Utopia and Marxism in Ernst Bloch

by Douglas Kellner and Harry O’Hara

Ernst Bloch celebrated his 90th birthday in the Summer of 1975 and was acclaimed throughout Europe as “one of the most important philosophers of our epoch.”¹ He was awarded honorary degrees from the Universities in Paris, Prague and Tübingen, and received glowing eulogies in the mass media. This widespread commemoration for a self-proclaimed Marxist by a variety of sources spanning the ideological spectrum might strike one as surprising. More startling is the wildly variant interpretations of Bloch’s work. On the Left, he was appraised an “exemplary Marxist,”² the “German philosopher of the October Revolution.”³ A New Left Festschrift for Bloch in Germany bluntly claimed: “From no other Marxist theoretician can one learn so much as from Ernst Bloch.”⁴ In Der Spiegel, Gershom Scholem said of Bloch: “the ninety-year old has become a blind visionary, a master who has survived the fight with the dragons that he has waged for forty years and has become a wise man in the sense of the old Jewish definition of an ‘old man’ as one who ‘has conquered wisdom’.”⁵ A reviewer of his latest work describes him as a “mystic,”⁶ and Bloch was acclaimed by theologians as one of the foremost influences on the fashionable theology of hope. A recent biographer of Bloch claimed: “It is between the three poles of Marxism, mysticism, and Karl May that the life and thought of the philosopher Ernst Bloch has taken place.”⁷ An important Festschrift put out by Suhrkamp Press contains a collection of reviews of Bloch’s major works and personal testimonies by Hermann Hesse, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and others who call attention to the astonishing range of Bloch’s work.⁸ Hans Mayer summed up the conflicting interpretations by describing Bloch as philosopher, aesthetician and political theorist whose “philosophy is saturated with experienced

1. See Rolf Denker’s discussion in Erperinger Zeitung, Tuesday, July 8, 1975.
2. Der Spiegel, No. 30 (1975), 11.
4. Jürgen Peters in Es muss nicht immer Marmor sein, p. 35.
7. Erhard Bahr, Ernst Bloch (Berlin, 1974). Karl May was a popular story teller of the 19th century.
history and historical experience.”

Born in 1885 in Ludwigshafen, Bloch’s life and work has spanned the 20th century. He has deeply experienced its major events and appropriated (and attacked!) its culture. Already in school he was introduced to socialist literature and studied philosophy, philology, music, and physics in Munich and Würzburg, writing a philosophy dissertation on Heinrich Rickert. Bloch tells how his father, an official with the Bavarian railroad, opposed his study of philosophy until one day when on vacation, Bloch discovered, and showed his father, a mausoleum on which there was a sign: “Here lies Friedrich August Wilhelm Schelling.” And beneath: “Dedicated to his honored teacher in loyalty and with eternal gratitude: Maximilian, King of Bavaria.” Bloch’s father was impressed and saw that even such a “breadless discipline as philosophy” might pay off and even win one honor. Hence Bloch was allowed to study philosophy and says he was eternally grateful to Schelling!

Bloch moved to Heidelberg before the first World War and began his stormy friendship with Georg Lukács. Both participated in the circle around Max Weber. Bloch recalls with horror the day when the war broke out in 1914 and Max Weber appeared in his officer’s uniform. The young pacifist Bloch went into exile in Switzerland where he wrote his first great work Spirit of Utopia. During the 1920’s Bloch became increasingly sympathetic to communism and participated in the heated Weimar discussions of politics, art, and philosophy. Bloch was immersed in avant-garde art, and was a staunch defender of expressionism. He was an early enthusiast for the Russian Revolution and an early opponent of fascism. When the Nazis came to power Bloch was on the top of the list of intellectuals Hitler wanted out of the way, and in 1933 he emigrated to Zürich, Paris, Vienna, Prague, and then the United States. There he began work on his greatest book The Principle of Hope which ends: “Once man has comprehended himself and has established his own domain in real democracy, without depersonalization and alienation, something arises in the world which all men have glimpsed in childhood: a place and a state in which no one has yet been. And the name of this something is home (Heimat).”

In 1948 Bloch returned to Germany and hoped to help construct socialism.

---

10. For a discussion of Rickert and the philosophical milieu in which Bloch was then immersed, see Andrew Arato’s article, “The Neo-Idealist Defense of Subjectivity,” Telos, 21 (Fall, 1974).
in the GDR. He was named professor of the history of philosophy and director of the Philosophical Institute in Leipzig. Bloch's books were published and he and his students edited a philosophy journal, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. In 1955 for his 70th birthday, Bloch received the national prize of the GDR, a Festschrift, and special honors from the SED. But only two years later, after unrest and revolts in the GDR, Poland, and Hungary, Bloch was forced into retirement, the philosophy journal was put in the hands of "orthodox" Marxists and was no longer accessible to Blochians (the former editor, his friend Wolfgang Harich, was imprisoned), and an anti-Festschrift was published in 1957, "Blochs Revision des Marxismus." Things became increasingly worse for the Blochs: his work was no longer published and he was not allowed to teach; his wife Carola lost her job and was thrown out of the party after a 25 year membership. Bloch was speaking in West Germany in 1961 when the Berlin Wall was put up, and the Blochs decided to stay in West Germany, where Ernst was offered a professorship in Tübingen.

From then on, Bloch, in his third exile, became the Socratic Gadfly of West Germany, participating in the activities of the student opposition, protesting against the atomic bomb, the Vietnam war, the "emergency laws," the law that forbade radicals to serve in government jobs, and so on. Bloch totally supported the oppositional groups and frequently appeared on television to castigate the government and the bourgeoisie. He published an incredible number and variety of books and received about every possible literary honor. Hence, the contradictory phenomena of an outspoken Marxist radical rising to the tip of the cultural superstructure through his publications.

Bloch's work is of major importance for radical social theory and the development of what he calls a "creative" or "critical" Marxism. In this essay our focus will be on the themes of his humanistic historicism, the ontology of the not-yet, his concepts of hope, concrete utopia, the novum and his unique version of Marxism. Above all, we shall be concerned to show how his work contributes to enriching the Marxian concepts of revolution and socialism. It is our conviction that a reevaluation of Ernst Bloch's thought is necessary. We need to see Bloch not as a romantic, a revisionist, or a mediator in some sort of Christian-Marxist dialogue. Rather, Bloch's significance for radical social theory lies in the need to revitalize Marxism against a theory or practice which purposively refrains from positing alternatives or dealing with the future, as well as against a mechanical, non-dialectical, economistic sort of dogmatic Marxism. The revival of interest in such thinkers as Korsch, Lukács, and Gramsci has provided impetus toward reconstructing Marxism as a theory of liberation and revolution and we believe that Bloch has much to offer to this project.
Our focus will be on Bloch's philosophy and theory of revolution and not on his complex, often tortuous political development. There is a strange and often contradictory relationship between Bloch's philosophy and politics that can only be adequately developed in a detailed historical-theoretical reconstruction of Bloch's philosophical and political writings in the context of his interaction with history. It is well known that after a period of youthful revolutionary romanticism Bloch stood politically close to the position of the CP from the 1920's to the 1950's, and was a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union and sometimes defender of Stalinism.13 He then became a critic of Stalinism and Soviet Marxism for which he was harshly criticized and then totally ostracized in the GDR. After emigrating to the BRD, he has firmly allied himself with the forces of democratic and libertarian socialism, and has dedicated a recent book to the memory of Rosa Luxemburg. What is surprising is that Bloch's philosophical position has remained rather consistent, while his politics have often dramatically changed. One might compare Bloch's theoretical constancy with Lukács, who rarely modified his theoretical position to fit his changing political position, and who often sacrificed his radical and brilliant philosophical positions to the party line. Bloch, on the other hand, never abandoned his libertarian-utopian socialism, his Hegelian Marxism, or his attempt to develop creatively the Marxian philosophy to nourish revolutionary consciousness. It is this theoretical core of Bloch's work that we shall attempt to capture in this paper.

1. History and Revolution

The starting point of Bloch's theory of revolution is his humanistic historicism. For Bloch history is a struggle against those conditions which prevent the human being from attaining self-realization in non-alienating, non-alienated relationships with itself, nature, and other people. Bloch constantly argues that Marxist theory ought not to forget its teleos, which is, as

---

13. Oskar Negt discusses Bloch's politics in "Ernst Bloch—The German Philosopher of the October Revolution," New German Critique, 4 (Winter, 1975), and explains Bloch's Stalinism rather problematically in terms of "the identity crisis and strong reality needs of the revolutionary intelligentsia" (p. 6). It has been argued that Bloch's politics and philosophy are simply contradictory. For example, Stephen Bronner cites the "disparity between Bloch's theory and actual praxis," suggesting that Bloch's "laudation of the 'new,' the aesthetic and historical 'interruption'" is responsible for a rejection of mundane political realities of the present. Stephen Bronner, "Revolutionary Anticipation and Tradition," Minnesota Review, NS6 (Spring, 1978), 93-5. It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that sometimes there is a disparity between Bloch's philosophy and politics (i.e., during the period of his ultra-Bolshevism), but that there has often been a quite consistent unity between his theory and politics (i.e., his early period and the two decades).
Marx puts it in the 1844 Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts: "the naturalization of man and the humanization of nature."\(^{14}\) Bloch comments: "Naturalization of man—that would mean his incorporation into the community, his final this-worldly awakening, so that, free from all alienation, we could really control *our* *hic et nunc*. Humanization of nature—that would mean the opening-up of the cosmos, still closed to itself, to be our Home; the Home once expressed in the mystical fantasy of new heaven and new earth, and echoing on through the beauty and quality of nature as these have found expression in painting and poetry, with the great leap out of the realm of necessity drawing ever closer to man. Not to mention that out-and-out qualitative, all-shattering horizon of *apocalypsis cum figuris* kept open not in antiquity but in the Christianity of Dürer’s day, at least in the realm of fantasy."\(^{15}\) Our focus in this paper will be on what Bloch, following Marx, calls "the development of the wealth of human nature," its enrichment and fulfillment.\(^{16}\)

Bloch finds prefigurations of a liberated and non-alienated condition in humanity's records of its hopes, dreams and struggles for a better world. The human being has incarnated its quest for an enriched humanity in its great artworks, philosophies, religions, and mythologies. No philosopher since Hegel has explored in such detail and with such penetration the cultural tradition, which for Bloch contains untapped emancipatory potential. One of Bloch's great contributions to Marxism is the restoration of a cultural heritage that is often neglected or dismissed as mere ideology by many Marxists. Critique of ideology, Bloch argues, is not merely unmasking (*Entlarvung*) or de-mystification, but is also uncovering and discovery: revelations of unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, abortive hopes—that can be resurrected and enlivened and realized in our current situation. As Habermas dramatically puts it: "What Bloch wants to preserve for socialism, which subsists on scorning tradition, is the tradition of the scorned. In contrast to the unhistorical procedure of Feuerbach's criticism of ideology, which deprived Hegel's 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*) of half of its meaning (forgetting *elevar* and being satisfied with *tollere*), Bloch presses the ideologies to yield their ideas to him; he wants to save that which is true in false consciousness: 'All great culture that existed hitherto has been the foreshadowing of an achievement,

inasmuch as images and thoughts can be projected from the ages' summit into the far horizon of the future. Even the critique of religion . . . is given a new-old interpretation. God is dead, but his locus has survived him. The place into which mankind has imagined God and the gods, after the decay of these hypotheses, remains a hollow space. The measurements-in-depth of this vacuum, indeed atheism finally understood, sketch out the blueprint of a future kingdom of freedom." 17

Bloch urges us to grasp the three dimensions of our temporality: he offers us a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the present and can direct us to a better future. The past—what has been—contains both the sufferings, tragedies and failures of humanity—what to avoid and redeem—and its unrealized hopes and potentials—what could have been. Crucial is Bloch's claim that what could have been can still be: for Bloch, history is a repository of possibilities that are living options for future action. The present, for Bloch, is characterized by latency and tendency: the unrealized potentialities that are latent in the present, and the signs and foreshadowings that indicate the tendency of the direction and movement of the present into the future. This three-dimensional temporality must be grasped and activated by an anticipatory consciousness that at once perceives the unrealized emancipatory potential in the past, the latencies and tendencies of the present, and the realizable hopes of the future. Above all, Bloch's is a philosophy of hope and the future, a dreaming forward, a projection of a vision of a future kingdom of freedom. It is his conviction that only when we project our future in the light of what is, what has been, and what could be can we engage in the creative practice that will produce the world we all want and realize humanity's deepest hopes and dreams.

No Marxist has more convincingly demonstrated the importance of philosophy, 18 art, and religion for revolutionary practice. Bloch finds a red path weaving through history, revolting against alienation, exploitation and oppression, struggling for a better world. He finds a series of red arrows in our cultural tradition pointing toward and anticipating Marxism and socialism. In his first great work Spirit of Utopia (1918, 1923) Bloch investigates music, art, and religion to discover the higher potentialities that will fill the emptiness and dispel the despair and pessimism of the present. This strange,

---


18. For a helpful discussion of Bloch's contribution to clarifying the problematic relationship between Marxism and philosophy see David Gross's article, "Marxism and Utopia" in Towards a New Marxism (St. Louis, 1973).
fiery, baroque book of “revolutionary romanticism” is burning with the hope for the transcendence of a bitter present for a better future. Bloch describes it as a “Sturm und Drang book, contra war, brewed with agitation... a nos ipse constructed first work of an already begun utopian philosophy.”19 The book is overflowing with revolutionary passion and a unique “revolutionary gnosis” that sees history inexorably on its way to socialist revolution despite contemporary setbacks: “War breaks out, revolution begins and with it the doors are open. Although to be sure, they have soon closed themselves again.”20 Bloch wants the doors of revolution to be opened again and knows this can happen only if the actors in the revolutionary process are activated with a yearning desire for socialism. Realizing socialism requires the will to revolutionary practice and a clear sense of the goal which will infuse practice with the requisite revolutionary passion and foresight. The problem is: “I eat bread and I sing songs... But we have no socialist concept. We have become poorer than the warm animals; if not the belly, then the state is our God, everything else has sunk to fun and games. We have longing shortsighted knowledge, but little activity, and as its failures clarify, no breadth, no vistas, no end-goal, no inner threshold which we anticipate crossing over, no core, and no gathered together conscience of the general (Ueberhaupt).”21 Bloch’s work is conceived as a new beginning that will develop consciousness of the final goal of revolutionary struggle—a goal which is rooted in every person’s dreams and embodied in the great works of art, in music, in religion, and above all in revolutionary struggle. Over the ensuing decades, Bloch deepened his inquiry and continuously meditated on history’s revolutionary potential. His work finds its most complete and powerful expression in Das Prinzip Hoffnung, over 1500 pages of excursion into the concept of hope, utopia, phantasy, and dreams of a better world.22 The riches in this encyclopedia of hope will be drawn upon throughout this paper.

Bloch’s corpus is utterly unique. After the Geist der Utopie, he published a brilliant study of Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution in 1921.

20. Ibid., p. 11.
22. Ernst Bloch, Das Prinzip Hoffnung, three volumes, (Frankfurt am Main, 1973). In his magnum opus he investigates “small day dreams” in Part I; the “anticipatory consciousness” and utopia in Part II; “the reflection of wish-images” (display, fashion, fairy tales, travel, film, theater) in Part III; “the outlines of a better world” in social utopias, technology, architecture, painting, opera, poetry, philosophy and leisure in Part IV; and “wish images of the fulfilled moment” – an investigation of morality, music, death, religion, nature, and the highest good in Part V.
followed by three collections of essays, philosophical vignettes, and critiques of the present age (Durch die Wüste, 1923; Spuren, 1930; and Erbschaft dieser Zeit, 1936). These fascinating books disclose an utterly original thinker and stylist who has created his own genres and mode of expression. After a long period of exile, Bloch published his study of Hegel, Subjekt-Objekt in 1951, the conclusion of which, “Dialectic and Hope,” is translated in this issue of NGC. From 1954-9, Bloch published the three volumes of Das Prinzip Hoffnung, and in 1961 published Naturrecht und menschliche Würde, a study of natural law theories and the heritage of the bourgeois revolution and its importance for socialism. In 1962-4 he published Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie, a concise and accessible summary of his philosophical stance. In 1968 he summed up his philosophy of religion in Atheismus im Christentum, and brought together his meditations on the history of philosophy in Das Materialismusproblem (1972) and Experimentum Mundi (1975). Bloch’s aesthetic essays were collected in Verfremdungen (1962-4) and in Philosophie des Vorscheins (1974). His political essays were collected in Politische Messungen (1970) and Vom Hazard zur Katastrophe (1972). Two volumes of selections from Bloch’s main works have been translated into English: Man on His Own (New York: 1970) which features Bloch’s writings on the philosophy of religion and messianic socialism; and On Karl Marx (New York: 1971) which records his encounters with Marxism.

Although Bloch has produced an astounding variety of works (sixteen volumes in the Suhrkamp Collected Works edition) over seven decades of productive activity that responds to a changing historical situation, there is a striking continuity in his works that reveals a relatively stable set of themes, concepts, and emphases unified in a theoretical framework that informs his work from the beginning to the present. It is our view that Bloch’s important contribution to Marxist theory is found in his continual infusing of Marxism with its telos: its theory of revolution and drive toward concrete utopia. It is precisely this theme which has been most misunderstood by his “sympathizers” such as the “hope theologians” and most violently attacked by his “opponents” in the GDR and elsewhere who flail Bloch’s “revisionism.” Both groups see Bloch as somehow spiritualizing or “mystifying” Marxism, largely because Bloch doesn’t dismiss religion as mere delusion and “bourgeois philosophy” as mere ideology. Both groups fail to see the

23. The first volume of this work was translated by John Cumming and published by Seabury Press as A Philosophy of the Future (New York, 1970).
24. Published in a truncated version which infuriated Bloch by Seabury Press as Atheism in Christianity.
polemical thrust of Bloch’s works against any Marxist theory which sacrifices
the most radical demands of Marxism as a theory of total social-economic-
human transformation. Against both his orthodox Marxist critics and
theological champions we wish to show that all of Bloch’s concepts and works
are infused with political content and are directed toward revolutionary
practice. This will require grasping the relation in Bloch’s thought between
utopia and revolution and seeing how religion, philosophy, and art can
contribute to practice by helping to produce the subjective conditions for
revolution and outlining the revolutionary goal.

2. Religion, Art, and Utopia

Oskar Negt rightly warns of “the pervasive theological misuse of Bloch’s
thought.” The theological treatment of Bloch has been to canonize him as a
spokesman in a Marxist-Christian dialogue. A movement called the theology
of hope claims Bloch as one of its own. It is perhaps indicative of the
consciousness(less) of American philosophers that various theologians by 1968
were devoting much attention to Bloch long before he was discovered by
philosophers. The first book of his translated into English, Religion im
Erbe, misleadingly titled Man on His Own (to give Bloch some sort of
fashionable existentialist flavor?) is introduced by such theological stars as
Harvey (Secular-City) Cox and Jürgen (Theology-of-Hope) Moltmann. In
these introductions, Bloch is characterized-caricatured as an “Atheist for
God’s sake” (p. 28—whatever that means!). The claim is made that one
cannot pin Bloch down to Marxism (p. 20) and that he presents a “system of
theoretical messianism” (p. 24). Moltmann’s interpretative move of viewing
Bloch as a religious thinker reminds one of Robert Tucker’s distortion of
Marx as a myth-making religious moralist. Tucker’s perverse reading of Marx
is analogous to the theologians’ reading of Bloch as a “conciliatory thinker”
between Marxism and theology. William A. Johnson’s The Search for
Transcendence sandwiches Bloch between chapters on R.D. Laing and C.J.
Jung and claims that Bloch “is an atheist in the service of the Gospel” and a
“crypto-Judaic-Christian.” Against these grotesque distortions of Bloch we
suggest that his philosophy of religion is the “determinate negation” of
Christianity and religion which elevates (Aufhebung) the human content of
religion and transforms it into a vision of socialist utopia.

27. See the issue of Cross Currents dedicated to the theology of hope, Vol. 18, No. 3
(Summer, 1968).
28. See the discussion in Cross Currents, op.cit., p. 267.
To properly appraise Bloch’s attitude toward religion let us reflect upon the young Marx’s position on religion which was, we believe, decisive in shaping Bloch’s dialectical conception of religion. It is important to see that much of Bloch’s philosophical enterprise is rooted in the issues and problems of the “Left-Hegelians” in the 1840s. Some of the problems that Bloch addresses are concerns which have been either ignored or “forgotten” by Marxists after Marx. Bloch’s concern with utopian socialism, and the critiques of religion, Hegel, and Feuerbach that pervade Bloch’s work parallel the concerns of the young Marx. The polemical thrust and current relevance of Bloch’s reworking of the debates of the young Hegelians reacts against (and compensates for) the amnesia of many Marxists who fail to grasp the concrete locus of Marx’s problematic. Moreover, these debates provide important insights into the concept of socialism and goals of revolutionary practice.

Bloch’s attitude toward religion is grounded in his taking seriously Marx’s insight that “man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man’s self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, the society. This state, this society, produce religion, an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world.” 30 Further, religion is “the expression of real suffering and also the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” 31 All too often Marxists fix upon the “opium of the people” formula and truncate the rich dialectical evaluation of religion in the early Marx. Not Bloch. He continuously cites and discusses these passages and is especially fond of Marx’s description of the critique of religion: “Criticism has torn up the imaginary flowers from the chain, not so that man shall wear the unadorned, bleak chain but so that he will shake off the chain to pluck the living flower.” 32 The “living flower” is a leitmotif of The Principle of Hope where Bloch analyzes its expressions in daydreams, art, and utopias, all of which are expressions of hope. For Bloch, hope is charged with a fervor where men struggle against conditions which appear immutable. Bloch is especially interested in the moments where this fervor explodes into revolutionary action. Throughout Bloch’s writings is a fascination with revolutionaries like Joachim de Fiore and Thomas Münzer, both of whom fought to transform the world to their vision.

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 176.
The volume Man on His Own contains a number of selections from Bloch's works that give a good idea of his complex stance toward religion. One should note that the wild revolutionary-apocalyptic-chiliastic of Spirit of Utopia gives way in the later Bloch to more sober evaluations of religion as found in such works as The Principle of Hope and Atheism in Christianity. Consistent throughout Bloch's work is his emphasis on the revolutionary elements of religion which he finds embodied in Moses, Jesus, and a number of heretics who opposed the church and the ruling powers. Moreover, he sees a congruence between the notion of the Kingdom of Heaven and the concept of socialism. He believes that great religious thinkers and movements who fought to realize the vision of heaven on earth, inexorably opposed the status quo and were often a subversive revolutionary force. Evidently, Bloch's strategy is to convince theologians and religious people that the telos of their belief is really socialism. Moreover, he wishes to show that religious consciousness is rooted in human needs caused by suffering and oppression, and in the hope for a better world that can find its fulfillment in revolutionary struggle. Hence, Bloch's position is that religion is a product of the human being that expresses some of its deepest needs which in turn can be translated into emancipatory practice if freed from oppressive and life-negating forms.

A correct understanding of Bloch's theory of human nature is crucial for grasping his theory of revolution. Bloch sees the human being as a species-being who has not yet become fully human because of such institutions as capitalism and Christianity. Bloch, like Marx, believes that to be radical is to go to the root and that the root of history and revolution is human self-activity. In Bloch's view, the human being is incomplete, unfulfilled, laden with unsatisfied needs and unrealized potentials which are the motor of human self-activity. Art, philosophy, and religion are the repository of needs and potentialities struggling for expression, hence they give us clues as to what the human being is and can be. Bloch's work is a magnificent project of decoding our cultural heritage to restore to us our human potential. His concept of the "not yet" militates against the notion of an innate, ahistorical human essence, for our species has not yet become what it can be and thus has not yet realized its humanity. At bottom, the human being is a

33. See the mind-boggling selection from Spirit of Utopia, "Karl Marx, Death and the Apocalypse" in Man on His Own, pp. 31ff. To place this work in the context of Bloch's thought as a whole, see the 1963 afterword to the Spirit of Utopia where he critiques its "revolutionary romanticism," p. 347.
34. See the selection from The Principle of Hope, "Christian Social Utopias" and "Man's Increasing Entry into Religious Mystery," in Man on His Own.
35. See Bloch's commentary on Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" in On Karl Marx, pp. 54ff.
problem and a mystery. In a 1975 interview in *Die Zeit*, Bloch argues that the human being is an “X of determinateness” and an “X of indeterminateness.” Further, “We really don’t know at all who and what the human being is; we don’t even know if we are humans in the old sense of the word. I would like to say that we are an experimental expression.”

Bloch proposes an anthropology which sees the human adventure as a series of experiments whose outcome is unknown in advance. Like the world (see Bloch’s latest work, *Experimentum Mundi*), human life is a venture, a series of risks, that is radically open to an indefinite future without a certain conclusion. The essence of the human being (and the world) is first revealed at the end, in the final goal in which human potentials are first realized. Bloch’s use of such paradoxical formulas as “the true is the whole, but the whole is untrue” and “the genesis begins at the end” should be seen in this context.

Humanism for Bloch is a historical goal. Bloch maintains a revolutionary humanism that sees the human being first attaining its goals and realizing its potentialities through a process of revolutionary struggle (as opposed to bourgeois humanism which glorifies the human being as it is). For Bloch the human being is “not yet” because at present we are trapped and held back by a set of social-historical conditions and institutions that prevent us from realizing our full potential. The categorical imperative of humanist-revolutionary morality is, Bloch constantly reiterates, hearkening back to the explosive dicta of the young Marx, “to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, abandoned, and wretched creature . . . ” For Bloch and Marx, the transformation to the free society and liberated humanity involves a project of revolution. Bloch’s anthropology is directed toward the “release of the richness of human nature” that will in the future achieve the fulfillment of the human being: a future which will come about when men and women join together and overthrow those relations which inhibit and prevent the realization of humanity.

Bloch’s principle of the “not yet” contains a critique of Hegel’s identity theory. Central to Bloch’s philosophical anthropology, philosophy of
history, and metaphysics is the guiding principle of a not-yet-identity. The ontological premise underlying all these aspects of Bloch’s work is found in his famous formula “S is not yet P.” For example, Bloch maintains, “the proletariat is not yet sublated (aufgehoben), nature is not yet home, the real (Eigentliche) is not yet articulated reality (prädizierte Wirklichkeit): all this is in process.”41 In regard to the human being, “S is not yet P” means we are not yet what we should be, we are not yet fully human. “S,” the subject, is the living, existing human being full of dreams, passions, and needs. “P,” the predicate, is our unfulfilled and unrealized potential, our possibilities. Bloch has devoted much energy to explicating the logic and ontology of the not-yet which he has said is the key to the future-oriented thrust of his philosophy: “Marxist philosophy is that philosophy which ultimately relates itself adequately to becoming and to what is still approaching... Marxist philosophy is a philosophy of the future.”42 Bloch’s philosophy is a “calling for what is not, building into the blue that lines all edges of the world; this is why we build ourselves into the blue and search for truth and reality where mere factuality vanishes—incipit vita nova.”43 Its task is to interpret what-is-not-yet-realized and to change the world in accordance with what could be.

Bloch’s project—and the centrality of the concept of the not-yet—has remained consistent from its beginning. Already in Spirit of Utopia, Bloch perceived “too much round about us is still halting, and ultimately we are still in a state of not-yet-being.”44 In the succeeding decades Bloch continually worked on the logic and ontology of the not-yet and systematized his inquiries in The Principle of Hope. The ontological foundation of his theory is what he calls “Left Aristotelianism.”45 Aristotle’s concept of matter as activity and potentiality suggests an ontological priority of possibility over actuality and necessity: reality is conceived as a dynamic process latent with possibility directed toward the realization of its potentialities which provide its telos and entelechia. But all is not fullness and ripeness in this metaphysical scenario, for the not-yet is permeated with a constitutive not: “The not is the lack of something and the flight from this lack; hence, it drives toward that which is lacking. With the not drives are modelled in the living being: as drive, need,

School see Martin Jay’s The Dialectical Imagination (Boston, 1973); Susan Buck-Morss’s “The Dialectic of T.W. Adorno,” Telos, 14 (Winter, 1972); and Alfred Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 159ff.
41. Ernst Bloch, Subjekt-Objekt.
42. Bloch, Das Prinzip Hoffnung, p. 8.
43. Bloch, ”Karl Marx, Death, and the Apocalypse,” p. 43.
44. Bloch, Geist der Utopie, p. 59.
45. See Ernst Bloch, Avicenna und die Aristotelische Linke for a discussion concerning the split of Aristotle’s followers into what Bloch perceives, on the mode of the dissolution of the Hegelian school, as a right and left Aristotelian tradition.
striving, and primarily as hunger."46 For Bloch we are needy, hungering beings who are driven to fill our emptiness, our lacks, our needs, and to appease our hungers: "All other drives are derived from hunger; and henceforth every longing turns upon the desire to find satisfaction in the what and somewhat that accord with it and are outside it. This means that all that lives must tend towards something, or must move and be on its way towards something; and that in its restlessness the void satisfies beyond itself the need that comes from itself. This kind of want is soon answered, as if there had been no question, no problem. But satisfaction is always transitory; need makes itself felt again, and must be considered in advance, above all to ensure its disappearance not merely as hunger and deficiency, but as a lack of what is most necessary."47

The "not-yet" contains the "not-yet conscious" (noch-nicht-Bewusstes). We have, Bloch believes, an unclear and undefined awareness of our needs and potentialities which are prefigured in our daydreams and desiring. These yearnings struggling for consciousness are present, first, in youth. Youth says Bloch, is driven by a dim presentiment of something ahead, something new, something better. Youth is burning with enthusiasms and hopes, striving for a clearer understanding of itself and the world. Secondly, the not-yet-conscious reveals itself in changing times which are "overcharged with the not-yet-conscious," struggling to throw off old forms of life and to discover new ones. Such ages as late Antiquity, the Renaissance, the age of 18th century revolution, Storm and Stress, and—significantly—our age are pregnant with the new, striving for consciousness of the momentous changes occurring, trying to seize and guide the future. Thirdly, the not-yet-conscious discloses itself in productivity. The artist who creates something new, something unexpected, is guided by an unconscious passion to produce a work which is at first only dimly conceived, then takes clearer and more concise shape as the creative process reaches fruition. In the young Goethe, Bloch believes, all of these phenomena—youth, changing times, and creativity—appear simultaneously.48

Bloch contrasts his notion of the not-yet-conscious, and the anthropology he builds on this notion, with Freud's concept of the "no-longer-conscious" and Freud's theory of the primacy of sexual drives and their psychic

47. Bloch, A Philosophy of the Future, p. 3.
repression.49 Bloch argues that wishes function more visibly and openly in our
daydreams than in the night dreams which Freud focused on. For Freud,
what is interesting about daydreams is that “a great number of human
beings create fantasies at times as long as they live,”50 but nonetheless, most
adults are ashamed and secretive about their daydreams. Yet, despite this
embarrassment, people hold on tightly to their daydreams to the extent that
one “would rather confess all his misdeeds than tell his daydreams.”51

Beneath the differences there are important similarities between Freud and
Bloch. For both thinkers, daydreaming and fantasy are integral parts of
human personality. Like Freud, Bloch understands that wishes play an
important role in influencing the way we see (and construct) our world, as we
fill our lives with beliefs, illusions, dreams, and delusions. For both thinkers,
the root of our desires and illusions is the human situation, our needs and
hungering (see Freud’s derivation of the need for religion in The Future of an
Illusion). For Bloch, one of the marvels of human life is the capacity to
fill life with “utopian projections, mirrored ideals, dream-manufactures,
and travel-pictures,”52 even under socio-economic relations of brutal exploita-
tion. A key to understanding oppression and liberation is thus to be
found in the examination of dreams and fantasies. Dreams are significant for
Bloch in that they express human needs and wishes despite all repression in a
given society, hence they reveal a condition of repression and the need to
overthrow it.53 Dreams thus prefigure and energize the struggle for liberation
and a better life. Dreams manifest yearnings for transcendence and can
function as symbols of human freedom and defiance regardless of social
circumstances. As Bob Dylan noted, “if my thought-dreams could be seen,
they’d probably put my head in a guillotine.”54 For Bloch, dreams are “the
first step to art”55 and are the source of social utopia. Bloch’s theory of
daydreams, art, and revolution illuminates his position in the so-called
expressionism-realism debate with Lukacs in the 1930s.

Expressionism is championed by Bloch as early as Spirit of Utopia for its
utopian potential: for its daring to rebel against the given society and its

49. Das Prinzip Hoffnung, sections 11-14.
50. Sigmund Freud, “The Relation of the poet to day-dreaming” in Character and Culture
51. Ibid.
52. Bloch, A Philosophy of the Future, p. 88. Sections 12 and 13 of this work contain one of
   the best discussions of Bloch’s concept of utopia.
53. For a discussion of the revolutionary potential of dissatisfaction, see Bloch’s essay “Marx
   als Denker der Revolution” in Marx und die Revolution (Frankfurt am Main, 1968).
54. Bob Dylan, “It’s all right, ma, I’m only bleeding” from Bringing it all back home (New
   York, 1966).
aesthetic traditions, and for its creation of new forms that embody dreams of a better world. Rather than merely reproducing what is, expressionism sought to portray what is not, thus allowing free reign to fantasy to express its wishes which could not be fulfilled in existing society. Thus expressionism contained for Bloch a radical indictment of the status quo, and its works contained a “dream-content” which Bloch saw as revolutionary potential. Expressionism is not, like realism, “the simple portrayal of facts, but of processes; it is finally the revelation of that which has not as yet come into existence and which needs him who will actualize it.”

The expressionists' experiments embodied yearnings for a new reality that contained for Bloch an important parallel to social utopias. Further, expressionism is a symptom of the crisis of capitalism and a fractured, contradictory totality. Against Lukács, Bloch polemizes: “Perhaps Lukács' reality, that of the infinitely mediated totality is not at all so objective; perhaps Lukács' conception of reality still contains classical systematic traits; perhaps true reality is also interruption (Unterbrechung). Precisely because Lukács retains an objectivistic, that is to say closed, conception of reality, he consequently, on the occasion of expressionism, turns against every artistic attempt to bring about the dissolution of a world view (even should this world view itself be capitalistic). Consequently, he sees nothing but subjectivistic ruptures in an art which interprets the real ruptures of the surface interrelations and which attempts to discover the new that already exists in the crevices. Consequently, he equates the experiment of dissolution with the state of decadence.”

Hence for Bloch expressionist art both mirrors the dissolution of the existing society and expresses a striving for a better world that is a radical rejection of this world and is thus subversive and potentially revolutionary. Although the expressionist artists may not be fully conscious of their intentions, nor perceive the goal of their strivings or effect of their art, their works are an embodiment of genuine radical impulses that may be decoded and utilized for revolutionary purposes.

The not-yet-conscious found in dreams, changing times, and art is related to the not-yet-come-into-being (noch-nicht-Gewordenes). For Bloch we are seething with unrealized potentialities that ground our fantasies and dreams and propel us to change and self-realization. We are always more than we currently are, are always ahead of ourselves, always driven by potentialities which are still outstanding, which summon us to action and struggle. This dialectical fire within, burning through our needs, desires, dreams, hopes,

---

56. Ernst Bloch, Die Kunst, Schiller zu Sprechen (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), p. 64.
57. Ernst Bloch, Erbschaft dieser Zeit (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), p. 270.
and potentialities, provides the basis of an anthropology of revolution. This activist concept of the human being offers an important contribution to a Marxist theory of the subjective conditions of revolution. Most Marxist discussions of changing consciousness producing the subjective conditions of revolution focus on the obstacles to revolutionary consciousness: false consciousness, ideological dissemblance, reactionary tendencies in the working class, etc. This sort of analysis is certainly not unimportant but it often doesn’t address itself to the crucial question: what motivates people to revolutionary action? Bloch argues that our desires, hopes, and dreams contain great revolutionary potential if they are properly understood and acted upon. It should be stressed that Bloch is clearly not supporting idle daydreaming or escapist fantasizing: “No man has been satisfied by desire alone. Wishing is not only ineffectual but enervates if what is wished is not will, and willed resolutely. It must be accompanied, too, by a keen far-seeing vision which shows the will what can be done.”

Thus for Bloch our dreams are rooted in our hungerings and potentials and contain an impetus toward change and struggle. For Bloch every dreamer is a potential revolutionary. The same hopes and desires that produce religion can produce revolutionaries. Bloch studies specific individuals like Thomas Müntzer and Karl Marx, and tries to discern what drove them to revolutionary action. More generally, he inquires into the experiences and conditions that can radicalize anyone who dares to dream. Interesting is his discussion of what radicalizes intellectuals and his reflection on the alliance between philosophy (intellectuals) and the proletariat which Marx saw as a key to revolution. The proletariat is radicalized by brute need, hunger, and their radical chains. But what radicalizes intellectuals? “What has brought to the red flag those who did not, in a sense, need it? Perhaps that sympathetic movement of the heart (insofar as it exists at all) before such universal suffering. Perhaps the conscience which this misery awakens in some silent members of the ruling class while their active business partners pocket the profits quite undisturbed. And perhaps the thirst for knowledge also helped by providing in scientific analysis a knife to lop off the branch on which a young man or woman of solid circumstances and expectations had been sitting... Hence the least that is needed is a collaboration of feeling, conscience, and above all knowledge, in order to present a socialist consciousness in opposition to one’s own past social being....”

59. See Marx’s early essay “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” op.cit. This essay is of inestimable importance for Bloch.
importance of Marx: "this goes to show that the combination of feeling, conscience, and objective insight that so often has caused intellectuals to move to the left makes Marx indispensable. Clearly Marx unadulterated offers a secure paradigm of the red path of the intellect: the model of a humanism that conceives itself in action." Marxism for Bloch is "the heir of whatever was intended by the earlier revolutionary bourgeoisie in respect to human decency." Marx's "humanization is the born enemy of dehumanization... True Marxism, in its dynamics of class struggle, and in its substantive goal is, and must be, humanism and humanitarianism enhanced." Revolutionary humanism was a central motif in Bloch's thought from the beginning. Marxism for Bloch is revolutionary humanism. In *Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch writes: "(Marx) is guided simultaneously, so to speak, by Jesus with a whip and the Jesus of brotherly love. Sometimes the conquest of evil may be managed in more quiet fashion, as by the proverbial horseman who simply didn't see that he was crossing a frozen lake, and — more profoundly — in exceptional situations, by the saint who succeeds with the kiss of love, ignoring evil creatively. Yet the rule is still that the soul must accept guilt in order to destroy existing evil, lest it incur the greater guilt of idyllic withdrawal, of seeming to be good by putting up with wrong. Domination, or power in itself, is evil; but it takes power to counter it. The categorical imperative must carry a gun wherever and for so long as power can be crushed by no other means; and wherever and for so long as anything diabolical maintains its violent resistance to the (undiscovered) amulet of purity."

Crucial is Bloch's linking of humanism with socialist revolution and his constant articulation of the goal of socialism with a new human being in a human society. In *Spirit of Utopia* Bloch portrays the "socialist idea" in quasi-religious terms, but in *The Principle of Hope* and subsequent work, utopia—and above all concrete utopia—is conceived in terms of socialism: "All utopias or nearly all, despite their feudal or bourgeois commission, predict communal ownership, in brief, have socialism in mind." One of Bloch's major contributions to Marxist theory is his rethinking the utopian socialist component of Marxism which he believes can be of value in producing the subjective conditions of revolution. From the *Spirit of Utopia* to *Experimentum Mundi* Bloch focuses upon and enriches the concept of utopia. To appreciate the boldness of this move we should recall the scathing attacks of Marx and Engels on the "utopian socialists." Ever since this

61. Ibid., p. 20.
62. Ibid., pp. 21-2.
63. Ibid., p. 21.
64. Bloch, "Karl Marx, Death and the Apocalypse," p. 36.
65. Ernst Bloch, "The University, Marxism, and Philosophy" in *On Karl Marx*, p. 136.
critique, most Marxists have avoided or scorned the term “utopia.” Yet a careful examination of the most famous criticism of utopian speculation in the Communist Manifesto shows that the utopian thinking being attacked is the ideas of certain groups of utopians whose theory leads them to a disastrous practice of accommodation to the status quo and surrender of the demands for radical change. Bloch's concept of utopia is carefully distinguished from the sort of utopia that the Communist Manifesto rebuts.

The fundamental failure of the utopian socialists for Marx and Engels is the lack of a concept of class struggle. Utopian socialists in their critique of society fail to make class distinctions and to conceive of radical social change through class struggle. As such, Marx and Engels attack the utopian socialists' attempts to place themselves above history and political struggle and the resulting quietism when "they reject all political and especially revolutionary action." Although Marx and Engels see a positive critical element in utopian socialism when it attacks "every principle of existing society," they believe that without being grounded in the historical development of class struggle, "these fantastic attacks . . . lose all practical value and all theoretical justification." Because of their "fantastic standing apart from the contest," the utopian socialists degenerate from their revolutionary ideals to "reactionary sectionism" where the escapist utopian mentality "deadens the class struggle" and reconciles "the class antagonism."

If Bloch's concept of utopia is to be relevant to a Marxist theory of revolution it must at the minimum avoid the traps which the utopian socialists of Marx's time fell into. Bloch's concept of utopia is grounded in history, is directed toward political and revolutionary activity and acknowledges class struggle as the way to concrete utopia. Crucial to properly grasping the revolutionary thrust of Bloch's concept of utopia is his notion of concrete utopia. While both abstract (or traditional utopian thought) and concrete utopian projection are concerned with the exploration of human possibilities, concrete utopia deals with possibilities which exist as tendencies latent within a given situation. Abstract utopians dream of far away El Dorado, the land of milk and honey, Oz, fairy tale kingdoms that may well express a negation of the status quo and the projection of a better life, but they remain mere fantasies for they contain no road map (kein Fahrplan) that shows us how to get there. Concrete utopia does not impatiently leap into an ideal beyond but

66. See Maynard Solomon's article "Marx and Bloch," Telos 13 (Fall, 1972), for a discussion of Marx's position on utopian socialism that also relates Bloch's concept of utopia to Marx's positions.

explores the present situation to discover real possibilities for radical change. Concrete utopia is exemplified in Marxism, but a Marxism that encompasses both a “cold current” and a “warm current,” both immediate goals and the final goal, both theory and practice. The “cold current” of Marxism involves “the detective glance at history,” rigorous scientific analysis of the present situation, hardheaded evaluation of the possibilities and openings for radical change, and ruthless critique of everything existing. The “warm current”—the heating up of which Bloch’s life has been dedicated to—contains the “liberating intention and the materialist-human and humane-materialist tendency,” i.e., the living, pulsating passion to change the world, burning desire for socialism, active participation in the struggle. From the warm current flows the revolutionary actuality of Marxism: “From here, the strong appeal to the humans who have been defaced, enslaved, abandoned, and made contemptible; from there the appeal to the proletariat as the point of departure of emancipation.” The problem is that this warm current of Marxism has been suppressed by orthodox economistic or evolutionary Marxists who merely focus on the objective conditions for revolution and neglect the subjective factors. Bloch critiques objectivistic versions of Marxism laden with “theoretical exaggerations of the objective factors and its supposed self-journey which carries practical defeatism into the subjective factors of the masses.” What is wanted is a proper mediation between the subjective and objective factors of revolution and between the warm and cold current. “The subjective factors, as the objective, must be conceived in their constant, dialectical, reciprocal interaction that is indivisible and inseparable. Whereby, certainly, the human action aspect must be preserved from isolation, from the standard putchistic activism as such which tears itself loose from the objective economic laws and believes the subjective factors can leap over them. But no less harmful is the social democratic automatism as such, as superstitious belief in a world which runs by itself.” A proper mediation of the subjective and objective conditions of revolution requires a fusing of the warm and cold currents of Marxism. It is not enough to have a burning desire for revolution: one must have a clear understanding of what is possible and a clear vision of both the means and the ends of the struggle. For Bloch, creative Marxism is a unity of “dreaming ahead, sobriety, enthusiasm.” Mere yearning is rejected for docta spe, “rationally

70. Ibid.
informed hope”: “If in the building of mere castles in the air there is little concern about the expense, which results ultimately in false paths and deception, even then, in the long run, hope (with a plan and with a link with the potentially possible) is still the strongest and best thing we have... Reason cannot blossom without hope, and hope cannot speak without reason: both must operate in a Marxist unity; no other science has a future, no other future, science.” Sobriety and enthusiasm complement and correct each other: the warm and cold current can merge together in a two-pronged attack on the status quo. Bloch sums it up: “Only Marxism both detects and liberates, providing both the theoretical and the practical solution for this so long-standing contradiction. Furthermore, only Marxism has produced the theory and practice of a better world, not in order to abrogate the present one, as in most of the abstract social utopias, but in order to transform this world economically and dialectically. Marxism never renounces its heritage, and least of all the primal intention: the Golden Age. In all its analyses Marxism plays the part of the sober detective, yet takes the legend seriously and reacts pragmatically to the dream of the Golden Age.”

Bloch’s stress on the importance of the subjective conditions of revolution can be seen as a reaction against deterministic-objectivist-economic versions of Marxism: “The exploding factor is the subjective factor of the proletariat.” It is not an accident that Bloch dedicated his late work Experimentum Mundi to Rosa Luxemburg, for he continually repeats Luxemburg’s critique of those socialists who forget the end goal of socialism through shortsightedness or total immersion in immediate tasks. For Bloch, the final goal should nourish, activate, and radicalize practice concerned with immediate goals. For Bloch one’s current practice should be infused and illuminated by continuous awareness of the final goal: “The form of incipit vita nova which is attached to the present respects immediate ends in theory as well as in practice; but while these present ends are enclosed within the possible range of a human life, they must at the same time set their sights on the distant goal of a society without alienation. The perspective must offer help, though not violent oppression; it must inspire, though not mediate. It must not leap over the route to the ideal, but follow its stages without abandoning the ideal.” For, “If the goals of a man fighting for higher wages do not include the disappearance of society that compels him to fight for

74. Ibid., p. 36. David Gross is therefore wrong to suggest that Bloch solely champions the “warm current” of Marxism and dismisses the “cold current” as “blind empiricism, positivism,” etc. (“Marxism and Utopia,” op.cit., pp. 96-7).
75. Ernst Bloch, Das Materialismusproblem (Frankfurt am Main, 1972), p. 310.
76. Ernst Bloch, “Incipit Vita Nova” in Man on His Own, p. 86.
higher wages at all, he will not get far in his fight for wages either." 77

Thus concrete utopia is a synthesis of the warm current and cold current of
Marxism, of the distant and near goals of socialism that holds together the
disparate moments in a Marxian revolutionary project; moments that have so
often fallen apart in Marxian theory and practice after Marx. Bloch restores
to us an integral revolutionary Marxism that maintains the unity of theory
and practice: "Marx stressed exactly the reciprocal interaction between
theoretical and actual practical work, in so far as he enlivened the theoretical
with a drive toward realization... theory without a reciprocally effecting
relation to practice remains abstract ideology... But so that theory is not
indifferent and ineffectual it must actually be mediated with real interests." 78
For Bloch in so far as theory and practice "both reciprocally and inter-
changeably oscillate with each other, praxis presupposes theory, just as a new
theory connects itself as a continuation of a new practice." 79 Bloch's lifework
is a testimony to this position.

3. The Novum and the Dialectics of Transformation

Herbert Marcuse has argued that in the face of the developments of late
capitalism we confront "the task of developing revised dialectical concepts."
Bloch fulfills the need to continually revitalize Marxian dialectics by both
infusing new life in the old Marxian categories and by creating new ones:
"Three categories of the dialectical process are... central: Front, Novum,
and Matter. All three presuppose the most worthy human capacity for
comprehension and participation: namely, hope. Front is the foremost
segment of time, where what is next is determined. Novum is the real possi-
bility of the not-yet-known, not-yet-wrought-into-being, with the accent of
the good novum (the realm of freedom), when the trend toward it has been
activated. Matter is not just mechanical mass, but—in accordance with the
implicit meaning of the Aristotelian definition of matter—both that which
has being in accordance with possibility and hence that which in a particular
case conditionally determines the capacity of something to become
historically manifest, and that-which-exists-in-possibility, and hence the real
possibility substrate of the dialectical process. Precisely as being in movement,
matter is being that is not yet manifest; it is the ground and substance in

77. Ernst Bloch, "Man's Increasing Entry into Religious Mystery," in Man on His Own, p.
208.
78. Bloch, Experimentum Mundi, p. 65.
80. Herbert Marcuse, "The Concept of Negation in the Dialectic," Telos, 8 (Summer, 1971),
131.
which our future—its own future too—is carried out.” The *Novum*, the new social self is a central key to Bloch’s Marxism which he charges with revolutionary energy to the extent that he equates *Novum* with revolutionary change that contains an eruption of novelty, a break with the past, the qualitatively new. Bloch’s focus is on the Newness which is concretely possible only with the advent of Marxism because “in no pre-Marxian world picture (*Weltbild*) could one find space for the *Novum*.” Bloch finds a psychological harbinger of the *Novum* in the experience of love which transforms one’s life. Religion too provides an anticipation of the *Novum* in the notion of the Second Coming, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Apocalypse. Yet for Bloch, without Marxism to provide the concrete possibility of the end of pre-history and the beginning of human history (in which the human being is the active, conscious subject of the historical process) no qualitative change beyond the bad infinity of mere novelty, the trivially new, is possible. For with the existence of Marxism embodied in a real, historical revolutionary movement, the *Novum* comes into being as the objectively real possibility of revolutionary social-self transformation. Although the *Novum* has existed previously in a latent state which manifested itself periodically in experiences of discontent and revolt, the *Novum* exploded into the continuum of history during those ten days which shook the world: the Bolshevik Revolution. Regardless of its later developments, Bloch saw the Russian Revolution as a manifestation of humanity acting out the *Novum* in history. The tragedy of Bloch’s life lies in the unfulfilled promises of the Russian Revolution. His return to the GDR rather than the Federal Republic after World War II and his decision to leave the GDR in 1961 are rooted in unfulfilled and (in the GDR) frustrated and even suppressed hopes for a classless society and liberated humanity: the *Novum* incarnate. Still Bloch remains, as Oskar Negt reminds us, “the German philosopher of the October Revolution.”

In light of the wide-ranging tour de force of Bloch’s writings, there is some irony that the book which became the most controversial was his book on Hegel: *Subjekt-Objekt*. Written in the US and GDR after World War II and published in the GDR in 1951, *Subjekt-Objekt* argued for the importance

---

84. *New German Critique*, 4.
of Hegel in the Marxian project. Against the orthodox Stalinist interpretation of Hegel as a bourgeois reactionary, Bloch saw Hegel as having positive as well as negative aspects. Bloch’s book and the reaction in the GDR reminds one of the experience of Lukács and his *History and Class Consciousness*. For both thinkers saw the importance of Hegel for Marxism and both were viciously attacked by the communist orthodoxy for their heresy. For Bloch, “whoever in their study of the historical-materialist dialectic omits Hegel, has no chance for fully conquering historical-dialectical materialism” (*Subjekt-Objekt*, p. 12).

Yet Bloch’s book is clearly not an apologetic for Hegel. For Bloch, Hegel’s thought contains “the limit of idealist dialectics, i.e., mere contemplation” (p. 516). Whereas Hegel’s philosophy is oriented toward the past and appropriating its contents *post festum* from a contemplative standpoint, Marxist philosophy is oriented toward the future which it actively strives to shape. Hence knowledge for Marx is an instrument to transform the present and to realize the possibilities which will produce a better future: “the destruction of slavery and the mastery of necessity” (p. 519). Although Marx’s philosophy is rooted in Hegel’s dialectic, it breaks with all previous philosophy. Bloch describes the change as “a leap into the new as it has never been experienced in previous history; it begins through Marx as a continuation as well as a sublation of Hegel—the transformation of philosophy into a philosophy of world-transformation” (p. 519). “Philosophy,” Bloch writes, “is no longer philosophy if it is not dialectical-materialist,” but “dialectical materialism is nothing if it is not philosophical,” throwing itself into a future informed by *docta spes*: rationally constituted and scrutinized hope. Philosophical intervention “is theoretically-practical work against alienation.” It aims at constituting the realm of freedom, socialist utopia, humanity’s homeland: “in so far as socialism liberates from all conditions of existence which carry in itself the character of alienated labor, it will liberate the entire society from alienation and will thus create the foundation for the entire earth as the home of humanization (*Inland der Humanisierung*)” (p. 520).