

Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno: “Possibilities of Utopia Today”

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Host: We can assure you, esteemed listeners, that we would not have had the courage to put such a global topic on our program, had we not been assured of the authorship, or may I say, the readiness to engage in dialogue, of two such distinguished authorities on this topic.

Ladies and gentlemen, it would be redundant to say any introductory words about Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno. Anyone who is just a little familiar with contemporary philosophy knows that both philosophers have been and continue to be committed to the idea of utopia in their distinct ways throughout their lives. The first, Ernst Bloch, in his monumental opus, “The Principle of Hope”, the second, Theodor Adorno, by means of a permanent dialectical criticism which is Hegelian. And with Hegel, as we know, lies one of the last philosophical roots of the intellectual figure we call utopia.

In short, only the collaboration of Bloch and Adorno, a unique constellation of competition and distance in German philosophy today, has given us the courage to face this issue at all.

By Utopia, we mean, preliminarily, the design of a social order that does not yet exist. *U-topos* is the placeless, the as yet placeless, the place “nowhere-home” [Nirgendheim]. Utopian thinking can be utopistic, i.e., illusionary, but it does not have to be like that. The great wishful fantasies of a different, a better, a new society, as conceived for instance by Rousseau in the utopia “back to nature”, by Kant in his idea of eternal peace or by Marx in his vision of a classless society, they all appear to me as locomotives moving the trains of humanity through history, little by little. Of course, these trains never arrive, because the timetable, if one wants to stay in this image, is revised, so to speak, by every new generation. Of course, there have always been utopias, their powerful effect is undeniable. But we should ask whether this utopian element of our spiritual tradition, which seems to me to be a profoundly religious moment of infinite hope or infinite fear, whether this category actually still has a real chance today in our enlightened, technological and disenchanting world, whether it can still exist today and tomorrow, and if so, how and where. But perhaps, gentlemen, this is a rather late question, and we should start with more immediate ones. Above all, the question of the unfashionability of our topic, of the unfashionability of the

term “utopia”, is pressing. The word does not have a good ring to it today, it is devalued and it is usually used only in the derogatory sense of “utopianistic”.

Adorno: Yes, if I am to say the first thing, which I am perhaps not legitimised to do since my friend Bloch is after all the one who brought the word utopia back to honour in his early work “Spirit of Utopia”, then I would first like to remind you that countless so-called utopian dreams, such as television, such as the possibility of reaching other stars, such as a movement faster than sound, have been fulfilled, but that these dreams, in having been fulfilled, all look as if the best had been forgotten in the process. This means that one does not become happy with them, that these dreams themselves have taken on a peculiar character of disillusionment, of the spirit of positivism and, beyond that, of boredom in their realisation. I mean this in such a way that it is not simply a matter of the fact that what becomes real is inherently limited in comparison to the infinite possibilities of the imagination but in a much more tangible sense. That is, one almost always finds oneself betrayed by the fulfilment of the wishes, as in the fairy-tale where the farmer is given three free wishes and with one of them, I think, he wishes his wife a sausage on her nose and then has to use a second one to wish the sausage away from her nose again. I mean, you can look into the distance but instead of the imago of Lilith, the erotic utopia, rising up, the most one sees is some more or less pretty singer who even cheats you of her prettiness as instead of showing herself, she sings some nonsense, which generally consists of roses and moonlit nights being in harmony with each other. Moreover, one could perhaps say by way of generalisation, that today, the fulfilment of utopia commonly consists of a repetition of the ever same. So when [Wilhelm] Busch says, “it’s beautiful elsewhere, too, and here I am anyhow” [schön ist es auch anderswo und hier bin ich sowieso], this word begins to take on a terrible meaning in the fulfilment of technical utopias today, namely that the “and here I am anyhow” also seizes possession of the “elsewhere”, where “Mister Pief with the big perspective” [Busch’s character] still wished himself to get to.

Moderator: Professor Bloch, are you also of the opinion that the devaluation of the term utopia is related to this, how shall I say, perfection of the technical world?¹

Bloch: Yes and no. It has to do with the fact that this fulfilment is not so perfect or so great after all. These are only very limited dreams. One could add the very old wish to fly, although in a poem by [Richard] Dehmel it is said, if I remember correctly, “to be as *free* as the birds are”. That’s in there too! So there remains a residue. After all, there remains much that is not fulfilled or trivialised by fulfilment. Setting aside the deeper aspect, that every realisation carries with it a melancholy, a melancholy of fulfilment, even if it really is fulfilment without residue. Fulfilment is never actually so, but thinkable, postulatable as such, as without residue. But it is not just that a

devaluation of utopia has occurred – I believe, by the way, that this is very old and that the slogan, “this is only a utopia”, as depreciation, as cloud-cuckoo-land, as „wishful thinking“ without any content, without the possibility of implementation, as rhapsody, as reverie in a banal sense, that this is very old and didn’t need to wait for our time to arrive. I don’t know if our time, has not, on the contrary, even brought about a revaluation of the utopian. It is no longer called that, it is called “science fiction” in technology, it is called “water on old mills” in theology, in which the “principle of hope“, which I have discussed, begins to play an important role. The optative, the “if only it were so”, begins to play a role that supersedes the role of reality, that it really was and is so. This is no longer called utopian – or when it is called so, perhaps not without associations to the old social utopias – but I believe that we live incredibly close, if not to utopia at least to the *topos* of utopia, setting all substance aside. “Utopia” was an empty *topos* from the very beginning on. For Thomas [More] the determination of a place, more as for Aristophanes with his Cloud Cuckoo Land. Here, [in More] the determination of a country is transferred to an island in the distant South Seas. What then changes later is that it comes out of space into time, with the later utopians of the 18th, especially the 19th century, Fourier and Owen and Saint-Simon and Cabet, who transfer utopia into the future. It is a transformation of the *topos* from space into time. [In the former case] Utopia is already finished on a distant island, only I am not there. In the latter case, when it is moved into a real future, not only am I not there, but the *topos* itself is not yet by itself [bei sich]! This island doesn't exist, but it is not nonsense or pure rhapsody, it is *not yet*, in the sense that there is the possibility that it could come into existence if we do something for it. Not just as we travel there, but *by means* of travelling there, the island of utopia rises out of the sea of possibilities. This is still utopia but with a new content [i.e. utopia as something brought about by human action]. I think in this sense utopia is not so settled yet in consciousness. Despite the appalling banalisation it has suffered and despite the order - here I would agree with my friend Adorno - despite the command given by a supposedly totally satiated and now supposedly classless, no longer antagonistic society. The semblance of this society or the interest of such a society to be so perfect, this gives a command, however not in the sense of a devaluation, but in the sense of a fraud of fulfilment. Because of which utopia need no longer be mentioned, for we have, in a neo-Wilhelminian way, come so marvellously far. [The last sentence is obviously ironic. I think the important point is that the allegedly post-antagonistic society presents itself as utopia already fulfilled].

Adorno: Yes, I agree with that very much and I will use your objection, which you implicitly expressed, to correct myself a little. It was not my intention to hold technology and the sobriety supposedly associated with technology responsible for this strange decline in utopian consciousness. Rather it seems to me that it is something that relates more to the contradiction

inherent in the relation between individual technical achievements and innovations and the whole, the social whole. What utopia is, what utopia can be imagined as, is the transformation of the whole, and such a transformation of the whole is fundamentally distinct from all these so-called utopian achievements, which, as you say, are all very diffident [*bescheiden*], very limited. It seems to me that what people have subjectively lost in their consciousness is the ability, quite simply, to imagine the whole as something that could be totally different. That people are oath-like bound to the world as it is. My thesis on this would be that innermost all people, whether they admit it to themselves or not, know that it is possible that it could be different. Not only could they live without hunger and probably without fear, but they could also live as free people. At the same time, the social apparatus has become so rigid towards them, and indeed all over the world, that what stands before them as a tangible possibility, as the obvious possibility of fulfilment, presents itself to them as radically impossible. And when people today universally say these things which in more harmless times were probably reserved for hardened philistines, “ah, those are only utopias”, “ah that's only possible in the land of milk and honey”, “actually, that's not supposed to be at all”, then I would say that this is because people are only able to master the contradiction between the obvious possibility of fulfilment and the equally obvious *im*possibility of fulfilment in such a way that they identify themselves with this impossibility and make this impossibility their own cause. Therefore, to speak with Freud, they identify with the aggressor and say that the very thing should not be of which they actually feel that it should be, but which is denied to them by a “bewitchment” of the world.

Host: I would like to ask, Professor Bloch, what is the content of utopias? Is it happiness, is it satisfaction, or is it the word which just turned up, is it perhaps simply freedom? What is actually hoped for there?

Bloch: Utopias, if I may respond to this question, emerged for a long time exclusively as social utopias, the dreams of a better life. In Thomas Morus' work, it's in the title: the state, the *res publica*. The *optima res publica* is set by Thomas Morus. So this is a transformation of the world to facilitate the greatest possible happiness, social happiness. But it is not the case that utopias don't have a timetable [*Fahrplan*]. In their content, utopias depend entirely on their social situation. Thomas More, living at the beginning of English imperialism, still in the Elizabethan age, has a pathos of liberal conditions among his islanders. Campanella, a hundred years later, in the time of the Hispanicisation of Italy, that is, the world of Philipp II., and within the atmosphere of the trial of Galilei, sets this counterplay to freedom: our social conditions and all conditions can only come into order if there is always the greatest possible order, if things are set straight. But the goal for both of them is always the realm of dreams, the more or less objectively founded, or at least in dreams well-founded, and not entirely meaningless realm of dreams of a better social

life. In addition, Campanella, and also Bacon, exhibit technical utopias. In Bacon's „Nova Atlantis“, the templum Salomonis: This is the anticipation of an accomplished technical university, in which outrageous inventions, a whole programme full of inventions, are presented. In play is also a much older layer that we don't want to leave out, we the least of all, the fairy-tale. The fairy-tale is not only filled with social utopias of a better life and of justice – this is another field that we will perhaps come to later, namely natural law, which does not coincide with utopia – but it also knows technical utopias, especially in the oriental fairy-tales. The magic horse from 1001 nights: there's even an ascent- and descent-lever, it's a helicopter, the magic horse! You can read 1001 nights as a textbook of inventions, in many places. Bacon addresses this too, and distinguishes himself from the fairy-tales, because what he portrays, this *real* magic, compares to the old wishful images of the fairy-tale like the deeds of Alexander compare to the deeds of King Arthur's Round Table. But there is that in both!

As I said, the content changes somewhat depending on the social situation. In the 19th century, the relation to the existing society is now clearly evident. Most obviously in Saint-Simon and Fourier, who was a great, exact, sober analyst. In his writing “[Théorie des] quatre mouvements” in 1808, monopoly capital is already prophesied. So it's a negative utopia, which also exist. The contents change but an invariant of the direction is there! Psychologically speaking, longing [Sehnsucht] – regardless of the content of the longing – is the universal and above all the only honest quality of all human beings. Thus [unintelligible] has already substantiated it. But now the questions and refinements begin. What do I long for as the optimum? As I said, one has to leave the ancestral home of utopias, the social utopias, in order to see what you [Adorno] were saying about the whole, in order to see the other areas of utopia which are not called by that name! For technology, it has already become clear. There is architecture that was never built, that was only drawn, wishful architecture in a grand style. There is theatre architecture, where something is produced cheaply and at low cost with cardboard, where only the money was lacking, and the technology was not sufficiently advanced. In the baroque period above all, in the Viennese baroque theatre, there are magnificent buildings that can never be occupied because they are made of cardboard and of semblance, but they appear nevertheless [a pun on the German “Schein” and “Erscheinen”]. There are the medical utopias that contain nothing less than the abolition of death, a very foolish distant goal, but which brought about something so sober as the abolition and relief of pain, which was much easier to accomplish, the invention of anaesthesia. Yet not only illness, but *this* is to be accomplished [Bloch says “abgeschafft” (abolished) instead of “geschafft” (accomplished) which seems to be a mistake], the utopia that people are healthier after an operation than they were before. Thus, restructuring the organism like restructuring the state.

Above all, as I said at the beginning, there is the Utopian in religion, namely in the heavenly kingdom. This is what appears at the end, this is what is proclaimed, this is what the Messiah, Christos, brings. Distant wishful visions [Wunschbilder] with extraordinary content and with great depth (pre-)appear [vor-erscheinen] here, so that I believe one must realize all that which resonates and is set in motion in a social utopia. Only and exclusively, and that is alone what makes the matter debatable, in accordance with the existing conditions, in scope with the tops of an objectively real possibility [“objektiv-reale Möglichkeit”, a technical term Bloch uses to refer to the material-historical conditions which allow for the realization of certain things and foreclose the realization of others. The sentence is rather fragmentary and difficult to understand in the original]. But if the ocean of possibility is much larger than our inhabited land of reality, which one could then call – without arousing associations, I beg your forgiveness – „presentness”... [“Vorhandenheit”, a term prominently used by Martin Heidegger. In Heidegger’s case, it is usually translated as “present-at-hand” but the meaning here is less subject-oriented but instead refers to the totality of positively existing things.].

Adorno (interjecting): Accepted!

Bloch: ...which one could then call “presentness”, without straining the actuality [Eigentlichkeit] – Then it has had bad press and has been treated badly with the very clear interest in not changing the world into the possible and, as I said, [the possibility] did not enter the philosophical horizon sufficiently and not without a slander that runs parallel to the slander of the utopian. [It’s difficult to follow here. I think essentially Bloch means that philosophically the category “possibility” has not yet been considered properly]

Adorno: Yes, I think that you have provided a whole series of, how shall I put it, illustrations of very different types of utopian consciousness. That has a lot to do with the issue. Because there is no such thing as a single fixable utopian content. When I spoke of the whole, I was not thinking only of the system of human coexistence, but really of the fact that all categories can change on the basis of their own composition. So I would say that it is an essential part of the concept of utopia that it does not consist in transforming a certain single category from which everything is constituted. For example, to take the category of happiness alone as the key to utopia.

Host: Not even the category of freedom?

Adorno: Neither the category of freedom in isolation. If the category of freedom alone were to be regarded as the key to utopia, then the content of idealism would really be synonymous with utopia, because idealism wants nothing other than the realisation of freedom without considering the realisation of happiness. There is always already a context in which all these categories occur, in which the isolation of the category of happiness, which as an isolated category always has something poor and fraudulent about it, would also change, as would the category of freedom,

which would then no longer be an end in itself or even an end in itself of inwardness, but something which would need to be fulfilled. I believe, however, and it has touched me very much that you have just come up with this because my own considerations have been revolving very much around this point lately, Ernst, that the question of the abolition of death is indeed the neuralgic point. This is what it is really about!

It's very easy to see that, one only has to talk about the possibility of abolishing death with some so-called well-meaning people – I'm borrowing the expression from Ulrich Sonnemann, who invented and introduced it – and then, just as if you would throw a stone into a police station and then a policeman comes out of the door, you will immediately encounter the reaction that yes, if death were to be abolished, yes, if people no longer died, that would be the most terrible and the most appalling thing. And I would say that it is precisely this form of reaction that actually stands in the way of utopian consciousness the most. What reaches beyond people's identification with the existing social conditions, in which they prolong themselves, is identification with death. Utopian consciousness means a consciousness for which the possibility that people no longer have to die is not something terrible, but on the contrary, is what one actually wants. Incidentally, – you spoke earlier of “presentness” – it is very telling that Heidegger in a way already devalues the question of the possibility of existence without death as a merely ontic question, which only concerns that which exists, and is of the opinion that death would, as it were, retain its absolute ontological, i.e. essential dignity even if death disappeared ontically, i.e. in the realm of that which exists. This sanctification of death or absolutisation of death in contemporary philosophy, which, I at least, consider to be the most anti-utopian, is, in fact, the key category. So I would say that there is no single category by which utopia can be named, but if you want to see how this whole complex is decided, then this question is actually the one that matters the most.

Host: Mr Bloch, would you accept what we have just worked out, that in a sense man's fear of death and that he has to die is the deepest and also the most legitimate root of his utopian thinking?

Bloch: Yes, the axe blow at the end puts an end to all our series of purposes [Zweckreihen], at least to our individual ones. It also invalidates what was before. And if there is nothing there... [breaks off] There is an image by Voltaire about desolation, the complete desolation: if you tell a shipwrecked man, who is swimming in the waves and struggling and fighting for his life, that this ocean in which he finds himself has no shores, then death is completely in the Now and no striving is necessary because it doesn't arrive anywhere, because it always remains the same.

This strongest counter-utopia is, however, something – I don't know if this is the path of our actions towards which we are heading, but it may be said to complicate the matter. Because otherwise, if not here in this reality, which is inescapable and which has no history yet, were no

transformations in its real process, if this reality did not block itself so extraordinarily against it, this Heideggerian nature would not exist at all. [Again, a relatively obscure passage. I'm not sure what Bloch means with this] The test of the example. But with this, we come to a realm which transcends this. I have already mentioned *freedom* as transcendence. In my opinion, this is already a transcending from the social utopias – they do talk about it, but in the sense of happiness: is the best possible living together determined by freedom or by order? [For them] Freedom is a variable and an auxiliary construction for the best possible life. Freedom as pathos does not occur in utopia, but in natural law, and specifically in the liberal natural law of the 18th century, in connection with the upright gait [Bloch's cypher for human dignity]. This is also in the realm of objectively real possibility, but it is not the same as social utopia. And the *other* even, a theologian once told me... These two limbs, these two utopian limbs – here, for once, natural law also called “utopian”. The construction of a state in which there would be no one weary and burdened, that would be the content of social utopias, that's what I have tried to show. Natural law is the construction of a state in which there would be no one humiliated and insulted. This is the second thing; it is also possible. But now the third thing that [unintelligible] has to do with – it is not the miracle after all, but death. “Death is the dearest child of faith”, can be said here, and a miracle is needed to bring death out of the picture. That's then called the resurrection of Christ... This faith, this *other*, however, this “who will save me from death?”, “from the jaws of death?”, as it says in the Bible, in the New Testament, this is after all transcendent, we can't do that! [This means we can bring about social utopia and the justice natural law aims for, but we cannot (at least not yet) solve the final questions of the meaning of life and death] So you have to have the baptism, the death, the resurrection of Christ... This is something that transcends the utopian in the choice of its possible means and still belongs to utopia.

Adorno: Yes, I believe so. Because to imagine the abolition of death simply as a scientific process, that is, by crossing the threshold between organic and inorganic life through further discoveries, that is certainly not what it's about. There is something very deeply contradictory in the whole concept of utopia, namely that on the one hand it cannot be conceived at all without the abolition of death, but that on the other hand, this idea itself is, I would say, inherently heavy with death and everything that goes with it. Where this is not included, where the threshold of death is not considered at the same time, there isn't really any utopia. And it seems to me that this has a very serious consequence for the “epistemology” of utopia – if I may put it so cruelly. Namely, that you are not allowed to sketch out [“auspinseln”, literally, “to brush out”] utopia positively. Any attempt to describe utopia in positive terms, to paint it in such and such a way, would be an attempt to ignore this antinomy of death and to talk about the abolition of death as if death didn't exist. This is perhaps the deepest reason, the metaphysical reason, why we can

only speak of utopia in negative terms, as the great philosophers have already determined. Hegel already and then, much more emphatically, Marx.

Bloch (interjecting): Negative doesn't mean devaluation, of course.

Adorno: No, not in the devaluation of utopia, but only in the specific negation of what is. Because that is the only form in which death is also with it, is in it. And that's why I believe – but this is very theoretical [thesenhaft] – that the prohibition of sketching out utopia or the prohibition of designing certain utopias in detail, as Hegel and Marx have...

Bloch (interjecting): Hegel?

Adorno: Hegel has it insofar as he devalues the do-gooder in principle and opposes him – and Marx took this directly from him – with the idea of the objective tendency and the realisation of the absolute, i.e. what in Hegel could be called utopia or must be called utopia in his youth, exists precisely in this element. What is meant here, is actually to prohibit, for the sake of utopia, the making of an image of utopia. In deep relation to the commandment, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any image!“, which is probably also a defence against the too cheap, the false, the utopia that allows itself to be bought off, for the sake of the reality of utopia, for the sake of truth itself. I don't know if that... whether I could... [breaks off]

Bloch (interrupting): Completely agreed! Which even brings us back to the first and, so to speak, current question, to the current fact, that utopia is being relaxed by presenting it as “science” or, even if only in instalments [Abschlagszahlungen], as already achieved. And the fact that one can present it in a book is already an instalment for having achieved it. Here, at least, it has already become real and, as you say, sketched out. So one is betrayed, it [utopia] has been relaxed and a reification of ephemeral, and not so ephemeral tendencies, as if they were already much more than tendencies, as if the day had already arrived, such a reification is achieved. Thus, iconoclasm is absolutely appropriate in this context and the insufficiency must be kept awake, for which, however, death constantly gives occasion. It is indeed not only a “go he must“, as old Schopenhauer says, but it is constantly irritating, out of every contentment, no matter how great it is and no matter how much of an economic miracle [Wirtschaftswunder] and welfare society there is. It persists!

There is something which is not supposed to be, from the utopian point of view, from the longing for a “coming into order” or the longing for a whole in which everything would be right, where freedom would be in balance, so to speak, in a much deeper sense – or rather in a more comprehensive sense, deep it is already! – in a more comprehensive sense than social utopias presented it, that is the case here. And it shows – now I'm coming back to death – that with the fear of death, which animals also have, there is also the much more thoroughly experienced fear of death which human beings have and the feeling that one's series of purposes are being broken

off. Because utopias without series of purposes do not exist, in a non-teleological world there is no such thing as utopia. Holbach's mechanical materialism cannot have a utopia. There, everything is present, a mechanical presence.

That there is such a sensitivity for something that is not meant to be [ein nicht sein sollendes] is the existence of utopia in an area where it struggles the most. And I think, Teddy, we agree that the essential function that utopia has, and its very existence, is a critique of what is given! [am Vorhandenen]

Adorno: Yes.

Bloch: If we hadn't already passed the barrier, we wouldn't even be able to perceive it as a barrier.

Adorno: Yes, utopia lies essentially in the determinate negation. [bestimmte Negation] The determinate negation of what merely is which, as it concretizes itself as a falsity, always points at the same time to what should be. Yesterday in the conversation you quoted Spinoza with the sentence *verum index sua et falsi* and I varied it a little in the sense of this dialectical principle of the determinate negation and said, *falsum*, the false, *index sui et veri*. This means that the true is determined by the false, i.e. by what is known to be false. And as little as we are allowed to sketch out utopia, as little as we know what the right thing would be, we know exactly what the false thing is. And this is actually the only form in which it is given to us at all. [In a nutshell, this is Adorno's theory of moral philosophy as outlined in his lecture series "Problems of Moral Philosophy"] But I do think, and perhaps we should talk about this, Ernst, that this thing also has a very tricky side, because the fact that we are forbidden to paint the picture also means that something quite bad happens. Namely, first of all, the more it can only be said as a negative, the less can one imagine anything determinate that is supposed to be. But then – and this is probably even more frightening – this prohibition of concrete statements about utopia tends to defame utopian consciousness as such and to swallow up what is actually important, that is, the will for things to become different. It is certainly the case that the horror we are experiencing in the East today is partly connected to the fact that, in the wake of Marx's criticism of the French utopians and Owen, the idea of utopia has disappeared from the conception of socialism altogether, so that the apparatus, the how, the means of a socialist society, take precedence over any possible content because the possible content cannot be spoken about and should not be spoken about. And that, as a result, the consistently anti-utopian theory of socialism now really tends to become a new ideology for the domination of people. I think I remember from the time when you had your conflicts in Leipzig that [Walter] Ulbricht – I don't want to quote it because I don't know exactly if my memory is exact – remarked against you, “such a utopia cannot be realised” – well, that's the bourgeois phrase – “and we don't want to realise it at all.” In contrast to this, I think we should keep one thing in mind. If it were true that it would be possible today, then one of the theoretical forms of

utopia, for which I am certainly not responsible, and, as far as I can see, neither are you, would be to say concretely what would be possible in the present state of the productive forces of humanity. This can be said concretely and without sketching it out and without all arbitrariness. If this were not said, if this image would not appear, then one would not really know what the whole is actually for, what the whole apparatus is actually set in motion for. So forgive me if I now take on the unexpected role of an advocate of the positive, but I believe that a phenomenology of the utopian consciousness would not be possible without this element.

Host: Mr Bloch, may I ask something before you reply? Would you accept what Mr Adorno said, that the utopian element has radically disappeared from the socialism that dominates the Eastern world today?

Bloch: With the addition that it has also disappeared in the West and that similar tendencies exist here, which re-establish the unity of the epoch, no matter how great the differences.

Adorno: D'accord!

Bloch: Yes, West and East are in accord and sit in the same unpleasant boat, in agreement in the point that "there should be nothing utopian". But now there is a difference between the prohibition to sketch out utopia and the admonition or command to defer it [Bloch says "Abschiebung", literally "deportation", but I assume he meant "Aufschiebung", "postponement"]. The instruction, or to put it better, the working maxim, which was necessary for Marx, i.e. to stop talking so much about the utopian: this is only polemical, and was directed, for short or for longer, against the abstract utopians who were his predecessors and who believed that if one appeals to the conscience of the rich, then they must realise that it is best if they cut the bough they are sitting on. A Socratic overestimation of the people's intellectualism! So, [this] interest played a role [in Marx's anti-utopianism] and the Hegelian eye for concreteness. This [Marx's reservation against utopianism] was a *medicina mentis speculativae*, i.e. a medicine against excessive speculative thought and spirit, which was probably necessary at this time and without which "Das Kapital" would probably not have been written – and perhaps *could* not have been written. Now, this has had terrible effects. How many terrible effects emerged from the fact that Marx has, in fact, sketched out *too little!* In literature, in art, in all kinds of matters of this sort, and only once the name Balzac appears... [I don't know what to make out of this reference] Instead of Marxian initiatives, which would have been possible, we have now – in a higher culture – [incomprehensible] initiatives. Because it was a hollow space into which we entered. ["leerer Raum" or "Hohlraum" are Bloch's cyphers for the spiritual perplexity of the interwar period and, more generally, for the "death of God". I assume what he means here is that by omitting utopia, Marxism failed to offer spiritual guidance and thus allowed fascism to occupy this sphere (at least that's his thesis in "Heritage of our Times")] But as I said, I think that this [Marx's anti-

utopianism] is a state of affairs which can be explained in terms of the history of science and that at the moment this situation no longer exists, meaning we don't suffer from an overabundance of utopianism which blocks the way, so that this [anti-utopianism] is groundless and terrible consequences have arisen from it. If I understand you correctly, this [Adorno's claim that it ought to be said what is possible at the current state of the productive forces] would even mean a practical turn, a turn of the later Marx, namely that one sees what the case is, without any trace of positivism. A positivism of the investigative kind, which is allowed for the sake of something other than the positive - in the positivist sense of the positive. This would be absolutely necessary, but without forgetting the other.

Adorno (inserting): Yes, of course...

Bloch: Because that is not the sole purpose of the exercise, to say that it would be possible to achieve it [utopia] technocratically and that it is now being done away with out of fairly transparent interests.

Host: But what? What would be the purpose of the exercise?

Bloch: If such a world, in which hunger and immediate need are abolished, unlike death, if that is abolished, if this world finally gets some air and is set free, but without the *other*; then not only the platitudes and the drab prose and the complete forlornness [Aussichtslosigkeit] and lack of perspective of Dasein emerge, here as well as over there [in the East], the "alas, it's not worth it at all..." As you said earlier in the conversation when it's at its best, despair awakens again, because as [Bertolt] Brecht says, "something's missing" ["etwas fehlt"]. What it is, one doesn't know. [This is at the heart of Bloch's philosophy: the ontological incompleteness of the world] It's from "Mahagony", one of Brecht's deepest sentences, just two words. What is this something? It must not be sketched out because one would then present it as having a specific existence [als ein seiendes]. But it must also not be eliminated as if it were not really the case that practically speaking, one could say, "that's what it's about!" I believe that this [the ontological incompleteness, so to speak] cannot be eliminated and that the technocratic, which absolutely must and should occur, is in the great realm of the utopian only a very small sector. That's a geometric image that is not really appropriate here, but there's also the image, which is in the old peasants' saying, "there is no dance before dinner". People must first be fed and then they can dance. It is a *conditio sine qua non* that the other can be discussed seriously at all, and without it being misused as mere deception. Once all the guests have sat down at the table, the Messiah can come, the Christos can come, but they must first sit at the table and then we can talk. So the whole of Marxism, even in its most luminous form and anticipated in its whole realisation is only a *condition* for a life of freedom, a life of happiness, a life of possible fulfilment, a life of substance!

Adorno: Yes! May I say one more word? We have, very curiously, come close to the ontological proof of God, Ernst.

Bloch: Now that surprises me!

Adorno: Because what you're saying contains the fact that we wouldn't actually be able to have the concept of what you have called with Brecht, "something's missing", if there weren't already ferments, germs, of what this concept actually stands for. I would think that if there wasn't a trace, a trace of truth in the ontological proof of God - that is, that in the might of the concept itself an element of its reality is already involved - then not only could there be no utopia, but there could be no thinking.

Host: Yes, that was actually the notion I wanted to bring up at the end. You already alluded to it, Professor Adorno. We said that utopia refers to what is missing, and the question that should be asked at the end is, in what dimension do humans realise utopia? This is where the word "hope" is due, and perhaps we should clarify what hope actually is and what it is not.

Bloch: Hope is concerned with the notion of perfection, i.e., the *ens perfectissimum*, which however is set here [in the ontological proof of God] as something that at the same time implies *ens realissimum*, which is not tenable. But imperfection is made explicit through perfection. This means that the unfinished, unbearable, and intolerable, undoubtedly only reveals itself through it. Otherwise [if there was no perfection] there would be no imperfection at all. Not only in our perception but substantially. It would not exist if perfection did not exist in the process. And, indeed, as a critical moment! That is also the case with Hegel. There, in the antithesis, there's the idea of perfection being in its way into exile. Although the idea of perfection being exiled is as un-Hegelian as possible.

Adorno (interjecting): Kabbalistic!

Bloch: One thing, however, is certain. And here we are in agreement, after some settled misunderstandings. Hope is the opposite of certainty, is the opposite of putting one's hands into one's lap, it is the opposite of naïve optimism. It always contains the category of danger. Thus, hope is not confidence [Zuversicht]!

Host: Hope can be disappointed?

Bloch: Hope is not confidence, if it were not disappointable, it would not be hope, it's a part of it. Because otherwise it would be conditioned and would allow itself to be bargained down and would then capitulate, and would say, "this is what I had hoped for!" Instead, hope is critical. Hope can be disappointed, but hope still nails a flag to the mast, even as the ship is sinking, to show that it doesn't accept it, no matter how powerful it is. So that to hell can still be said, "this is hell!". There is also a Tantalean or Sisyphean process, a protest - we are not able to make any use of that [It's a bit difficult to follow here. I think Bloch means that even the Sisyphean rebellion

against an all-overpowering fate implies hope]. This would be a situation in which there is no way out, but hope is not confidence, hope is besieged by dangers. Hope is the awareness of danger and the determinate negation of that which facilitates the opposite of what is hoped for. Possibility is not a hooray-panteism, not at all! In the possible there is also the opposite! In the possible there is also defeat. In hope is implied the possibility of defeat as much as the possibility of victory. I used the word process, which has a lot of meaning. It has a chemical meaning, a medical meaning, a legal meaning and a meaning for salvation [Heils-Sinn]. There would be no process at all if there were not something that should not be. It would not be a process [unintelligible] if the nefarious ontology of the *ontos on* ["the really real", in Plato] as a *realissimum* had already been achieved. Since this is not the case, it [perfection] permanently hovers over it.

One sentence which I think we can all subscribe to in the end is a simple one, curiously enough, by Oscar Wilde: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at."

Host: I think, gentlemen, we can end at this point. I don't think there is anything more profound to be said about the subject we have sought to address. The fact that man hopes for something that is missing is what distinguishes him from all other creatures. Thank you very much!