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Ciphers of Transcendence and Utopian Potentials

Initiating a Conversation between Jaspers and Bloch

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Abstract: Jaspers and Bloch, who were acquaintances in Heidelberg, both elaborate a future-oriented philosophy. By establishing a dialogue between Jaspers' philosophy of transcendence and Bloch's philosophy of utopia it is possible to better understand the relationship between existentialism and Western Marxism. After reconstructing the notion of "limit situations" in *Psychology of World Views*, the focus is on Bloch's critique of, and alternative to, Jaspers' idea of transcendence. Finally, a comparative analysis that preserves the respective strengths and insights of existentialism and utopian Marxism is called for.

In 1917, two year before the publication of Jaspers' path-breaking *Psychology of World Views*, Ernst Bloch develops in his *Spirit of Utopia* an existentialist form of Western Marxism. Bloch, the philosopher of utopia, aims to rescue emancipatory potentials. These potentials are always in danger of being exhausted and corrupted under conditions of modernity. Bloch's guiding question is how it is possible to develop a specifically modern form of utopian thinking that goes beyond the economic determinism of dogmatic Marxism. The starting point is to attribute to our mental life and in particular to yearning, anticipating, and hoping a potentially emancipatory dimension.

In this essay I argue for establishing a dialogue that draws on what could be arguably called the two sources of the main currents of 20th century Continental thought. Bloch and Jaspers, I want to claim, form a constellation that allows us to better understand the relationship between existentialism and Western Marxism. After reconstructing Jaspers' project of understanding human consciousness as essentially conflicting and his idea of a "transcending consciousness," I contrast the latter to Bloch's conception of the "shape of the unconstruable question" in *Spirit of Utopia*. In particular I focus on Bloch's critique of the emptiness of a philosophy of transcendence. Finally, I present an outlook towards a comparative investigation that preserves the respective strengths and insights of Jaspers' existentialism and Bloch's utopian Marxism.

To my knowledge, the relationship between Bloch and Jaspers has not been addressed in the literature. This is surprising not only because they are two of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, but also because of the obvious convergences and fruitful disagreements of their respective projects of developing a future-oriented philosophy.

Prophetic Philosophy and Philosophy of Transcendence

Let us first turn to Jaspers. In his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, which originally appeared in 1919, Jaspers lays the foundation for 20th century existentialism. Although he later developed his ideas in

an explicitly philosophical register, the basic motives in this work were to set the program for what remained his essential question: how can a new philosophy be conceived that takes seriously human existence at a time in which philosophy had become ideological or formalist? In other words, how is it possible to renew philosophy after it has been transformed into scientistic positivism, on the one hand, and various ideological world views on the other hand?

To understand what philosophy could be once again it is necessary, Jasper argues, to pursue the neglected but important question what the human being was, is, and could be. In his *Psychopathology* as well as his *Psychology of World Views*, Jaspers aims to throw light on this question by outlining the limits—and ways of relating to these limits—of what he considers the normal life of the human soul.

The *Psychology of World Views* is only the culmination of other works relating psychology, which was for Jaspers the attempt to interpret and understand (rather than explain) mental processes, to ethics, religion, language, art, ethnology, and society. Philosophy rather than science or ideology is characterized as holistic and value-oriented in nature without, however, providing ethical imperatives. While it aims to illuminate and construct an "organism of possibilities," it does not pretend to choose between these possibilities, which can only be done by living actors in concrete situations.

Philosophy, which does identify one true possibility, is referred to as *prophetic philosophy*. Jaspers uses the term "prophetic," because such a philosophy aims at providing existential orientation in anticipating the future and thus forecloses the dimension of openness essential to the first person perspective. "I did not want a prophetic philosophy," Jaspers reflects back on his *Psychology of World Views* in the preface to the fourth edition, "and yet I did not have a concept of this other kind and already secretly searched for philosophy."[1] Without quite understanding it at the time, the *Psychology of World Views* transforms a prophetic philosophy into a philosophy of transcendence, which opens up rather than forecloses what the great modernist Robert Musil calls *Möglichkeitssinn*, a sense of possibility. On an individual level, providing orientation and transcendence go hand in hand. It is only the freedom within that is capable of overcoming the crises of meaning that are at the bottom of a pathological mental life.

The starting point of Jaspers' existential psychology is the assumption that possibility precedes actuality. This is not to be taken as a metaphysical thesis. Of course are we thrown into a world and find ourselves in given and thus actual contexts that determine what is possible and what impossible. To claim that possibility precedes actuality is meant to express that to exist means to be confronted with choices. Past events leave future possibilities essentially underdetermined, in particular when judged from the first person perspective, our immediate experience as thinking, judging, and acting beings.

Despite the emphasis on communication and historical conditions of our existence, Jaspers did start from the premise of our egoistic predicament. We cannot but outline our future existence by way of a complicated process of personal anticipation and decision-making. Existence is essentially possible existence, *mögliche Existenz*. The future is irreducibly unknown and to think and to exist means to take a stand with regard to the past and a possible future. Taking a responsible stand is a result of becoming conscious that to be human means to be on the way and to be on the way means to stand on a past and move towards a yet unknown future. We are, in short, *homo transcendens*, beings who are capable and, in a sense, forced to burst open *Weltgeschlossenheit*, the closed-offness of the world.

Drawing on Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, Jaspers emphasizes the dynamic structure of our existence with the terms "life," "force," "idea," and "spirit," while he later groups all these categories under the concept of existence and unconditional action. A dynamic life is one that is shaped by individual choices within the flux of time.

We have gotten accustomed to associate the emphasis on individual choices with liberalism. A word of warning is necessary here. Despite the emphasis on choice, Jaspers is not a proto-liberal in the contemporary sense of someone who defines himself by the extent of freedom of choice granted to him by natural law or through a social contract. Rather he emphasizes *significant* choices that change how the future and the past need to be interpreted in more or less radical ways. Although we have not chosen ourselves, one is constantly choosing who one wants to be. Human beings bear responsibility qua their

[1] Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, fourth edition (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1954), p. XII. [Henceforth cited *PdW*]

existential condition of being choosers. Seen from the first person perspective, context, class affiliation, history, although having a strong impact on us, can never change the primacy of human choice and the responsibility connected to judgment, the most essential of faculties. What matters is not the infinite realm of open possibilities, to have formal freedom of choice, but lived choices in which something specific and determinate that transcends the given context emerges, in which our existential horizon is broadened. It is thus not the arbitrary but the meaningful choice that presupposes processes of attributing values that Jaspers is concerned with and which distinguishes his philosophy of transcendence not only from prophetic philosophy, but also from a merely descriptive existential psychology.

The philosophy of transcendence with its emphasis on choosing is also revealed by Jaspers interpretation of world history, which concentrates on individual choices. Paradigmatic individuals are those that create a new horizon of interpretation and transcend given contexts. Jesus, Socrates, Buddha, and Confucius are the founders of the Jewish-Christian, the Greek, the Buddhist, and the Confucian traditions, primarily because they were extraordinary choosers. By way of introducing new ideas into the world they expanded the framework of existential possibilities in which people gain their orientation and meaning, in which choices can be meaningfully coordinated according to some good.

Under modern post-Platonic conditions it has become impossible to speak of the Good as the ideal object of choice rather than multiple goods. Since we cannot rely on any given good as universally binding and authoritative, we have to choose, and by choosing we have to transcend any given context. However, the striving for the Good rather than merely any set of arbitrary goods survives in our striving to be consistent with regard to the values we take to be essential in characterizing who we are and what we take to be important. "Human beings," Jaspers acknowledges, "do not want to live in contradiction with themselves" (*PdW* 225). There are two strategies to avoid contradiction in situations of multiple values. Either certain values could be ignored, suppressed, or denied. Alternatively we can create a hierarchy in which values stand in orders so that whenever a conflict emerges we can settle the conflict by determining which value trumps the other ones. Neither of these strategies is ultimately successful. If we suppress values, they do not seize to exist, but will continue to confront us. We cannot, for example, deny that authenticity is a value, because it is too deeply rooted in our culture and our environment will continue to remind us of it. A hierarchy of values, however, is either too formal to have any practical consequences or it will suppress certain values and thus be an arbitrary hierarchy.[2]

Limit Situations

The modern world is a world of necessary and inevitable value collisions. Moments when such collisions come to the fore and are engaged with are often marked by an encounter with limits. In turning to the limit situations of human existence in a chapter of *Psychology of World Views* entitled "The Life of Spirit," Jaspers throws light on the existential condition of moderns who have escaped a world of metaphysical security and are condemned to having to choose among different conflicting values. In this prominent chapter Jaspers turns to the discussion of the conditions under which meaningful future orientation comes about under the heading of limit or, as Popper translates the term *Grenzsituationen*, "marginal situations." Limit situations that are experienced in the form of struggle (*Kampf*), death (*Tod*), chance (*Zufall*), or guilt (*Schuld*). They reveal that

> there is nothing stable in the existing world, no unquestionable absolute, no security, which would withstand every experience and every thought. In these situations we feel thrown back on ourselves and understand that this self is a fleeting, rather marginal fact in a universe that appears to be a limit. Everything is liquid, is in restless movement of being called into question. Everything is relative, finite, divided into opposites. We never find the whole, the absolute, the essential. (*PdW* 229)

Limit situations reveal to us our limitations, which we tend to bracket in our routine life. However, apart from revealing our limits in light of an omnipotent universe beyond our grasp and control, they also reveal that choice does in fact matter, since it determines our relationship to these limits. Although we cannot chose not to die, what sets us apart is that we can relate to death in ways that re-determine who we are as a person.

[2] Cf. for example Charles Taylor's account of modern value conflicts in *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1991).

Limit situations, according to Jaspers, provide human beings with a "consciousness of the antinomic structure of the world … ourselves and the world are divided in antinomies" (*PdW* 230). Since our intentions do not translate one-to-one into the wanted outcome, but often lead to a realization of something that has not been wanted, the world is divided into what is intended and whatever consequences are in some sense causally related to my intentions, even if, or precisely because I did not want these consequences. Jaspers writes

> Values only become actual through forces and conditions which themselves are value-neutral or negative with regard to values (*wertnegativ*). If one wants any value to be realized in reality, one inevitably needs to accept counter-values (*Unwerte*) because the world is normatively complex, stubborn, and abrasive. Every action directed at values carries with it consequences, which the person acting did not want and could not want. No action leads to the intended effect without impureness and unintended outcomes. (*PdW* 237)

Jaspers mentions the love of humanity and spiritual culture as potential values or goals of one's actions that automatically lead to or involve an entanglement with counter values. To achieve the pleasures of a cultivated humanity one easily accepts or at least contributes to exploitation in which one class buys its leisure time at the cost of the working class.

The reversal of good intentions into disastrous outcomes is the topic of tragedy from its Greek beginnings to its modern expression in Kleist's, Strindberg's or Ibsen's dramatic works.[3] What we could refer to as Jaspers two basic premises, namely that we want to overcome contradiction or antinomies and that the world is nevertheless structured in antinomies constitute a second order antinomy, the tragic dimension at the bottom of the human condition. We are the kind of beings that try to dissolve what is essentially irresolvable. This constitutes the "antinomic structure of human existence, *Dasein*" (*PdW* 225). In the domain of human existence we speak of antinomies not if we are dealing with mere opposites or poles of existence such as happiness and sadness. Neither are we dealing with potentially resolvable paradoxes. Existential antinomies are *irresolvable value contradictions*. If the ultimate values of our existence cannot coexist but are equally important and justified, we are confronted by an authentic existential problem. The response to irresolvable value conflicts and the paradox one finds oneself in having to choose even if knowing that any choice will be in a sense a wrong choice leaves one with despair in light of necessary failure (*PdW* 235).

The consequence of gaining an insight into the antinomic character of human existence could lead to at least three different reactions. The human being could be destroyed, he could evade the antinomies, or he could gain strength by transcending them. In the first destructive case the human being wants something, but is not willing to accept the consequences or use the necessary means. In the second case, the strategy of evasion, he ignores that the opposites are in fact antinomies. He thinks that he can make them coherent but in fact only indulges in bad compromises and thus neutralizes the opposites. The third way of reacting to the insight that human existence is essentially conflicting, is to not rest content with this situation or arbitrarily jump into a momentous either/or decision. What is needed, Jaspers argues, is cultivation and sustaining of the tension in a way that increases it according to Nietzsche's *bonmot* that "the greatest human being, assuming that such a concept is legitimate at all, would be the human being who best presented the antinomian character of human existence in the strongest way" (*PdW* 239).

Following Hegel's dynamization of Kant's conception of a dialectical sublation of antinomies, Jaspers writes that "the creation and intuition of such worlds of ideas is not the acquisition of stable property—this would lose the idea–, but rather symbol and utopia of the unconscious aim to which the process of spirit is directed in infinite, living acts of antinomic syntheses" (*PdW* 242).

These acts of antinomic synthesis constitute the authentic response that allows for a form of transcendence of the world within the world. By philosophically relating to our principle limitations in limit situations we do not overcome them, but gain an awareness which sees them not just as detriments to achieving our goals, but as constitutive of who we are. This is the hidden normative, or perhaps better, educative core of Jaspers' philosophy of transcendence. Jaspers' message is not prophetic in pointing us to a certain path or goal beyond existential struggle and

[3] It could be argued that Jaspers' philosophy as a whole is premised on an insight into the tragic dimension of human existence. He explicitly addresses the tragic as a guiding theme in *Über das Tragische* (Munich: Pieper, 1952), which is an excerpt of his major work *Von der Wahrheit* (Munich: Piper 1947).

value conflicts, but it does point to the possibility of orienting oneself with regard to constitutive dilemmas in a way which does see them not just as limiting, but also as enabling.

The Confrontation with Bloch

It is not accidental that Jaspers uses the expression "symbol and utopia of the unconscious aim" to characterize the fleeting point that provides orientation in the midst of existential struggles. We can rightly assume that he is responding to or at least carrying on an implicit conversation with Ernst Bloch's philosophy of utopia. Both Bloch's utopianism and Jaspers' philosophy of transcendence are premised upon the assumption that it is necessary to renew philosophy without ignoring the antinomic character of our post-Platonic mental lives, i.e. conditions under which we face irresolvable value conflicts that cannot be overcome by a reference to a universal context-transcending Good that we could all aspire to.

Bloch and Jaspers were acquaintances who met during Max Weber's tea gathering in Heidelberg from 1912 to 1914. The Weber circle also included thinkers such as Lask, Lukacs, and Naumann and has been one of the few occasions of mutual engagement before existentialism and Western Marxism went separate and, not infrequently, hostile paths. Jaspers helped Bloch to be exempted from military service, and in a letter from his American exile, Bloch refers to Jaspers as "profound" (*tiefsinning*).[4] Jaspers appreciated Bloch's spontaneity, even though he regarded the latter's Gnostic style and explicit utopianism as being too opaque and too prophetic for his sentiment. Bloch carried with him the aura of a prophet and we can assume that Jaspers had Bloch in mind when criticizing the prophetic philosophy of his day. The prophetic appearance of Bloch is expressed in the joke that Lask used to tell: "'what are the four apostles called?' Mathew, Mark, Lukacs and Bloch."[5]

Despite obvious differences in content and tone of the lucid humanist and the Gnostic prophet there are surprising parallels between their respective projects. Both Jaspers and Bloch chose as their point of departure a form of depth analysis of context transcending consciousness to counter the nihilist world situation of a compartmentalized modernity that Weber characterized as an iron cage. Only in our existential condition as self-encountering and self-projecting beings, both argued, could we find the philosophical resources to rightly address and counter the fate of modernity.

The intended form of future-oriented philosophy could not ignore or dispense with the antinomic constitution of human existence and its manifestation in history. The problem of classical utopianism had been that it denied this constitution. Utopian constructions of the highest Good share that they reify the good in the form of a once and for all completed condition of harmony, a society beyond reproach, a history that has or will soon reach a blissful end. By painting an image of a state, an island, and, since Enlightenment, a future that is free of existential conflicts historical reality as we know it is reduced to a mere anticipation of an apocalyptic escape from history. Plato and Thomas More, and Marx are representatives of such problematic versions of utopianism. They develop a vision of a state, an island, or a future that is free of struggle, death, and injustice, in short, free of value conflicts. Not only is this conception implausible given our existential condition as limit-confronting choosers in a messy world, it is also dangerous when put to practice.

People who construct a possible utopia of perfection are often immune to actual suffering, because they justify all actions with the supposedly better state they claim to find, bring about, or at least anticipate as a real possibility. Utopia is really a u-*tempia* in that it posits a time that is beyond time. Utopia is radically detached from an imperfect past and an open future. The ambivalence of a belief in utopias is that it can motivate and set free high quantities of energies, but it can also lead to a form of activism that is, according to Jaspers, "non-living, and linear" (*PdW* 243).

Utopian activism is the opposite of careful reflective action or an insight into the limitations of action. It sees reality as raw material to be shaped according to a master plan. Bad forms of utopianism are thus an objectification or reification of the normative essence of human existence. They deny the irreducible opacity that is characteristic of lived experience, which is always unfinished experience.[6] They deny the

[4] Cf. Ernst Bloch, *Briefe*, Volume 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 766 f.

[5] Cf. Hans Saner, *Jaspers* (Reinbeck: Rowohlt 1970), p. 33.

[6] Martin Seel has warned against the tendency of utopian thinking to violate the inherently unfinished character of human life in his "Drei Regeln für Utopisten," in *Sich*

possibility of freedom and existential acts of transcending the normative boundaries of the present by way of the imagination and spontaneous action.

If outlining a metaphysics of the social reality were a desirable philosophical project, this metaphysics would have to be one that would emphasize that the world we inhabit is essentially unfinished, something to be continued and unfolded rather than perfectible as the classical utopians have it. What Bloch calls the "opacity of the lived moment" needs to be accepted and cannot be transcended by future or restorative visions of bliss, perfection, and harmony.

In line with this critique of utopianism, Jaspers writes, "Utopia as the casket of spirit kills… The human being who has faith in utopias is himself a dead person, even if he is highly active. Wherever he acts, he destroys, because anything that lives does not fit into utopia. What he imagines there does not grow any grass anymore. Wherever he acts, everything becomes dead, rigid, and anarchic" (*PdW* 242). If one believes in utopia, one believes that the world is—even if not finished in reality—conceivable as potentially finished, complete, lacking in nothing. Strive is pacified and antinomies are overcome in an ideal normative realm.

Whether correctly or not, Jaspers' believed that Hegel and Marxism represented such attempts to posit a realm in which the antinomies of our existence are in principle overcome. Jaspers, we have seen, is elaborating a philosophy of transcendence that does not commit the mistake of trying to escape the fact that life is often miserable, that hopes remain unrealized, and intentions often do not work out the way they were supposed to when put to practice.

Jaspers, although he was criticized for presenting a value-free typology of psychological strategies to cope with the antinomic condition of human existence, implicitly suggests an ethics of sustaining existential antinomies rather than overcoming them. Gaining an insight into existential antinomies is the only transcendence available to us. In other words, he suggests that a way of responsibly dealing with a world that is often at odds with one's aspirations is to understand one's limitations. Transcendence is thus primarily a negative transcendence in that it results from becoming aware of the limitations of our standpoint as epistemic beings with principally limited cognitive and practical capacities, beings who live through opaque experiences and are faced by unintended consequences. We tend to overestimate our creative as well as our destructive powers. To take a contemporary example, claiming that we are capable of eradicating the universe or that man-made global warming will destroy the planet is just as much an overestimation as it is to hope that we could completely change the world in our image. Philosophical transcendence consists in confronting these principal limitations, i.e. limitations that cannot be overcome by various techniques of social, economic, or ethical restructuring of our environment and ways of interacting with this environment, other persons, and oneself.

bestimmen lassen. Studien zur theoretischen und praktischen Philosophie (Frankfurt Main: Suhrkamp, 2002) p. 258-269.

The Emptiness Objection and Bloch's Philosophy of Utopia

It might be asked if it is not possible to provide a more positive characterization of transcendence. What are we directed towards when we understand that we are not omnipotent but finite creature? Jaspers' answer to this question usually points to mystic conceptions of learned ignorance in light of a deity beyond our conceptual grasp.[7] This conception of transcendence remains surprisingly empty and formalist. It rests on intuition or mystical experience, which succumb to non-discursive leaps of faith that liberate us from the tragic nature of earthly existence: "Only a faith, which knows a being that is different from immanent being redeems from the tragic."[8] Keeping a category, and in particular an, if not the most essential category free from any determinate meaning and referring to it as the fully or complete other, God, or Being runs the danger of negatively reifying it.[9] Critics have rightly pointed out that Jaspers' "method" of alluding to a transcendent

[7] Cf. in particular his sympathetic reconstruction of the doctrine of learned ignorance in *Nickolaus Cusanus* (Munich: Piper, 1964).

[8] Karl Jaspers, *Über das Tragische*, (Munich: Piper, 1947), p. 48.

[9] I would like to thank Prof. Kurt Salamun for his reference to the analogous critique of analytic philosophers such as Popper and Stegmüller of the ambiguity and ultimate emptiness of the concept of transcendence. Cf. Karl Popper's critique of Jaspers in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* as well as Wolfgang Stegmüller's critique of Jaspers and *Transzendenzmetaphysik* in general in his *Metaphysik, Wissenschaft, Skepsis* (Frankfurt Main: Humboldt, 1954), p. 148 f. and p. 365-374.

realm constitutes an immunization against potential criticism, but also against a serious engagement with it.[10]

Like Heidegger's concept of Being, which is not only the highest but also the most empty of categories, Jaspers' gesture to a transcendence as a mere cipher is problematic in at least the following two ways. The thought figure of the *deus absconditus*, the fugitive God that likes to hide, tends to create an idol which is empty, cannot be depicted and thus not known. This idea, which often appears in the form of an appeal to the wholly or totally other (*das ganz Andere*), cannot provide any kind of theoretical guidance, not to mention motivation for free, innovative, and responsible action, the original goal of renewing philosophy from the perspective of existence. The other danger consists in assuming that the transcendent realm, if it is totally other, is the opposite of what we know. Jaspers in fact often treats the transcendent as connected to the one, the unchanging, and the eternal, which is juxtaposed to our changing, temporal existence. Emancipation, *frei machen*, is thus conceived of as an escape of the very history that is supposed to be inescapable and the essence of the human condition. The transcendence that is connected to an a-historical conception of flesh and boneless freedom is also apolitical and difficult to square with Jaspers exemplary political engagement, in particular after WWII, be it with regard to the question of German guilt, the dangers connected to the atomic bomb, or reactionary tendencies in the Federal Republic of Germany. Unless Jaspers can show how transcending consciousness can motivate such acts of responsible engagement or enrich human experience, he remains vulnerable to the charge of emptiness and formalism.

Jaspers uses what he calls ciphers, i.e. ambiguous fragments of meaning, to address the charge of emptiness. Following Kant, Jaspers distinguishes the symbol character and the cipher character. While the symbol represents an object as an intentional object, the cipher does not refer to an existing object. The experience of incompleteness and limitation is not one in which we confront a huge and in principally unknown and unknowable sphere with the little that we in fact do know. Rather it is an area of which we have certain revelations of a transcendence to rather than transcendence from, how fragile and tentative they might be. Ciphers open up ways of approaching and revealing transcendence in the here and now. They are historically preserved layers of meaning that point to possibilities of overcoming the antinomies of human existence. The cipher is not knowledge, but neither is it a mere empty placeholder. Rather it is supposed to be a non-representational mediator. Unfortunately, Jaspers does not elaborate this theory of ciphers sufficiently and it hardly fits into his conception of radical historical immanence. Drawing on ciphers does thus not clarify in what way transcending consciousness could be the lever for a different future-oriented philosophy that aims to transform this reality rather than establish contact with another.

This lacuna is filled by Bloch, critically reviewing Jaspers' *Psychology of World Views*, in his *Inheritance of our Times*. There, Bloch charges Jaspers of not relating material conditions and psychological projections in a dialectical manner. The emptiness and rigidified typology of psychological world views and the theory of ciphers, Bloch argues, is due to a lack of historical and, in particular, socio-economical concreteness. Jaspers, on that account, provides metaphysical counseling that fixes contingent psychological modes of behavior as existential categories, as eternal fate. Transcending consciousness is thus just another type of psychological comportment. Not only does Jaspers ignore that the utopian potential of every present is different—the twenties and the sixties of the 20th century were clearly far richer in utopian energies than the nineties or the beginning of the 21st century and the hope for an afterlife is very different from the vision of a society in which people would not be discriminated because of their racial, gender, or class affiliation. He also refrains from treating certain forms of transcendence as pathological compensations for unfulfilled desires.

Bloch is committed to a dialectical and materially concrete investigation of utopian potentials. His intellectual influences reveal surprising parallels to that of Jaspers. Both started their philosophical development with a serious interest in psychology before turning to philosophy by translating psychological into philosophical categories. Bloch claims that his entire work is based on one essential idea or rather guiding thread, the not-yet-conscious and the not-yet-existing.

The not-yet-conscious reveals itself particularly in what he calls *Wendezeiten*, times of transition such as the renaissance, *Sturm und Drang*, the French

[10] Cf. for example O. F. Bollnow, "Existenzerhellung und philosophische Anthropologie. Versuch einer Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Jaspers," in: Hans Saner (ed.), *Karl Jaspers in der Diskussion* (Munich: Piper, 1973), p. 185-232.

Revolution, or early romanticism. These *Wendezeiten* correspond to significant moments of transformations in a life history and play a structurally analogous role to limit situations. These significant changes share a "pathos for the new, the peculiar pathos of the creative dimension of human beings itself, i.e. what one could call genius."[11] Subjective experiences of unredeemed promises translate into an affective hope, real despair, or emancipatory action.

In contrast to Jaspers' formalist conception of subjective transcendence—the view that we have to chose and breach novel terrains—Bloch draws on specific historical material and concrete experiences to demonstrate how present consciousness is taken on a journey of fulfilled longing. Although he does not paint out utopia by constructing an image of a perfect society or fulfilled life, Bloch focuses on the sediment dreams in everyday experiences. *Spirit of Utopia* draws on works of art and in particular music to concretize our sense of the possible while remaining conscious of the material and spiritual limitations inhibiting real progress.

While Jaspers draws on ciphers that leave his conception of transcendence too vague, Bloch investigates real utopian tendencies in areas such as technology, the arts, or customs. To conceive of tendencies is essential because tendencies have reality in which they are manifest or at least latently existing, while pointing beyond what merely exists. They are temporally forward-pointing. They store emancipatory energies that can be released under favourable conditions. Any serious attempt to regard the present as being in need of further development has to draw on these rational tendencies in order to not get entangled in the same mistakes again. They are the connection between the present as it is and the form of possibility that is entailed by this present. Of course these tendencies do not guarantee that they will be realized. Contrary to being guarantors of the realization of reason they are historical chances. Utopia would not be utopia if it could not be (and has for the most part been) disappointed. Actual reality, Bloch argues, stores a utopian potential, even if it remains uncertain if this potential can be realized. Concrete human wish images are what he calls "conscious" or "awake dreams" that, on the one hand, can have an ideological function, but they can also contribute to happiness and innovation.

Let us consider an example. Bloch starts his investigation of the spirit of utopia by characterizing an encounter with and immersion into an old jar that opens up a realm of experiences in the person contemplating over it. The mystery of the jar with its opaque interiority and its unknown history triggers an imaginative journey into a world that had not been disenchanted by modern technology and functionalism. The jar reminds the viewer of the ingenious craftsmanship and long nights of social gathering. It radiates an atmosphere that reaches far beyond the so-called proper function of a jar as being a drinking utensil or its monetary value on the market of collectors' items. Its unknown interiority triggers the imagination and its smell reminds one of long forgotten drinks. Adorno comments on this passage, "I myself am Bloch's jar, literally and immediately. It is a paradigm of what I could become and am not allowed to be."[12] By way of uncovering the imaginative richness of everyday experience the ordinary is transfigured and reveals what it could be. By extension it thus also reveals where the ordinary prohibits us from realizing our potentials.

The philosopher who is aware of the historical nature of this and other images while also having to point beyond the immanence of history articulates the search for a home as at once a return and an anticipation of a "beyond which is not yet": it is a "remembrance, a finding oneself back at home […] but precisely in a home in which one has never been yet and which is still a home."[13] Tracing utopia, the possibility of a home, reflects a time-consciousness that connects an immersion in a past in the form of remembrance and an anticipation of yet unknown, but imaginatively enriched future potentials. Just as the futurity of utopia is not a mere regulative idea that could never be reached, it does also not succumb to a form of certainty about utopia as an endpoint of history.

The question concerning the possibility of the human being remains in the last instance unconstruable

[11] *PW*, p. 408. In his biography, Hans Saner pointed out the involuntary poetic quality of Jaspers' prose, Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, Hamburg: Rowohlt 1970, p. 133ff.

[12] Theodor W. Adorno in *Ernst Bloch zu Ehren* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965), p. 18.

[13] Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 186.

for Bloch just as it does for Jaspers. However, while Jaspers refrains from providing content to what he means by transcendence, Bloch thinks that we can approach it by way of mapping a material psychology of hope that reveals hidden historical potentials as they are stored in everyday experiences such as wish images, day dreams, or aesthetic artefacts like the jar.

Conclusion

Jaspers, in particular in his early *Psychology of World Views*, shares with Bloch a concern for developing a form of future or possibility-oriented philosophy. Both start from the premise of insurmountable existential conflicts. However, when contrasted to Bloch's concrete depth psychology of utopian potentials, Jaspers conception of transcendence and freedom remains rather empty. We learn about the transcendental conditions of our experience as existing beings, but not about what it means to be standing at a particular existential or historical junction, drawing on concrete experiences, disappointments, hopes, and ideals. Jaspers' ciphers of transcendence that point to a reality beyond the reality we do know, live and choose in cannot provide determinate meaning and orientation. Jaspers' freely choosing existential subject is surprisingly unhistorical and disembodied.

Although I have focused on Bloch's implicit and explicit criticisms of Jaspers' philosophy of transcendence, to initiate a true conversation it would be necessary to read Bloch against the background of Jaspers' criticism of socialism, which needs to be left for another occasion. Apart from the prophetic style of Bloch's utopian Marxism, Jaspers would argue that it continues holding on to the dangerous hope of a final revolution that would overcome existential conflicts once and for all in an alleged utopian condition. The final chapter of *Spirit of Utopia* is after all entitled "Karl Marx, Death, and Apocalypse." It presents a socialist conception of a Third Reich which Bloch continued to hold on to despite the apparent horrors committed under the guise of political ideologies that aimed to create heaven on earth and left a dystopian reality. A dialogue between existentialism and Western Marxism is desperately needed. Bloch and Jaspers provide a promising starting point for such a dialogue. In spite of apparent and important differences, they share a concern for renewing philosophy by engaging its history.