

ERNST BLOCH: 'IDEOLOGY' AND POSTMODERN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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The work of the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) on 'ideology' has still not been adequately assimilated. In this essay I draw attention to Bloch's work on 'ideology' (part one) and highlight its wider implications (part two), while in part three I subject it to criticism. I then turn, in part four, to the significance of Bloch's theory of 'ideology' for postmodern social philosophy.

I

It is usually said that the Marxist tradition began with a negative approach to 'ideology'. According to the orthodox interpretation,¹ Marx and Engels gave the term 'ideology' a negative connotation when they used it to denote (1) *idealism* in the sense of an excessive preoccupation with ideas considered in isolation from concrete social and economic contexts; (2) *apologia* or legitimating justifications for the status quo or for the interests of the ruling class; (3) *formations* in which humanity and its circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*—for example, legal, political, religious, artistic and philosophical formations; (4) *mystification*, fog, clouds, illusion, dreams serving to reconcile contradictions or to conceal from humanity its real circumstances and interests.

Marx and Engels, however, were neither as consistent nor as clear as the orthodox interpretation suggests. Even in *The German Ideology* they spoke of the forms of consciousness *corresponding* to 'morality, religion, metaphysics and all the rest of ideology', as if there were more to 'ideology' than 'forms of consciousness'. Nor were they as naïve as those who confuse their theoretical commitments with their *dicta*. Marx, for example, was perfectly well aware that it was unsatisfactory to evaluate ideas simply by reference to the society at hand, since, as in the case of Germany, ideas could be ahead of the existing society and could deal with issues which had then arisen only in the craniums of intellectuals (*Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*). Nor did Marx believe that the political beliefs of actors could be interpreted in most real situations along simplistic, class-essential lines (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*). Nor was the author of *Capital* insensitive to the possibility that economic agents might hold beliefs which correctly 'reflected' fetishised social relations. Further, when Marx, and later Engels, held that ideas could become a material force when grasped by the masses (*Theses on Feuerbach*), they were not so simple-minded as to think that the understanding of such ideas by 'the masses' would always be strictly correct.

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In other words, Marx and Engels were aware that some of what they called 'ideology' was not reducible merely to error, even if they did rather give the impression that 'ideology' was *a bad thing*. Their concern was to relate 'ideology' to the social and economic arrangements by which it could be clarified and, in part, explained.

However, there is another very different approach to ideology in the Marxist tradition: an approach which implies that ideology, at least of a certain sort, can be *a good thing*. According to this approach,² 'proletarian ideology' is needed, and 'socialist ideology' will be required to preserve and advance the interests of 'socialist society'. This approach, from Lenin on, allows no hint of any critique of 'proletarian' or 'socialist' 'ideology'. This form of 'ideology' must be approached 'positively', especially in the context of the need to form the desires, aspirations and personality of the 'new person' emerging under socialism. Now these 'negative' and 'positive' approaches can obviously be reconciled at the level of political doctrine and rhetoric. But they cannot be reconciled at the level of a consistent over-all theory as long as the *dicta* of Marx and Engels are treated as sacrosanct, and as long as the confused formulations thrown up by the Marxist tradition are merely recycled in new conceptual frameworks. That this is the case is confirmed by the incoherence of the various attempts to reconcile them along these lines, as the examples of Lukács, Althusser and contemporary Soviet work all testify. This suggests that it might be better to rethink the questions of *functional error* and *signifying practices linked to interests* separately and in principle, without artificial partitions into 'good' and 'bad', 'progressive' and 'reactionary', 'bourgeois' and 'socialist'. For these issues raised are indeed of general relevance, and substantial progress, both theoretically and at the level of practical applications, will depend on treating them as such.

It would be pleasant to be able to relate that Ernst Bloch anticipated the above conclusions, or others of related intent. He did not. Bloch's work falls squarely within the Marxist tradition, with its two differently accented approaches to 'ideology'. In effect, Bloch attempts to move the Marxist tradition towards a positive approach to 'ideology', where 'ideology' covers the materials which orthodox Marxists regard as requiring critique.

Bloch began as a utopian philosopher, maintaining that utopia provides the basis for a new kind of post-philosophical work in the age of science and technology. As a utopian philosopher, Bloch held that supra-empirical orientations could: (1) indicate deep levels of human desire; (2) provide access to future possibilities for human development; (3) outline model ideas for changing the world and society for the better; (4) contain normative contents by which to judge the world and society at hand. Moreover, Bloch proposed that supra-empirical orientations pervaded actuality and were found in the so-called empirical, so that no dualism between Utopia and actuality was tenable. The world of human cultural experience was strewn with utopian fragments, and the need to grasp the utopian intention, the pervasive spirit (*Geist*) of Utopia within human consciousness and culture, was basic to any attempt to grasp human life. Bloch's evaluation of such supra-empirical orientations meant, however, that he

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was sympathetic to many of the very materials which orthodox Marxists regarded with deep suspicion, *viz.*, fantasies, religion, mythologies, and cultural excess of all kinds.

The young Bloch made no secret of the fact that he believed a positive approach to 'ideology' was needed. In *Spirit of Utopia* (1918, 1923) he devoted a section to 'The True Ideology of the Kingdom', spoke of 'genuine' cultural, social and historical ideology, and advocated an alliance of Marxism and religion in 'a will to the Kingdom'.³ 'Ideology', he implied, would be necessary and desirable if the world were to be changed for the better. Moreover, Bloch held that Marxism had been seriously unbalanced and distorted by an inadequate, one-sided, negative approach to 'ideology'. Granted that Marx's 'economic analyses' provided the means by which the socialist dream might be set on the firm path to science, Bloch warned that it was an illusion to imagine that a better society could be based on such analyses alone or on what could be extrapolated from them.⁴ Ideas and ideals, even 'theology' in the thoroughly political sense of an inheritance of the 'secret transcendental elements' in socialism were also needed to supplement Marx's economic analyses. In *Thomas Münzer as Theologian of the Revolution* (1921) Bloch's position appeared more orthodox. Nonetheless, once again he implied that a positive approach to 'ideology' was needed by identifying religion as the real 'ideology' of the Peasant Wars⁵ and by attempting to show that Münzer's theology was full of elements which could be inherited by socialism.

The mature Bloch was more circumspect. As a committed Marxist openly sympathetic to the international Communist movement, he accepted the standard Marxist-Leninist formulae and deepened their interpretation. In these mature writings, Bloch advances two very general claims about 'ideology'.⁶ First, he claims that 'ideology' is pervasive in class society and in the whole of its superstructure: in philosophy, religion, economics, education, science and law. 'Ideology', he believes, is also found as an admixture, in the consciousness of individuals: in their wishes, hopes and daydreams as well as in their more articulated attitudes and beliefs. Through this first claim, it should be noted, Bloch extends the search for ideology (1) *below the level of full consciousness*, and (2) *beyond the level of consciousness*, to that of the superstructure (understood as not dualistically separated from the base). Hence, 'ideology' is to be found in the details and forms of organization of everyday life: in, for example, advertising, clothing, sports, entertainments and penal practices. It is also to be found in current interpretations of the natural sciences, especially in the physical relativism associated with contemporary physics, and in relation to technology.⁷ Secondly, Bloch claims that 'ideology' is Janus-faced: it has two sides or senses. There is 'ideology' in the bad sense (false consciousness, illusory reconciliation of contradictions, mystification, interested error). But there is also 'ideology' in the good sense, the latter including the 'ideology' of the proletariat and 'true false consciousness'.

In addition to these two general claims—whose coherence will be discussed below—Bloch's mature writings reassert the positive approach to 'ideology' implicit in his early utopian philosophy. He does so by developing his doctrine of

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cultural surplus.⁸ Bloch breaks with the schematism of vulgar Marxism and argues that 'ideology' cannot be *reduced* to 'false consciousness'.⁹ The primary site of 'ideology' is the superstructure, but this 'ideological' superstructure contains cultural surplus. This cultural surplus appears in 'ideology', but it is not reducible to that 'ideology' in which it appears. Precisely because it is full of unsatisfied and unfinished contents, the cultural surplus which appears in 'ideology' outlasts the society in which it arises and the social strata with which it is initially associated; so to speak, this surplus may 'see' into the next epoch and uncover themes and problems which will be given concrete expression only under very different social and economic conditions.

But this points to the necessity of a positive approach to 'ideology', one that uncovers the 'good contents' which are contained in some of the materials orthodox Marxists label as 'ideology'. 'Ideology' and utopia, in other words, are not simply opposites, for in class society utopian elements appear in 'ideology', especially in works of genius, in the great works of a culture: in philosophy, religion, ethics and law. According to Bloch, such cultural surplus, freed of its association with 'ideology' in the narrowly 'negative' sense of error, mystification and the illusory reconciliation of contradiction, has the character of *utopian surplus*: it is full of anticipation, pre-light, pre-view, anticipatory pre-appearance (*Vor-Schein*).¹⁰ Bloch supports this claim in terms of his theory of the not-yet-conscious, according to which human consciousness and culture evidence not-yet-conscious knowledge of the not-yet-become. The utopian surplus present in human consciousness and culture may correlate, in crucial cases, with still developing and open *real possibilities* which (1) have not yet fulfilled all the conditions of their possibility; but which (2) are developing reality and may later become actual possibilities. Whether such open *real possibilities* will in fact develop into actual possibilities depends on human action, and on whether adequate account is taken of them when they are still at an early stage of development.

Bloch cannot provide strict epistemological justification for the claim that utopian surplus may correlate with still-developing, openly *real possibilities*. The test is, and must be, practice. Bloch's point, however, is that what becomes possible in the human social and cultural world depends, in no small measure; on the course of human action, on the interventions which humans make in existing causal chains. To this extent, it is important not to be blinded by what would be the case if no such interventions occurred: one must allow for the room to move which appropriate interventions would open up.

Bloch explains the appearance of utopian surplus along historical materialist lines, in terms of the tendential development of social formations and the rise and fall of social classes. Utopian surplus tends to appear especially when a class is rising, at its high point, or at the point at which it is about to fall. Bloch develops his analyses by rejecting any base-superstructure dualism; by placing special emphasis on the presence of social strata which are not contemporaneous with the dominant mode of production (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*); and by arguing that the superstructure can be futuristic *vis-à-vis* the society at hand. He also implies

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that recursive considerations, while they help to explain the appearance, organization and form of the relevant materials, do not exhaust the 'contents' which such surplus contains. The contents of utopian surplus are *problematic*, not only in the sense that we do not know what to do with them, but in the sense that such contents are themselves in a problematic state.¹¹ These contents are 'remote contents'. They cannot be immediately translated into adequate theoretical terms, nor can they be immediately applied to the existing society:

Because not everything can be done at once, the more remote, that is, the deeper lying contents, must remain theoretical longer than those that are suitable for immediate use. The more remote contents are less quickly understood for the same reason as they are less quickly usable. The not-yet-accessible part in them certainly does not render them difficult to see, like objects in close proximity, but it renders them difficult to survey because of the untried, at present still untestable distant content in the remote image.¹²

Bloch further argues that such contents remain encapsulated even after the most obvious elements of distortion, class interest and illusion have been removed from the contexts in which they appear. Hence, theoretical configurations of a new sort are needed to take account of the element of *delay* which such contents involve. In particular, a theory of set times (*Terminlehre*) is needed to take account of contents that will be available for adequate theorisation and then realisation in the future—but only when and as conditions develop.¹³ Any such timetable will be provisional and will require correction and revision when and as conditions change. Its purpose is not to lay down the pattern which future developments will take, but to keep certain long-term teleological horizons and perspectives *on the agenda*. Here Bloch breaks with that approach to the critique of 'ideology' which assumes that 'ideology' can be criticised in all its aspects now, and that any residue can be immediately translated into theory and action. According to Bloch, utopian surplus, on the contrary, can provide *long-term perspective* goals for theory-practice. It can do so because the arousal content which such surplus contains remains relevant to motivation and to the general sense of direction; because the specific *optatives* which such surplus intends become less illusory as conditions develop; and because, in important cases, the *topoi* uncovered by this surplus gradually come to be identified in more realistic terms. Bloch at this point takes up and extends Engels' notion of legacy or *Erbe*. He argues that the surplus which appears in 'ideological formations' is capable of 'a late ripening'; it can be actively inherited, changed, developed, and 'made true' in a productive socialist inheritance. Bloch thus stresses that it is necessary (1) to preserve the *excess* which such surplus contains rather than collapsing it into a theoreticist grammar; (2) to strengthen the element of legitimate revolt against negative conditions which such surplus implies; and (3) to translate the anticipation of a better life which gives such surplus its force, its quality of 'arousal' into

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corrected, contemporary terms. Bloch's positive approach to 'ideology' consequently yields a programme. By marshalling the *Vor-Schein* in the *Schein* of 'ideology', a fully critical but no longer one-sided Marxism can extract the valuable elements from 'ideology' and, so to speak, put them to work.

II

Bloch's positive approach to 'ideology' has radical implications, even when viewed from within his Marxist problematic. This positive approach inevitably implies that 'ideology', at least in the wide sense of 'ideological formations', can be very useful, inasmuch as contents of great importance first appear in such 'ideology', albeit admixed with 'ideology' in the narrow sense of class interest, illusion and mystification. Consistent with this view, Bloch does not hesitate to make materials which orthodox Marxists label 'ideology' *central* to his vision of Marxism. For Marxism derives its normative teleological horizons from the surplus which such materials contain. These materials are seen to be full of objective anticipation, of objectively unfinished and unsatisfied elements which are capable of a late ripening. 'Ideology' in this sense not only has a history; it may, once made 'true', have a history in the future. Bloch's positive approach to 'ideology' also implies that it is necessary to question the fundamental biases which inform Enlightenment-influenced approaches to 'ideology'. Bloch never retreats from the basic programme of the Enlightenment. On the contrary, he identifies Marxism as a new edition of the Enlightenment. But he does reject the 'half Enlightenment' which pervades modern culture. Such 'half Enlightenment' has a 'nothing but' attitude.¹⁴ Whereas genuine Enlightenment plays the detective but then goes on to take the legend seriously, half Enlightenment is content, even when confronted with the greatest manifestations of human culture, to expose what appears to be false. In doing so, it makes, according to Bloch, two catastrophic mistakes: first, it deludes itself into thinking that truth can be obtained merely by eliminating error, and, secondly, it falls into the superstitious belief that truth makes its own path through the world. Bloch's positive approach to 'ideology' amounts to an attempt to overcome both mistakes: an attempt which implies not only that 'error' does not have the character which 'half-Enlightenment' alleges, but also that truth requires more time and more assistance on its way through the world than 'half-Enlightenment' implies.

These implications of Bloch's positive approach to 'ideology' can be spelled out more precisely, and with reference to those phenomena—ideas, fantasy, ideals and the 'irrational'—which Marxist approaches to ideology tend to downgrade, and which, according to Bloch, need to be taken more seriously in the context of attempts to change the world for the better.

(1) *A preoccupation with ideas may be legitimate at one level of analysis.* Bloch does not deny that ideas need to be related to particular social and economic contexts, and to the limits set by them. His point is that the excessively negative

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concentration on error which characterises Marxist approaches to 'ideology' leads to a neglect of *ideas as such*: to a neglect of *the creative function of ideas* at both a personal and a social level; to a neglect of *the transmigrations of ideas* across world outlooks and social formations over very long periods of time; to *historical amnesia and shortsightedness* in minds ignorant of pre-modern ideas; and to a neglect of *the objective topological problems* which any serious study of ideas not confined to a classification of epiphenomena involves. Instead, Bloch's approach implies that *a new approach to the history and development of ideas is needed which is free of the bias against error which informs the Marxist critique of ideology*. Such an approach will not confine itself to the pursuit of alleged social correlations or be governed by anachronistic notions of correctness. It will be based on the quest for *model ideas*: ideas which contain the seeds of future development. Inspired by Marx's injunction to complete the ideas of the past, Bloch seeks to show that such model ideas are to be found throughout the intellectual and cultural history of humankind. In volume after volume,¹⁵ he attempts to demonstrate that an activist, refunctioning approach to the ideas which appear in the past can yield a rich harvest, especially if attention is not confined to high cultural developments, but also extends to heretical movements, mystical ideas and eruptions of popular culture. In each case Bloch holds that a critique of 'ideology' is required, but only as a tool to clear away the most obvious distortion. What remains is a *model content* requiring further development.

(2) *Imagination or fantasy (Phantasie)*¹⁶ *needs to be rehabilitated rather than devalued and repressed*. Admittedly, Bloch ignores both analytical philosophers (who seek to rehabilitate imagination as a philosophical topic) and the work of contemporary scholars such as H. Corbin and S. Nasr, who attempt to reassert a theory of the imaginal. Instead, his contribution links the excess of imagination with open and still-developing real possibility. Bloch breaks with the assumption that imagination is merely arbitrary or voluntarist: an unsituated product of an allegedly private, 'subjective', individual consciousness. Rather, he argues for a theory of world-informed, *objective imagination*, which avoids both the dead end of Romantic *Phantasie* and the rationalistic prejudice which assumes that imagination is usually false.¹⁷ Bloch identifies such objective imagination in terms of his theory of the not-yet-conscious which, as 'utopian function', works in human consciousness to provide not-yet-conscious knowledge of real possibilities. He implies that imagination *in excess* and *in partial error*—fantasy—is not only normal, healthy and non-abolishable, but often *secretly wise*: something to be matured and directed. Far from being objectionable *because* it is not fully in accordance with present possibilities, fantasy offers access to a form of productivity which may otherwise be inaccessible. Far from being objectionable *because* it deviates from existing facticity, fantasy is often instructive precisely when it deviates in a normative direction from the society and world at hand. Because what is needful may appear in the flights of a culture beyond its 'reality' and the operative rationality by which it is administered, some advances may be made only if fantasy is not repressed, but allowed its flight into prospection, even though this involves an initial tolerance of illusion and error. In turn, this implies

an alternative approach to cultural development. For insofar as fantasy may need to manifest itself in an excessive and erroneous form *before* a rational reconstruction is attempted, the strategy of eliminating excess and error and relying on a front-parlour rationalism may in such cases be precipitate. Here Bloch's position involves a decisive break with the abstract intellectualism of the post-Enlightenment left and a different approach to aesthetics, religion, law and popular culture. What is at issue is the need to overcome the prejudices of a time-free rationalism, and, with them, the mania for theoretical purity which fails to recognise the role of less constrained, more impure moments in a general theory of rational cultural development.

(3) *A concentration on the need for, and the causality of, ideals is—within certain limits—justifiable.* Here Bloch's essay 'Ideals without Idealism' is a key text.¹⁸ Bloch implies that it is a mistake to treat ideals as epiphenomena and to rely exclusively on 'correct theory'. A correct theory, even if attainable, is insufficient. Ideals have an irreducible prospective and mobilising function which should neither be usurped by theory nor constrained by a regimentation based on a preferred methodology. Bloch's brief is for a critical inheritance of the *Vor-Schein* in the ideals of both the past and the present; though utopian, these ideals relate to open, real possibilities. But the implication is that the Enlightenment approach to error, which has influenced many Marxist approaches to 'ideology', is unsatisfactory. Bloch proposes that the flight into the clouds which ideals are inclined to take may be valuable, and that various ideals, including illusory ideals, should be allowed to emerge so that they can be criticized and harvested.

(4) *A partial rehabilitation of 'the irrational' may be called for.* Bloch argues for a partial rehabilitation of 'the irrational' because he holds that 'the irrational' is a more fundamental phenomenon, one that is of more political and social importance than Marxist approaches to the critique of 'ideology' tend to suggest. He rejects any generalised condemnation of 'the irrational'.¹⁹ Instead, *discriminations* are called for: between cases in which a certain subject matter is not yet capable of rational treatment, and cases in which a subject matter which could be dealt with rationally is subjected to 'irrational' treatment; between cases in which 'irrational' developments (for example, Nazi race theory) amount to mere dross and cases in which such developments may yield a rational residue. Bloch's point is that some of what appears initially in an 'irrational' form may be potentially rational: that the form in which contents appear tends to be distinguished from those contents themselves. Such contents, however, require a treatment different from that envisaged by Enlightenment-influenced critiques of 'ideology'; for such critiques, 'the irrational' denotes something intrinsic and not (as Bloch insists) a current temporal articulation. Here Bloch's advance is to relate 'the irrational' not merely to error but also to time. He thereby insists on the need to 'rationalise' the *currently* 'irrational', to subject it to a critique designed to remove its most dangerous and potentially harmful elements. But he denies that it is sufficient merely to criticise currently 'irrational' materials and to relate them to their alleged social origins. Instead, Bloch argues that it is necessary to 'dialecti-

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cise' and to 'refunction' currently 'irrational' materials insofar as they (1) reflect existing motivations and desires of social strata; (2) embody legitimate criticism of the world or society at hand; and (3) point to subject matter which cannot be accounted for by contemporary rationality and regnant epistemology.²⁰ In other words, a form of emancipatory 'theology' is needed which preserves—until such time as they can be more fully articulated—the good contents which 'the irrational' contains. Here Bloch breaks not only with the taboo against the irrational in Enlightenment-influenced approaches to 'ideology' (Oskar Negt), but with all time-free rationalism as such. According to Bloch, 'the irrational' does not cease to be powerful because it is 'criticised' or 'refuted', nor does it fail to be instructive because it has not yet taken rational form.

III

Bloch's works on 'ideology' must be subjected to criticism because, even when judged by minimal methodological requirements, they are less than satisfactory. Bloch provides no coherent discussion of what he means by 'ideology'. On the contrary, in his mature work he uses the term 'ideology' ambiguously, sliding, according to context, among (1) 'ideology' in the sense of 'ideological formations' (the legal, political, religious, artistic and philosophical formations to which Marx himself referred); (2) 'ideology' in the sense of false consciousness; and (3) 'ideology' in the sense of the outlook of a social class, for example, the 'ideology' of the bourgeoisie or the 'ideology' of the proletariat. Here Bloch's work is vitiated by terminological loyalty to the *dicta* of Marx, Engels and Lenin. He treats these *dicta* as if they were coherent and juridical, as if they could, in principle, provide consistent theoretical concepts. Hence, he adheres, without appropriate critical discussion, to the orthodox Marxist claims that 'ideology' exists; that it can be understood, at least in part, as 'false consciousness'; and that it is proper to speak of 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' 'ideologies', the latter being self-reflective and having an interest compatible only with universally valid, objective analyses.

Bloch's work on 'ideology' is also weakened by his reliance on distinctions which primarily embody differences in evaluation. In particular, like Mannheim, whose *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) was influenced by Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (1918) and *Thomas Münzer as Theologian of the Revolution* (1921), Bloch operates with an initial distinction between 'ideology' and 'utopia', which turns out to be unworkable. Bloch criticises Mannheim's over-sharp distinction between 'ideology' and Utopia ('ideology' is not confined to orientations tending to sustain the existing order); he also rejects Mannheim's relationist sociology of knowledge.²¹ Like Mannheim, however, he implies that some perspicacious distinction is involved in being nasty to 'ideology' (outside of 'socialist' contexts or contexts in which 'ideology' has a 'socialist' application) and nice to Utopia. As

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a result, he is unable to provide the conceptually sharp demarcations which his work requires.

Bloch's work on 'ideology' is further weakened by an arcane conceptual apparatus and lexicon ('utopian surplus', 'not-yet-conscious', 'utopian function', 'contents'). In the manner of the most slippery 'continental philosophy', this lexicon resists translation into exact terms. Indeed, Bloch's recursive modernism tends in the direction of a new symbolical theology which, for all its beauty and manifest uplift and despite its post-theological political character, does little to avoid the pitfalls which plague symbolical theologies in general. Such symbolical theology serves Bloch's purpose to the extent that he intends to awaken and extend the desires and hopes of humankind, but it also means that many of his central concepts turn out to be ciphers with no precise denotation. Proper distinctions are lacking; key terms are undefined and used in multiple and confusing senses. As a result, Bloch's work on the problem of 'ideology' is inherently untheoretical. His very claims about 'ideology' are improperly formulated. For example, the claim that 'ideology' is pervasive in class society is empty, and it does not clearly distinguish between cultural productions as 'ideology' and 'ideology' as the content of these productions. Further, given such an imprecise and extended understanding of 'ideology', it is most improbable that the presence of class society could be the crucial variable. One might perhaps argue that cultural productions in class society are distorted in specifiable ways; but then the term 'ideology' could not also cover forms of distortion which would be found in a society without classes. Bloch's ticks and crosses according to political taste evade this issue. Likewise, it is frivolous to distinguish two sides or senses of 'ideology' when some of the same general phenomena are instanced in both, and when there is no attempt to specify the distinction in structural terms and with sufficient regard to the relevant causal conditions.

Bloch's doctrine of utopian surplus is open to a related objection, in that he fails to establish the utopian, anticipatory character of the materials he describes. There is no way to establish conclusively that any given set of materials is utopian surplus or, indeed, that other materials are not, especially since the apparent tests involve subjective elements and also references to what might be made of such materials in the future. Further, the notion of an active, productive *Erbe* of such utopian surplus is inherently conservative and preservative of the topologies of the past. Bloch may be right to insist on an immanent, continuationist dimension in human history, but his approach hardly rises to the challenge of providing concrete orientations for a world increasingly shaped by science and technology.

Nonetheless, it may be a mistake to insist too much on Bloch's methodological weaknesses: Bloch's weaknesses are often bound up with his strengths. Bloch is *a utopian in the philosophical mode*: a thinker who never entirely breaks with the self-intoxication of Utopia and who consequently adheres to the utopian technique of reaching beyond what can be currently justified epistemologically.²² To point to his syncretic mentality and conceptual slippage, and to underline his disregard of the need for proper argumentation, is legitimate, but might be understood also as a description of his mode. Utopian philosophy aims at utopian

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excess and should be judged by its *productivity*: by its ability, first, to draw attention to neglected problems and, secondly, by its capacity to anticipate or open the way for future developments which, at the time of writing, appear to lack some but not all of their conditions. Whether Bloch's philosophy can be credited with such productivity remains to be seen. But it is only fair to observe that the beginnings of such productivity can be detected in current writings on aesthetics, religion and law, while the idea of philosophy which aims at productivity rather than victories in argumentative combat is now a *cliché* of contemporary French philosophy (Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard) and is also voiced, more cautiously, in contemporary analytical philosophy (Rorty, Nozick).

IV

In conclusion, I should like to turn to the significance of Bloch's work on 'ideology' for the philosophical tradition, and in particular for what can be called postmodern social philosophy. Postmodern social philosophy is new terrain. The term is not in general use; the characterisation I offer here, which is only one of several possibilities, is my own. Postmodern social philosophy can be provisionally characterised as social philosophy which holds that modern social philosophy is increasingly inadequate to a world shaped by advanced science and technology, and that what is now required is something more contemporaneous with the problems bound up with what might be called our emerging postmodernity. Postmodern social philosophy does not deny that many of the processes studied by such as Aristotle, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx and Weber continue to operate; but it does hold that these processes are entering some new phases which such thinkers could not wholly foresee and that these new contexts and resources make it possible for us to envisage different responses.

Postmodern social philosophy should be carefully distinguished from the motley collection of trends known as cultural 'postmodernism' and also from various tendencies in contemporary thought which use the label 'postmodern' to justify a retreat behind modernity and a return to forms of pre-modern thought. Postmodern social philosophy is firmly committed to advancing science and technology and to extensions of existing forms of rationality. It favours stricter and not more relaxed criteria for theoretical discourse. Precisely for this reason, however, postmodern social philosophy attempts to demarcate forms of human activity which are most valuable when they are stripped of pretensions to strong knowledge claims. Postmodern social philosophy insists on both normative and procedural rationality. It holds, however, that we would often be wise not to leave such areas unoccupied, but to develop for them procedures and praxologies with no claims to scientific status. For by turning to such methods we can take up problems and materials which modern social philosophy ignored or mishandled. Conversely, postmodern social philosophy is opposed to all attempts to develop

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pseudo-sciences which serve to inhibit the extension of scientific methods to materials to which they can be applied; it is also hostile to epistemological optimism which is not procedurally controlled. It favours a minimalist interpretative approach to the generation of increasingly extensive strong knowledge claims, and it seeks to combine this approach with a procedural concern with the formation of persons and with the development of new forms of sociality in which such formation may be possible.

It would be of course difficult to imagine a perspective more alien to Bloch. For Bloch's work is bound up throughout with epistemological optimism, with speculative and ungroundable claims, and with a material rationalism which cannot be cashed. This difference of perspective means that postmodern social philosophy is not inclined to attempt a reconstruction of Bloch, if only because such a reconstruction is bound to remain too close to Bloch's questions and general sense of direction. Postmodern social philosophy follows a different strategy. It extracts from Bloch's work questions which did not occur to him and, in so doing, shifts his methodological ground. In this regard, it can be said that the significance of Bloch's work on 'ideology' for postmodern social philosophy is that it suggests the need for examining a range of different problems with different biases in mind. In response to these difficulties, postmodern social philosophy advances perspectives which arise out of—but which are not present within—Bloch's writings. At least four of these perspectives can be briefly mentioned here.

First, there is a need to rethink the question of the function of error in personal and social life without the bias against error which informs Enlightenment-influenced critiques of 'ideology'. Bloch's work shows that materials allegedly admixed with error should not for that reason be devalued, since such materials may contain more valuable indications for future developments than materials which are unobjectionable, but also relatively 'flat'. This, in turn, reopens the whole question of the function of error, existing and potential, in human consciousness and culture, a question which Enlightenment-influenced critiques of 'ideology' have closed off. Postmodern social philosophy takes up this question. It holds that such error is morally heterogeneous, that some forms of error may never be eliminated, and that some forms of error may be defensible, provided they are subjected to procedural constraints.

A second perspective concerns the need to rethink the problem of the relationship between signifying practices and interests without implying that such practices can be adequately dealt with by a critique of 'ideology' which relates interests to a posited social structure and a projected ensemble of future social developments. Bloch's theory of 'ideology' shows that contents found in signifying practices are not necessarily reducible to interests understood in this way; it also calls into question the negative interpretation of this understanding, which remains characteristic of a great deal of work on 'ideology'. Postmodern social philosophy emphasises the need to investigate the problem of the relationship between signifying practices and interests. Yet it holds that what is at stake cannot be wholly explicated in terms of truth and error, that it is an illusion to

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imagine that signifying practices relating to interests can be entirely eliminated, and that an approach which subjects such signifying practices to procedural and argumentative requirements holds out more promise than one which depends on some kind of Kantian transcendental framework. Precisely because interest, like sin, is general and sometimes useful, postmodern social philosophy seeks to civilise rather than to prevent its operation.

Thirdly, there is the need to rethink the problem of time and rationality in the context of more adequate approaches to consciousness and culture. Bloch's great contribution is to stress how the problem of time has been trivialised and repressed, to emphasise how general the tendency is to imagine that what appears now in consciousness and culture should be understood *reflexively* by relating it to the existing society and to the world currently about us. Postmodern social philosophy, in contrast, argues for time differentiations within rationality and holds, moreover, that the role of consciousness and culture in social philosophy needs to be rethought in a formative-causal, proleptic perspective—one which is in no way futuristic, however.

A fourth perspective concerns the imperative for rethinking both the nature of the 'empirical' and its relation to supra-empirical orientations. Here Bloch's work on 'ideology' is invaluable, even though Bloch himself misses some key issues by overextending the concept of 'utopia'. Utopia is important as a region for research, but it is not itself a proper theoretical concept and does not always clarify what is at issue. It also tends, especially in Bloch's future-oriented version, to conceal the form of a crucial problem, namely, that humans throughout history, and regardless of their comportment towards future time, display supra-empirical orientations, which in some cases then become manifest as the empirical. Postmodern social philosophy takes up this problem and frees it from its confinement within a narrowly conceived critique of 'ideology'. It does not reject out of hand the work of those (Hadjinicolaou, Tafuri) who attempt a critique of visual and architectural 'ideologies'; but it denies that such approaches adequately analyse this problem. Postmodern social philosophy proposes that supra-empirical orientations may be among the things we need. It may be suggested that these orientations may best be approached procedurally, and with the following implications: (1) that no knowledge claims relating to such orientations can be accepted unless they meet strict criteria; (2) that such knowledge claims which do not meet these criteria should be thoroughly investigated, criticised and exposed; but (3) that, subject to such constraints and others relating to the rights of persons, it may not be the proper business of social, political or philosophical theorists to decide for particular groups and individuals to which posits and orientations they are entitled.

There is of course more to be said about this elsewhere. Obviously, postmodern social philosophy may develop along lines different from those I outline here. However postmodern social philosophy develops, as it departs from the nine-

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teenth century social theories which inspired Ernst Bloch, it will have much to learn from the new ground which the great utopian so persistently uncovered.

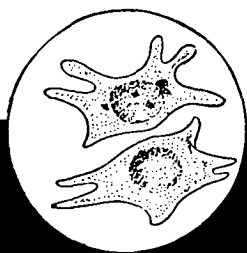
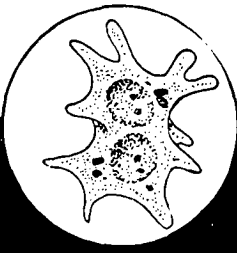
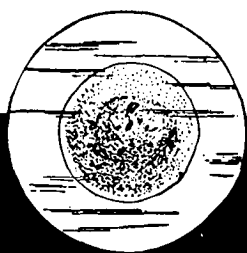
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Notes

1. For useful discussions, see M. Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology* (London, 1977) and B. Parekh, *Marx's Theory of Ideology* (London, 1982).
2. See, for example, V. Kelle and M. Kovalson, *Historical Materialism. An Outline of Marxist Theory of Society* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 227-37. Cf. J.M. Gilson, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore, 1975).
3. *Geist der Utopie* (1918), *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main, 1959-1977; hereafter cited as *GA*), vol. 16, pp. 411-45. Cf. *Geist der Utopie* (1923), *GA*, vol. 3, pp. 307-42.
4. *Geist der Utopie*, *GA*, vol. 16, p. 429.
5. *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*, *GA*, vol. 2, p. 12f.
6. For central discussions, see 'Ideelles als das im Menschenkopf umgesetzte Materielle oder Probleme eines ideologischen Übermas (Kulturerbe)' in *Das Materialismusproblem*, *GA*, vol. 7, pp. 381-438; 'Begegnung der utopische Funktion mit Ideologie' in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, *GA*, vol. 5, p. 174-180; 'Ideologiekritik an der Sprache' in *Experimentum Mundi*, *GA*, vol. 15, pp. 33-8, and *Ibid.*, pp. 50-4; 'Universität, Marxismus, Philosophie' and 'Der Wissenschaftsogrieff des Marxismus' in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*, *GA*, vol. 10, pp. 270-91 and 345-55; and *Abschied von der Utopie?*, H. Gekle (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main, 1980), pp. 65-75 and 83-100.
7. On physical relativism, see *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, *GA*, vol. 4, pp. 289-95, and *Das Materialismusproblem*, *GA*, vol. 7, ch. 8; on 'ideology' and technology, see 'Bemerkungen zur "Erbschaft dieser Zeit"' in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*, *GA*, vol. 10, pp. 31-53, especially pp. 34-41.
8. For the fuller discussion see *Das Materialismusproblem*, pp. 381-425 (note Bloch's distinction between and ideological surplus and an ideology-free surplus).
9. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, p. 177.
10. *Das Materialismusproblem*, p. 415.
11. See Bloch's little-known but important 'Theorie-Praxis auf längere Sicht' in *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1978), pp. 246-50. For my English translation, see R. Fitzgerald (ed.), *The Sources of Hope* (Oxford and Sydney, 1979), pp. 153-8, and my extended introduction, pp. 144-53.
12. 'Theorie-Praxis auf Längere Sicht', p. 246.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
14. See *Atheismus im Christentum*, *GA*, vol. 14, pp. 39, 87-98, 313-18.
15. See, for example, *Das Materialismusproblem*, *GA*, vol. 7, and *Naturrecht und menschliche Würde*, *GA*, vol. 6.

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16. Bloch's use of *Phantasie* is deliberately ambiguous and is most easily translated as 'imagination' or 'fantasy' according to context.
17. See *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*, GA, vol. 10, pp. 22-33.
18. See 'Ideale ohne Idealismus' in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*, GA, vol. 10, pp. 26-30. Cf. 'Ideale in der Moral ohne Eigentum' in *Experimentum Mundi*, GA, vol. 15, pp. 188-196.
19. In general, see *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, especially pp. 126, 152-7, 203-4.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
21. For Bloch's attitude to Mannheim, see *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, pp. 286ff, *Experimentum Mundi* p. 27, and *Abschied von der Utopie?*, pp. 89-90.
22. As I have argued elsewhere in my *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (London and New York, 1982).



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