disappointed?" Bloch's reply to his own rhetorical and politically provocative question:

"Even a well-founded hope can be disappointed, otherwise it would not be hope. In fact, hope never guarantees anything. It is characteristically daring and points openly to possibilities that in part depend on chance for their fulfilment. Thus, hope can be frustrated and thwarted, and out of the frustration and disappointment it can learn to estimate the tendencies of

processes that it had possibly estimated incorrectly. Hope can learn and become smarter through damaging experiences, but it can never be driven off course. The substance of its goal is “real humanism” and since this goal is not present, one can neither speak about it out of experience nor formulate it completely. To do so would be pure invention, not definition. Still, it is possible to determine the direction toward real humanism. a direction that is invariable and unconditional; it is “indicated precisely in the oldest conscious dream (*Wachtraum*) of humankind: in the overthrow (instead of the hypocritical new installation) of all conditions in which the human individual is a humiliated, enslaved, forsaken, despised creature.”

In conclusion, Bloch maintained that “the world process has not yet been won anywhere, but also: it has not been thwarted anywhere, and human beings can be on earth the indicators of their decisive way toward salvation that has not yet come or toward damnation that has also not yet come. The world remains in its entirety the same highly labouring laboratory *possibilis salutis*... Hercules says: ‘Whoever does not hope for the unhoped-for will not find it.’”

From 1961 until his death in 1977 at the age of ninety-two, Bloch wrote, spoke, and fought pugnaciously and unceasingly in the name of hope that could be disappointed and could err but could never be eradicated as long human beings lived on this earth. Hope had always been for Bloch a religious, ontological, and political matter, and it continued to be such more than ever in West Germany, where he was to become a symbol of integrity for the protest movements which emerged during the 1960s.

Aside from lecturing throughout Europe, Bloch became very involved in various political struggles. For example, he supported the rise of the Social Democratic Party in West Germany, attacked the right-wing Springer Press monopoly, criticised the introduction of professional proscription of civil servants in West Germany, and took a position against nuclear armament, German anti-Semitism, the Vietnam War, the Soviet invasion of Prague, and the terrorism of the Baader–Meinhof Group. His political position became more discriminating and clearer, and the centrality of aesthetics in his political philosophy was often reiterated as in the following statement from a 1968 interview with Michael Landmann:

“Aesthetics should not be confused with contemplation or considered disinterested. Often, certainly, the true, the good or the beautiful, or rather what is proclaimed as such, has nothing to do with daily life and so serves the purpose of deception, as opium of the people... Stage and story can be either a protective park or a laboratory; sometimes they console or appease, sometimes they incite; they can be a flight from or prefiguring of the future. Theatre is not just illusion; it can also be an anticipation of what is to come, for in it the resistance of the empirical world is eliminated. Brecht made the theater a laboratory for new models. On the problem of whether a man can be sacrificed to the group, he first writes a ‘Yes-sayer’ then a ‘No-sayer’ and he could have

added a 'Maybe-sayer.'"

Art retains its anticipatory function even after the revolution. The image of Greek man, the citizen, was first delineated in art. Likewise, architecture first creates real space against the obstacles with which the earth is full. Were the inflammatory elements of art eliminated in the classless society, it would be proof that reality had remained a petit-bourgeois society in which art becomes a palliative ideology instead of a clarion call. True art, including non-revolutionary art, is always a clarion call and a challenge.

Although he was half blind during the last ten years of his life, Bloch continued to hold his seminar for students of philosophy and managed to finish the revisions for the 16-volume edition of his complete works. In one of his books of political essays titled *Politische Messungen*, he altered some of his former essays to make them more critical of Stalinism because he held the view that his works were part of a process of change and reflection and that his entire philosophical project would always remain unfinished in the same way that the human project on earth would remain unfinished.

Bloch continually tried to learn from his errors and contradictions and reworked his former views if proven wrong by historical developments. In doing this, he clung to a personal ethics of the "aufrechter Gang", the upright gait. According to Bloch, humankind had not yet learned to take full possession of its natural rights and to walk upright with dignity. Humans still had to learn to become like God and take destiny in their own hands, make their own destiny, that is, to make history for the first time.

What is envisioned as home (*Heimat*) in childhood is in actuality the goal of the upright gait toward which human beings strive as they seek to overcome exploitation, humiliation, oppression, and disillusionment. The individual alone cannot attain such a goal, which is only possible as a collective enterprise. Yet, the measure of the individual's ethical backbone can be determined by his or her struggle to stand and walk upright and contribute to the collective goal. The relative historical gains, revolutionary transformations and formations, what Bloch called "concrete utopias," were stepping stones and indications of what the human individual and the world could become. In this regard, Bloch's contradictions until his death in 1977 should be regarded as unique individual traces in a struggle to realise philosophy as part of a collective praxis.

From the outset, Bloch saw his task as part of an ongoing endeavour to name the unnamable final destination, to construe the unconstruable question about the meaning of human existence. Bloch re-elaborated and expanded Marxist categories with notions of Messianism, Christian mysticism, and the Judaic commandment against creating a graven image of God. Consequently, Bloch employed images, comparisons, implications, connotations, provocations, aphorisms, fables, and anecdotes to form and reform philosophical categories. Like the expressionist artists and writers themselves, Bloch wanted to "shock" his readers to become aware of their inner needs so they might break out of themselves and break down those reified conditions that prevent communication and collective action.

Bloch's metaphorical use of montage techniques allowed for the juxtaposition of crude, daily expressions along with chiliastic images and euphoristic pronouncements of the coming of communism. Though he was at times astonishingly crass and naive, he purposely relied on such techniques to break with the instrumental use of traditional philosophy and Marxism as well. Bloch wanted to estrange himself and his readers: Distance had to be gained from the immediate experience of life and from those customary forms that locked life into blocks of classifications and categories. Like his thought processes, Bloch's language never stood still.

Though it may be immensely difficult to read Bloch, it is a challenging and tantalising experience that can open up new horizons of thought. He forces his readers to rethink and reconceive the purpose of philosophical language and thought with the intent to open up utopian possibilities. More than anything else, Bloch placed great faith in art and literature to raise the not-yet-conscious to a point where it could grasp what direction humankind would have to take to bring about the fulfilment of those needs, wants, and wishes scattered in dreams and daydreams.

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#### **About the Author**

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