

Resenha

Martinez Andrade, Luis & Meneses, José Manuel: **Esperanza y Utopia: Ernst Bloch desde América Latina**. Zacatecas, México: Taberna Editores, 2012. (Spanish Edition), 146 pages. ISBN 978-607-9165-35-2

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French philosopher Bernard-Henry Lévy once stated in an interview¹ that England is the fatherland of economics, France the fatherland of politics and Germany the fatherland of philosophy. Ernst Bloch, a philosopher native to Ludwigshafen, Germany, is not the exception to the rule. However, his intellectual contribution to generations of latin americans largely transcends the old continent and has resonated with many of their concerns then and now. *Esperanza y Utopia: Ernst Bloch desde América Latina* is a compilation of essays that evokes the extent of Ernst Bloch's thought and reception, reappropriation and praxis in Latin America. As Michael Löwy points out in the prologue, the study of Bloch has normally been limited to europeans, and what this book features is an analysis of his intellectual prose by latin americans themselves (with the exception of Frédérick Lemarchand's essay). The book is composed of five essays, with participating authors from Brazil, and Mexico and Uruguay.

In the prologue, Löwy evokes the revolutionary romanticism which permeated the works of Bloch and his

difficulty for accepting the “capitalist” world as it existed, for it would imply a passivity amongst its inhabitants. Although, Bloch is often classified as marxist or neo-marxist writer, what separates him from other writers of the same genre was his belief in “simple optimism of automatic faith in progress”. That is also seen in his vision towards building the future and the common reference that is made to “Utopia”. His theories have also often been endorsed by religious and millenarian movements. Raised in a judeo-christian background; what is paradoxical about Bloch's own religion, as Löwy points out, is not the fact that he was an atheist, but rather his idealized vision of religion: a kingdom of God without God, and one where the Lord of the world was dethroned by mystical democracy. The environment and its preservation were also included in this dialectic.

The first essay (*El Principio Esperanza desde América Latina*) by Fernando Aínsa, an uruguayan/aragonés essayist and literary critic deals with the buoyant aspect of Bloch's thought and suggests why in Latin America his thought was received with so much enthusiasm, particularly in the Northeast of Brazil. *The*

¹ See 10/29/2012 The economist's special report on France's collective exasperation

Principle of Hope, Aínsa suggests found a particular audience in various youth and religious movements of the sixties. It gave many latin americans a base between identity (as is) and Utopia (what should or could be). It also allowed for a generation of Latin-Americans to envision and imagine their future differently and to divert from the proposed path of globalization and growth in capitalist terms. To follow Bloch's definition of "Utopia", it needs to be understood in terms of what is possible and what is not. This leaves the windows open for creativity and imagination as opposed to a "closed" vision, which would be a "locura" (madness). One his most important contributions to Latin America is the idea that the world is not immutable and it is, in fact, changeable.

Frédéric Lemarchand's essay (*Lecturas de Ernst Bloch, Hans Jonas y Walter Benjamin. Diálogo sobre la Responsabilidad, la Heurística del Miedo y la Vulnerabilidad*) is nicely positioned proceeding the first essay since Bloch's optimism is placed in opposition to the notion of fear as sustained by Jonas. The latter, although not entirely optimistic seeks to use the notion of fear as a wise advisor for changes to come in the future. Fear, in that sense also comes in handy when posing the right questions. Though this prose is much more founded in the present and in the past it does not entirely lose sight of the future. The idea of responsibility and accountability for the current situation and the status quo (present and past) Lemarchand ultimately argues is not entirely antithetical to that of Bloch's theory (focused in the future). Applied to the latin-american case, it becomes relevant in terms of religion and in current concerns raised on the topic of sustainable development. Benjamin, like Jonas are much more alike: they both fear a catastrophic future as opposed to Bloch's optimistic vision

of the future which is not necessarily naïve. However, all of their arguments concord when it comes to an educational responsibility to bring about a better understanding of the past and the future.

In Wellington Teodoro da Silva's essay (*Cristianos Brasileños entre Esperanzas: revolución y salvación*), the brazilian historian raises analyzes the appeal of the christian left in Latin America, and more particularly in terms of liberation theology and movimientos de base initiated in the sixties (which Bloch's work had profoundly influenced). The popularity and the echo of the leftist church in the *Nordeste* is interesting to the historian because all strata of a highly hierarchized society were mobilized. Despite the fact that the church in this case remained omnipresent, what it is noteworthy according to da Silva is the conceptual ingenuity of the local intelligentsia to put forward these ideas. The historian also shares the anecdote of Castro's visit in 1990 to a congress with more than 1300 ecclesiastical individuals leaders from the *movimento de base* held in São Paulo. One of the participants asked Fidel why there were not any christians in the communist party in Cuba, and Fidel's response was "why aren't they any christians in the Cuban communist party?, I would say with all sincerity, that if we had people like you, they would have already been in our party." The author uses this example to illustrate how this form of christianity was much more closer to the left as opposed to the conservative and traditional catholic church. The author also invokes the metaphor of hunger and satiation to explain how it is in our nature to anticipate future provisions. The commingle of religion and utopia captures what the author calls a trinity, the past, present and future. What differs from this form of christianity from Bloch's vision of utopia is the question of "salvation".

In “*Principio Esperanza, Piedra Angular Del Ecosocialism*”, Mexican author Luis Martínez Andrade navigates through the current environmental questions as they are developed by community leaders today, in particular by the MST. Andrade seeks to see how Bloch's vision of an eco-socialist system is being advocated today by rural workers in Brazil. Utopia is understood as the state in time where the environment and nature were both respected and in harmony at the same pace as third world nations proceeded with their quest for progress. Martinez briefly recurs to classical texts from Marx, Engels, Hegel to more contemporary ones such as Ariès, Latouche, Le Boff and many others to analyze environmental challenges to economic growth. What is clear from Andrade's essay is that the form in which we have managed so far economic growth and our approach to earth is bound to drain the land of its resources and the people who exploit it. Being in a close-tied relationship, there is no richness without either/or element land and/or man, the author, like the MST leader calls for a reorganization and a humanization of these natural resources. Andrade also proceeds to analyze the critiques that have been made to Bloch and the neo-marxist alternative as well. He also defines different possibilities of the stages of nature as proposed by Bloch: *natura dominata*, *regnum hominis* and *unio mystica*. He argues for a harmonization with nature (and to modify our mindsets) to escape from the lash of capital. Resources are exhaustible, but not utopic faith, he writes, which is why Bloch's work is still pertinent to this day in peripheral and developing countries. The author thus advocates for “*eco-socialismo*” as a viable sociopolitical project for envisioning the future.

And lastly, in José Manuel Meneses Ramírez's article (Ernst Bloch: La Soberanía

del Sueño) seeks to understand how Bloch's work has deeply inspired many Latin-Americans to imagine and create their future, to work together towards a beautiful utopia, to give themselves the possibility of sleeping awake, to apply their will to reality.