I had the pleasure of meeting Ernst Bloch in person. We met in 1974, in his apartment in Tübingen, not far from the school at which—as he was frequently fond of recalling in his writings—Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin, as youths, planted a tree in 1789 to celebrate the French Revolution. He was already eighty-nine years old, practically blind, but retained an impressive intellectual clarity.

One of his remarks in the course of our conversation particularly impressed me, because it summed up the lifelong stubborn loyalty to the idea of utopia:

The world as it exists is not true. There is a second concept of truth that is not positivist, that is not based on confirmation of the actual [...], but is more \textit{wertgeladen} [value-laden], as for example in the concept of “a true friend” or Juvenal’s expression \textit{tempestas poetica}—that is, a tempest such as is found in the book, a “poetic storm” such as reality has never known, a tempest driven to the ultimate, a radical storm. So a true storm, in this case in relation to aesthetics, poetry; but in the case of the expression “a true friend” by contrast in relation to the moral domain. And if that does not accord with the facts—and for us Marxists, facts are nothing but reified moments of a process—then so much the worse for the facts, as old Hegel used to say.\footnote{I have published this conversation in the appendix to my book \textit{Pour une sociologie des intellectuels révolutionnaires: L'évolution politique de Lukács 1909–1929} (Paris: Maspero, 1976), 294.}

Even though the references are in Latin or German, on reading these words it is hard to avoid thinking of an old Jewish characteristic that is captured perfectly by the familiar Hebrew or Yiddish term \textit{chutzpah} or \textit{chutzpe} which, very roughly translated, approximates to “cheek,” “impertinence,” or “provocation.”
From his first writings onwards—*Geist der Utopie* (1918) (published in English as *The Spirit of Utopia* in 2000) and *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (1921)—the daydream of utopia stands at the center of Bloch’s thought. His philosophy explores diverse philosophical, literary, and religious sources, among which that of Jewish messianism occupies a special place. In one chapter of *The Spirit of Utopia* entitled “Symbol: The Jews”, Bloch extolled Judaism as the religion that had the essential power to hope “for the Messiah, for the call of the Messiah.” According to him, it is this belief that makes for the historical continuity of the “people of the psalms and the prophets,” and inspired, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a reawakening of “pride in being a Jew.” According to Bloch, Jesus was a true Jewish prophet, but not the true Messiah: the “remote Messiah,” the savior, the “last, unknown Christ” has not yet come.

For Bloch, as for Walter Benjamin, revolutionary utopia is inseparably associated with a messianic or chiliastic concept of time that stands counter to any gradualism of progress. In relation to Thomas Münzer and the Peasants’ War of the sixteenth century, he remarks:

> It was not for better days, but for the end of all days that the war was being fought here... not to overcome earthly difficulties in a eudaemonistic, unincorporated civilization, but to de-realize in the breakthrough of the kingdom.

His train of thought is strangely “syncretistic,” simultaneously Jewish and Christian: for example in that other passage in the book about Münzer, which compares the “third, last gospel” of Joachim di Fiore with the chiliasm of the Anabaptist peasants and the messianism of the Kabbalists of Safed who, to the north of the Sea of Galilee, awaited “the messianic savior” “who topples empire and papacy... and shall bring about *Olam-ha-Tikkun*, the true kingdom of God.” That is not just historical reflection: in 1921, Bloch believed in imminent revolutionary change in Europe, which he described, in Jewish-messianic language, like the Princess Sabbath who shone concealed behind a “thin, crackling

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4 Ibid., 319.