

# “Flaschenpost” from the Past: The Critical Utopian Pedagogies of Ernst Bloch and Paulo Freire

[Geçmişten Gelen Şişe içerisinde Mektup: Ernst Bloch ve Paulo Freire'nin Eleştirel Pedagojisi]

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to draw attention to the convergences between the ideas of the German philosopher Ernst Bloch and the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. This article explores Bloch's and Freire's views on utopia, education, critical consciousness, imagination, reality, process, history, hope and transformation. This article is divided into three parts: Introduction, main part and conclusion. The introduction briefly discusses the question of whether Freire was influenced by Bloch and vice versa. Bloch's and Freire's critical utopian pedagogies are rooted in their views on the nature of human beings and history. Therefore the main part explores Bloch's and Freire's views on the nature of human beings and history as well as their views on utopia and education. The conclusion sums up the convergences between Bloch's and Freire's ideas about the nature of humankind and the world, reality, history, critical consciousness, imagination, hope, utopia and education.

**Keywords:** Ernst Bloch, philosophy, utopia, Paulo Freire, education.

## Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı Alman filozof Ernst Bloch ve Brezilyalı eğitimci Paulo Freire arasındaki yakınsamalara dikkat çekmektir. Çalışma Bloch'un ve Freire'nin ütopya, eğitim, kritik bilinç, hayal gücü, gerçeklik, süreç, tarih, umut ve dönüşüm üzerine olan fikirlerini incelemektedir. Çalışma üç bölümden oluşmaktadır: Giriş, ana bölüm ve sonuç. Giriş bölümü Freire'nin Bloch'un çalışmalarından veya Bloch'un Freire'nin çalışmalarından etkilenip etkilenmediği sorusu üzerinde

durmaktadır. Bloch'un ve Freire'nin kritik ütopya pedagojilerinin temeli onların insan doğası ve tarihi hakkındaki görüşlerinden ortaya çıkmıştır. Buna istinaden ana bölümde Bloch ve Freire'in insan doğası ve tarihi üzerine fikirleri incelenmekte, bir yandan da ütopya ve eğitim hakkındaki görüşlerine yer verilmektedir. Sonuç kısmı Bloch ve Freire'in insan doğası, gerçeklik, tarih, kritik bilinç, hayal gücü, umut, ütopya ve eğitim hakkındaki görüşlerindeki yakınsamaları özetlemektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Ernst Bloch, felsefe, ütopya, Paulo Freire, eğitim.

## Introduction

Ernst Bloch is a 20th-century German philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. His first important philosophical work *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918/ 1923) had a profound impact on many Frankfurt School thinkers, such as Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin (the latter was not a member of the Frankfurt School, but, like Bloch, closely associated with it). Paulo Freire is a 20th-century Brazilian educator. His major work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) has become widely influential and has laid the groundwork for Critical Pedagogy. Freire's work was influenced by Frankfurt School thinkers such as Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse. There is no indication that Freire was familiar with Bloch's work and vice versa. Bloch wrote his main philosophical works many years before Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in English in 1970. Therefore it is very unlikely that Bloch's thought was influenced by Freire's works. By contrast, Freire's thought might have been influenced by Bloch's works. In Freire's works, there are many references to the writers which influenced his thought, such as Marx, Lukács, Fromm, Sartre, Marcuse and many others, but Bloch's name is mentioned nowhere. However, it could be argued that Freire's thought might have been influenced by Bloch's works indirectly via the impact of Liberation Theology, which spread throughout Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s. It has been suggested that the philosophical roots of Liberation Theology can be found in Europe – in the works of Hegel, Marx, Feuerbach, Moltmann and Bloch (Min, 1989, p. 96). Critics have pointed out that Freire came into close contact with Liberation Theology during his early life and that his encounter with Liberation Theology was a formative experience for him (Gadotti,

Torres, 2009). However, it has also been suggested that Bloch's ideas did not become known in Latin America until the 1960s and that his ideas were received there with great enthusiasm because they were perceived as resonating with the major tenets of Liberation Theology (Münster, 2010). Similarly, it has been argued that rather than drawing on Liberation Theology Freire contributed to Liberation Theology and helped shaping it (Kirylo, 2011, p. 167). Therefore, it is very difficult to establish whether Freire's thought was influenced by Bloch's works via Liberation Theology or not. The convergences between Bloch's and Freire's ideas are very probably simply the result of their similar intellectual backgrounds: Both Bloch and Freire were inspired by Hegel, Marx and Jesus Christ. The same also applies to Liberation Theology.

Perhaps Freire himself would have suggested that he was influenced by Bloch "without knowing it". Freire (1990, p. 36) has remarked that he "was influenced by Fanon without knowing it." He has made a similar remark about Gramsci:

... I only read Gramsci when I was in exile. I read Gramsci and I discovered that I had been greatly influenced by Gramsci long before I had read him. It is fantastic when we discover that we had been influenced by someone's thought without even being introduced to their intellectual production. (Freire, in Lake and Kress, 2013, p. 54)

Freire would probably not have been dismayed to learn that his ideas show a strong convergence with Bloch's ideas. Robert Lake and Vicki Dagostini (2013, p. 101) have claimed that "[o]f all the Frankfurt School writers that have influenced Paulo Freire, there is more concurrence with the work of Erich Fromm than any of the others." Lake and Dagostini (2013, p. 101) have supported this claim by drawing attention to the fact that "[b]oth Fromm and Freire devoted one entire book on the subject of hope." The same can be said about Freire and Bloch. Moreover, both Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* and Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* are works which revisit and build upon a groundbreaking early work: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *The Spirit of Utopia*, respectively.

**Ernst Bloch: "In that we travel there the island of utopia arises out of the sea of the possible."**

In *The Spirit of Utopia* and *The Principle of Hope* Bloch has developed the key concepts of his philosophy of utopia. One of his most important concepts is "the Not-Yet". Bloch has claimed that human beings are driven by a "Not" or, more precisely, a "Not-Yet". The "Not-Yet" is a perceived lack of something and, simultaneously, a desire to abolish this lack. Thus, the "Not-Yet" is a utopian "Not-Yet", which manifests itself as a "Not-Yet-Conscious" and a "Not-Yet-Become". The "Not-Yet-Conscious" is related to human consciousness, that is, to thinking and the imagination.

The “Not-Yet-Become” is related to the world, that is, to space and time, reality, history, the past, the present and the future.

Like the Frankfurt School thinkers, Bloch has developed his ideas in a critical dialogue with Marx and Freud. Bloch has rejected Freud’s claim that the dominant drive in human life is libido. According to Bloch, if there is one dominant drive at all, it is not libido but hunger. Bloch has not only contested Freud’s claim that the main drive in human life is libido but also that the interpretation of nocturnal dreams yields significant insights. Unlike Freud, Bloch did not consider nocturnal dreams as very significant. By contrast, Bloch accorded great significance to daydreams. According to him, daydreams are manifestations of utopian longing. Their existence attests to the utopian nature of humankind: “The fact that we can thus sail into dreams, that daydreams, often of a completely uncovered kind, are possible, indicates the great space of the still open, still uncertain life in man” (Bloch, 1996, p. 195). Bloch has pointed out that human beings are unfinished and open: “There is this open dimension in people, and dreams, plans live within it” (Bloch, 1996, p. 288). The inclination of human beings to daydream and to engage in creative work indicates that there is something missing in our lives and that something is wrong, which must be remedied. Bloch has argued that daydreaming and creative work are highly conducive to change because these activities presuppose and further venturing beyond. Human beings are characterized by an inclination to venture beyond. Compared to plants and animals, humankind “is much more awake, [and] wells up utopianly. [...] Human existence has [...] more fermenting Being, more dawning material on its upper edge and hem” (Bloch, 1996, p. 196). This upper edge and hem is a threshold between the Conscious and the The-Not-Yet-Conscious. According to Bloch, we are continually venturing beyond this threshold. The Not-Yet-Conscious in the human mind corresponds to the Not-Yet-Become in the world: “The open dimension is also in things, on their leading edge, where becoming is still possible” (Bloch, 1996, p. 288). Human beings are in a continuous process of becoming. This means that they are full of yet unrealized possibilities. Bloch (1996, p. 235) has argued that “man is the real possibility of everything which has become of him in his history and, above all, which can still become of him if his progress is not blocked.” Similarly, the world is in a continuous process of becoming. Like humankind, it is unfinished, open and full of yet unrealized possibilities: “Expectation, hope, intention towards yet unbecome possibility: this is not only a main characteristic of human consciousness but also a main characteristic of objective reality on the whole” (Bloch, 1996, p. 9).

For Bloch, reality is not identical with what exists. He has argued that reality is only one moment in a continuous process of becoming. In this process, what is possible becomes real and vice versa.

Everything that has been shaped is constantly undermined by “utopian tension” (Bloch, 2000, p. 228). Bloch has argued that capitalist ideology has created the impression that reality is static and unchangeable. Although the future is undeniably still ahead of us, capitalist ideology has been trying to make us believe that the future will be like the present and the past. Consequently, the future appears to us as if it had already been decided upon: It appears as finished and closed. This ideological barrier has successfully served to preserve the status quo and to prevent radical change. As Bloch (1996, p. 2) has put it, “bourgeois interest would like to draw every other interest opposed to its own failure; so, in order to drain the new life, it makes its own agony apparently fundamental, apparently ontological.” He has also argued that positivism and empiricism are ideological constructs, which aim to strengthen the impression that reality is static and unchangeable and that the bourgeois agony is ontological:

Where the prospective horizon is omitted, reality appears there only as a has-been, as a dead one, and it is the dead, namely, the naturalists and empiricists, who bury their dead ones here. Where the prospective horizon is continuously kept in sight, reality appears there as what it is concretely: as a network of paths (Weggeflecht) of dialectical processes that take place in an unfinished world, in a world that would be totally unchangeable without the enormous future, the real possibilities within it. (Bloch, 1988, p. 155)

Bloch has argued that positivism and empiricism distort our perception of reality, including our perception of ourselves. He has further argued that positivism and empiricism are detrimental to our well-being and self-esteem because they ignore our most important capacities, namely, to think, to feel, to learn and to dream: “The scientific given [...] in its God-forsaken automatism, independent of the experiencing, comprehending, present subject – is [...] just the schematism into which the dead bury what is dead” (Bloch, 2000, p. 190).

Like many Frankfurt School thinkers, Bloch has argued that science has been used by the ruling classes to sustain the oppression of the masses. Scientific progress has advanced to a stage at which it could be used to liberate humankind from starvation, toil and exploitation, but it has been turned into an instrument of domination by the ruling classes. Wayne Hudson (2013, p. 25) has suggested that Foucault can be considered as one of “Bloch’s heirs”. Bloch (2000, p. 190) has claimed that scientific progress has aggravated human despair and hopelessness because “scientific structures and laws” have paradoxically acquired the status of “destiny”. According to Bloch, life in capitalist societies is characterized by hopelessness and fear. Many people feel that they have been “only passively thrown into What Is” and do not realize that they can “throw themselves actively into

What Is Becoming” (Bloch, 1996, p. 3). Like Marx, Bloch believed that humankind can transform reality. Bloch (1996, p. 248) has argued that human beings must become “conscious producers of their history”. Human beings can produce history through their work and ideas. Bloch has accorded great significance to work, critical thinking and the imagination: “Man is that which still has much before it. He is repeatedly transformed in his work and by it. He repeatedly stands ahead on frontiers which are no longer such because he perceives them, he ventures beyond them” (Bloch, 1996, p. 246). According to Bloch, daydreaming is not a waste of time, but a step toward transformation. Our imagination opens “windows through which we can see the daydream world of realizable possibility” (Bloch, 1996, p. 111). Falko Schmieder (2012, p. 130) has characterized Bloch as a thinker who has sought to “make accessible again the buried dimensions of fantasy and desire for the left”.

Bloch has not only accorded great significance to daydreams but also to hope. He has emphasized that hope makes us open and wide, whereas fear makes us narrow: “The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them” (Bloch, 1996, p. 1). Hope is the opposite of fear. It is, moreover, “a directing act of a cognitive kind” (Bloch, 1996, p. 8). According to Bloch, hope is both a cognitive and a transformative force: “Hoping [...] turns what was experienced forward, above all with the hope that lives in us as the ‘quietest’, ‘deepest’ longing, that accompanies us as the ‘waking dream’ of some demystification, some nameless, uniquely right fulfillment” (Bloch, 2000, p. 191). Hope is closely bound up with daydreaming and the imagination. According to Bloch, hope is also vital for any kind of transformation: “First the content of hope represents itself in ideas, essentially in those of the imagination. [...] the ideas of the imagination [...] carry on the existing facts toward their future potentiality of their otherness, of their better condition in an anticipatory way” (Bloch, 1988, p. 105). Jack Zipes (1988, p. xxx) has argued that, in a world in which human beings are increasingly treated as objects and do no longer perceive themselves as subjects, Bloch’s philosophy is “an antidote to [...] pessimism and helplessness.”

Bloch has claimed that we must *learn* hope: “It is a question of learning hope” (Bloch, 1996, p. 1). Learning is mainly supposed to occur in schools and universities. Bloch has severely criticized schools and universities, that is, conventional education in capitalist society. As a Marxist, Bloch regarded conventional education as a part of the capitalist superstructure and as permeated by capitalist ideology. According to Bloch, the hidden but nonetheless main goal of conventional education is to preserve the status quo. Thus, conventional education is opposed to socio-political transformation. Conventional education does not aim at the students’ well-being and happiness. It primarily aims at molding the students into docile employees and consumers. In order to achieve

this goal, Bloch (1971, p. 8) has argued, students are intentionally and systematically prevented from thinking. The students are continually kept busy by reading the different textbooks used in different courses and by memorizing facts in preparation for exams and tests, in which they reproduce these facts. Therefore, the students have neither the time nor the energy to think. Bloch has criticized conventional education for having turned learning into a tiresome mechanical routine. He has rejected the view that the primary purpose of education is transmitting facts. Bloch (1971, p. 8) has also rejected “the tyranny of the textbook”, which oppresses students and teachers alike: The teachers are under pressure to cover everything in the textbook; the students are under pressure to memorize everything in the textbook. According to Bloch (1971, p. 9), the pressure put on the students is “a sadistic pressure” and causes much misery.

Conventional education does not only produce misery but also boredom, because the students are cast into the role of passive listeners: The teachers narrate the contents of the textbook; the students listen to their narration. Besides, many students perceive their lessons as boring because the knowledge which conventional education has prescribed for them is “contemplative knowledge”. Bloch has argued that “contemplative knowledge” is detrimental to socio-political transformation, because it is primarily concerned with the past. Moreover, contemplative knowledge treats the past as if it was finished and closed. Thus, it creates the impression that the past has no impact on the present and the future. Bloch has claimed that contemplative knowledge falsifies our perception of the past, the present and the future. It only represents a “reified *factum* without consciousness of its *fieri* and continuing process” (Bloch, 1996, p. 7). Bloch has rejected “contemplative knowledge” and has instead advocated “active knowledge”, which concerns itself with the present and the future and which does not regard the past as finished and closed but as unfinished and open. According to Bloch, knowing the past is important for us because it contains “undischarged future”, which is highly relevant to the present and the future:

The dialectical Marxist concept of history opens our eyes and what deserves to become extinct in the ideological constructs of the past falls and dies. Thus what deserves to remain, what is still relevant, advisory and illuminating, what is perennially alive becomes more clearly visible. (Bloch, 1971, p. 63)

Bloch (1996, p. 198) has promoted a kind of education which “mobilizes the subjects of conscious production” and which aims at producing non-contemplative knowledge. Bloch (1996, p. 200) has defined non-contemplative knowledge as “concerned with the foremost segment of history, and [...] the still undischarged future in the past”. He (1971, p. 27) has argued that in order to accomplish a

shift from contemplative to active knowledge, teachers must become conscious of their attitude toward their role. Many teachers are not aware of the circumstance that they act as mouthpieces of capitalist ideology. Bloch (1971, p. 79) has claimed that knowledge is never disinterested, neutral and objective. He has further claimed that capitalism only *pretends* to be disinterested, neutral and objective in order to conceal its interests. Teachers should be aware of this.

Conventional education is mainly concerned with transmitting facts. Bloch has not only claimed that these facts are not neutral, but also that facts do not exist:

Of course, nothing would circulate inwardly either if the outward were completely solid. Outside, however, life is just as little finished as in the ego which is working on the outside. Nothing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed, full of fixed, even perfected facts. Instead of these there are simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed. (Bloch, 1996, p. 196)

Besides, Bloch has argued that the concept of facts is bound up with the reification and commodification of knowledge in capitalist society. This reification and commodification of knowledge has produced a learning environment in which the teacher acts like a salesman and the students act like customers. Bloch (1971, p. 34) has suggested that, instead of acting like salesmen and customers, teachers and students should act like “philosophical detectives”. He has further suggested that teachers and students consider studying as a searching and tentative experience – as “essay” (Bloch, 1996, p. 196). Bloch has further argued that one of the strongest forces in the production of knowledge is wonder, which is liveliest and strongest in young people: “It ties philosophy again and again to youth, makes metaphysics at every point impatient again, conscientious – the wisdom of age in the early, unerring freshness of adolescent, primordial wonder” (Bloch, 2001, p. 170). Bloch has urged teachers and lecturers not to assume or pretend to know everything there is to know in their fields of study. In fact, Bloch has warned against the artificial division of knowledge into fields of study and has advocated interdisciplinary research. He himself was an interdisciplinary scholar, dealing in his works not only with philosophy but also with education, literature, music, painting, architecture, religion, history and popular culture.

Bloch (1971, p. 32) has also argued that teachers and students should regard knowledge as being in process and as developing. Knowledge should be presented as having relevance to the students’ lives, not as something antiquated and obsolete. For example, texts should not be consumed passively and unthinkingly, but actively appropriated, that is, re-created. Bloch (1996, p. 157) has



argued that reading is a critical and creative activity. Besides, Bloch (1971, p. 32) has emphasized the importance of dialogue in the class room. He has considered education as dialogical and formative. According to Bloch, education should aim at the students' physical, intellectual and ethical formation. In this context, Bloch (1971, p. 60) has drawn attention to the similarity between the German words "Wissen" (knowledge) and "Gewissen" (conscience). Bloch (1971, p. 78) has claimed that thinking has always been and must always be partial. Bloch himself was always partial to his vision of utopia. It is important to note that he did not want to limit utopia to a single, fixed definition. In his works, there are many different descriptions of utopia. For example, Bloch has described utopia as a society in which oppression, exploitation and alienation will have been abolished. He has also described utopia as *Heimat* (home), that is, as a world in which human beings do not perceive and treat the world and each other as if they were strangers. In general, Bloch's different descriptions of utopia draw on Marxist and Christian ideas and metaphors.

### **Paulo Freire: "The dream makes things possible."**

Like Bloch, Freire was profoundly influenced by Marxism and radical Christianity. At the beginning of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (p. 37) warns his readers that his book is "for radicals". Then he expresses his conviction that "Christians and Marxists... will continue reading to the end". Freire was a radical Christian before he became a Marxist. He never perceived his adherence to Christ as conflicting with his adherence to the ideas of Marx:

... it was the woods in Recife, refuge of slaves, and the ravines where the oppressed of Brazil live coupled with my love for Christ and hope that He is the light, that led me to Marx. The tragic reality of the ravines, woods, and marshes led me to Marx. My relationship with Marx never suggested that I abandon Christ. (Freire, 1996, p. 87)

Freire himself experienced and witnessed hunger during the years of the Great Depression. He has pointed out that his hunger as a child was temporary, but that the hunger of his working-class friends was a daily occurrence over many years. In his works, Freire has frequently stressed his deep concern with hunger. He has also called attention to the fatal consequences of hunger – not only for the body but also for the mind and soul (see Freire, 1996, p. 15).

Freire and Bloch share similar views on the significance of hunger and on the nature of humankind. Like Bloch, Freire (2000, p. 43; Freire, 2014b, p. 50) has argued that human beings are "uncompleted being[s] conscious of their incompleteness" and that, therefore, they engage "in a

permanent process of searching for [their] completeness". In fact, human beings *must* "become inserted in a permanent process of searching" (Freire and Horton, 1990, p. 11), otherwise they would die spiritually. Freire (2000, p. 60) has argued that human life is not only characterized by this "drive to search", but also dependent on it.

The purpose of this search is humanization. We are used to calling ourselves "human", but, according to Freire (2000, p. 44), we have not become fully human yet, because we are all continuously engaged in dehumanization, either in the role of oppressor or in the role of oppressed (or both). Freire has argued that the oppressed *and* the oppressors are dehumanized (the oppressors to a less obvious and drastic extent than the oppressed, of course). Dehumanization gives rise to the desire to abolish dehumanization and to achieve humanization. According to Freire (2000, p. 43) humanization is our ontological vocation, whereas dehumanization constitutes a distortion of this vocation and creates the urge to overcome this unbearable state.

Like Bloch, Freire has accorded great significance to daydreams and, thereby, to the human imagination. According to Freire (2000, p. 84; 1990, p. 86), human beings are characterized by their ability to "transcend themselves, ... move forward and look ahead", or by their ability of "going *beyond*". By continuously striving to transgress the "frontier between being and being more human" (Freire, 2000, p. 102), human beings also exercise another vital ability: the ability of risking (Freire, 2014b, p. 22). According to Freire (2014a, p. 74), "[d]reaming is not only a necessary political act, it is an integral part of human nature, which, within history, is in permanent process of becoming". Freire (2014a, p. 33) has emphasized the importance of critical consciousness and the imagination, arguing that, in order to transform the existing world, we must be able to imagine "a different world than the one of oppression".

According to Freire, human beings can transform the existing socio-political order, because human beings *and the world* are still unfinished, open and incomplete. Their unfinishedness, openness and incompleteness implies the existence of a realm of possibility, which, in turn, points to the prospect of transformation through human agency. Like Bloch, Freire (2000, p. 71, p. 5) has argued that reality is "not motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" but "a *process*, undergoing constant transformation". In order to achieve transformation, we must have dreams: "The dream makes things possible" (Freire, 2014a, p. 147). Like Bloch, Freire believed in the dialectical relationship between consciousness and history, between thinking and acting. Freire (1985, p. 179) has argued that consciousness plays a crucial role in the human production of history. However, becoming conscious of the causes of one's oppression does not result in an automatic removal of these causes. Nevertheless, in becoming conscious of the causes of one's oppression, one takes a

step toward removing them: “Of course, oppressed human beings cannot become Subjects by merely reflecting on oppressive reality and discovering their status as objects ... but they thus become Subjects *in expectancy* – an expectancy which leads them to seek to solidify their new status” (Freire, 2000, pp. 130, 131).

Freire has argued that capitalist ideology seeks to lure us into believing that utopia and dreams are undesirable and unnecessary. As Freire has pointed out, the breakdown of the communist regimes in the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union and their Eastern European satellite states in or following the year 1989 has been presented by capitalist ideology as evidence of the inherent unfeasibility of communism and as the end of ideology. According to this interpretation, utopia is dangerous (because it allegedly turns by necessity into totalitarianism) and impracticable. In any case, taking into account the gigantic production power of the capitalist system, utopia is considered obsolete and superfluous from a capitalist perspective:

Reactionary postmodernity has had success in proclaiming the disappearance of ideologies and the emergence of a new history without social classes, therefore without antagonistic interests, without class struggle. They preach that there is no need to continue to speak about dreams, utopia, or social justice. (Freire, 1996, pp. 83, 84)

Freire has rejected this view. He (2014b, p. 28) has argued that “[t]he discourse that denies the existence of ideology is, in itself, tremendously ideological”. He (1996, p. 109) has also argued that social classes have not disappeared, calling attention to the racism experienced by Spanish guest workers and black South African exiles in Switzerland during the 1970s, which, as he has claimed, was rooted both in ethnicity *and* social class.

Freire worked for many years in literacy programs with South American peasants, who suffered excruciating poverty. Their precarious economic situation and the hunger they had to endure did not only harm their bodies but also their minds and souls. They had drifted into a mental state which Freire (2014a, p. 112) has termed “historical anesthetization”: a submersion of consciousness, apathy and an inclination to accept one’s “fate”. While he was working with South American peasants, Freire discovered the formative and transformative powers of “conscientização” (“conscientization”). He (2000, p. 89) has described conscientization as “first of all the effort to enlighten men about the obstacles preventing them from a clear perception of reality. In this role, conscientization effects the ejection of cultural myths that confuse the people’s awareness and make them ambiguous beings”. The term “ambiguous beings” refers to Freire’s conviction that the oppressed tend to internalize the values of their oppressors. They turn themselves into hosts for their

oppressors and become “ambiguous beings” (Freire, 2000, p. 144). It must be emphasized that conscientization is not a teaching method but a learning experience. It cannot be imposed on the educand. The educator can only inspire and facilitate conscientization. According to Freire (2000, p. 81), conscientization is a step toward socio-political transformation because it engenders the emergence of the educands’ consciousness and subsequently their “*critical intervention* in reality”.

Freire’s work with illiterate Brazilian peasants made him aware of the inadequacy and deviousness of conventional education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he denounces conventional education as “banking education”. According to Freire (2000, p. 81), banking education “attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness”. In banking education, the teacher “fills the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (Freire, 2000, p. 71). Banking education is “an act of depositing” (Freire, 2000, p. 2), which turns students into containers. In banking education, students remain largely passive: They receive, file and store the teachers’ deposits. This passivity, which banking education imposes on students, is a violation of human nature and the ontological vocation of humankind. In banking education, as Freire (2000, p. 72) has aptly remarked, “it is the people themselves who are filed away.” According to him (2000, p. 76; 1985, p. 2), banking education serves “to obviate thinking” and to “kill our curiosity, our inquisitive spirit, and our creativity”. In short, banking education tries to turn human beings into “automatons” (Freire, 2000, p. 68). Freire has argued that because students are not automatons but human beings they want to ask questions, exchange their ideas and engage in creative work. According to Freire (1990, p. 158), students are “cognitive subjects”. However, as the following quotation shows, banking education stigmatizes and punishes students who perceive themselves as cognitive subjects:

[According to the banking concept of education], the good student is not one who is restless or intractable, or one who reveals one’s doubts or wants to know the reason behind facts, or one who breaks with established models, or one who denounces a mediocre bureaucracy, or one who refuses to be an object. To the contrary, the so-called good student is one who repeats, who renounces critical thinking, who adjusts to models, and who ‘thinks it pretty to be a rhinoceros’.” (Freire, 1985, p. 117)

In the quotation above, Freire cites from Eugene Ionesco’s absurdist play *Rhinoceros* (1959), which has been interpreted as a warning against the advance of totalitarianism. Freire’s reference to this

play can be considered as an attempt to draw attention to the political nature of education and its crucial role in society. Without a critical attitude we would all soon become rhinoceros.

Freire has emphasized that reading or studying is a critical and creative activity. Like Bloch, Freire has argued that we should not consume texts passively and unthinkingly but read them actively - as subjects. Freire has stressed that reading or studying requires a critical and searching attitude. Besides, he has claimed that reading or studying constitutes an act of engaging not only with texts but also with the world. According to Freire, reading the word necessarily involves reading the world:

When reading a book, we subject-readers should be receptive to any passage that triggers a deeper reflection on any topic, even if it's not the main subject of the book. Sensing a possible relationship between the read passage and our preoccupation, we as good readers should concentrate on analyzing the text, looking for a connection between the main idea and our own interest. (Freire, 1985, p. 3)

To prevent human beings from turning into rhinoceros, education must involve the students' intellectual *and* ethical formation. Like Bloch, Freire has rejected the concept of education as transferal of allegedly disinterested, neutral and objective knowledge. As Freire (2014b, p. 25) has stated: "I see as dangerous the possibility of education collapsing into technique, of being transformed into mere technique, into a practice that loses sight of the question of dreaming, the question of beauty, the question of being, the question of ethics."

According to Freire (2000, p. 9), education should not be "deposit-making" but "the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world". Problem-posing education presupposes a critical attitude and "involves a constant unveiling of reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 81). It is centered around conscientization, a process in which "consciousness emerges as 'intention' and not just as receptacle to be filled" (Freire, 2000, p. 115). Freire (2000, p. 81) has claimed that "[p]roblem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality." He (2014b, p. 51; 1996, p. 137) has considered the future "as a possibility" and as "a problem, a possibility, and not inexorable". He (2000, p. 84) has further described problem-posing education as "revolutionary futurity" and as "prophetic (and as such, hopeful)". Freire's view of human beings as unfinished, open and incomplete does not only imply possibility but also hope. Freire (2000, p. 91) has claimed that "[h]ope is rooted in man's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others." According to Freire (2014a, p. 8),

“[h]ope is an ontological need”. He (ibid) has stated that he does “not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream.” Freire (1996, p. 110) has further stated that he does not consider utopia “as something unattainable”, but “as a possible dream”. Like Bloch, Freire never wanted to limit utopia to a single, fixed definition (Webb, 2012, p. 600). Freire has described utopia in terms such as humanization and liberation from oppression. Accordingly, he has also referred to his vision of a critical utopian pedagogy as “liberating education”.

Whereas banking education serves the preservation of the status quo, that is, oppression, liberating education aims at liberating human beings from oppression. Freire (2000, p. 79) has argued that “[l]iberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information”. Freire (1990, p. 194) has further argued that “knowledge has *historicity*. That is, knowledge never is static. It’s always in the process”. In order to liberate humankind from oppression, human beings must become “subjects rather than just the objects of history” (Freire, 1996, p. 111):

In these complex societies we sometimes find ourselves living very much submerged in time, without critical and dynamic appreciation of history, as if history were flying over us, commanding and relentlessly regulating our lives. This is a fatalism that immobilizes, suffocates, and eventually kills us. History is nothing like this. History has no power. As Marx has said, history does not command us, history is made by us. History makes us while we make it. (Freire, 1985, pp. 198, 199)

Freire (2014b, p. 32) has stated that one of his “biggest fears [is] that humanity falls into this kind of post-modern fatalism.” He has called attention to the vested interest of capitalism in denouncing dreams and utopia: “We are surrounded by a pragmatic discourse that would have us adapt to the facts of reality. *Dreams*, and *utopia*, are called not only useless, but positively impeding” (Freire, 2014a, p. 8). According to Freire, capitalist ideology does not only denounce utopia and dreams, but also the reality of process and possibility - with the exception of the so-called American Dream, which is centered around money and success as defined by one’s ability to earn money. However, as Bloch has pointed out, money does not make us happy because the wish for money is not a childhood wish.

Like Bloch, Freire has drawn attention to the innate partiality of knowledge. Freire has argued that capitalism only *pretends* not to fabricate and use ideology to preserve the status quo. According to Freire (1990, p. 104), if one claims to be neutral, one has chosen the side of the oppressors. Freire has argued, banking education serves the oppressors and is not disinterested, neutral and objective. Consequently, teachers must ask themselves the following questions: “[I]n favor of whom, in favor

of what, in favor of what dream [am] I teaching”? and “[A]gainst whom, against what, against what dream [am] I teaching”? (Freire, 2014b, p. 21). According to Freire (2014b, p. 21), “the process of education always goes beyond itself... Beyond means that education is always related to a dream, and the teachers must have their own dreams, their own utopia.” Freire has described utopia as humanization and liberation from oppression. He (2000, p. 72) has also described utopia as being “*with* the world”, not merely “*in* the world”. The expression “*with* the world” is reminiscent of Bloch’s description of utopia as a world in which human beings do not perceive and treat the world and each other as if they were strangers.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the following convergences between Bloch’s and Freire’s ideas have been pointed out: Bloch and Freire shared a similar intellectual background, i.e. they were both influenced by the philosophy of Hegel, Marxism and the Christian religion. Both thinkers had a lifelong interest in utopia and education. Both Bloch and Freire have considered human beings and the world as unfinished, open and full of yet unrealized possibilities. They have both argued that consciousness and history (thinking and acting) exist in a dialectical relationship. They have consequently argued that human beings are historical subjects, who can transform reality. Both Bloch and Freire have rejected capitalism and capitalist ideology. They have both criticized conventional education for treating students as empty containers waiting to be filled with allegedly disinterested knowledge (both have rejected the notion of disinterested or neutral knowledge). Both Bloch and Freire have emphasized the importance of critical consciousness, hope, dreams, process and possibility for socio-political transformation. They both refused to limit utopia to a single, fixed definition. Instead, they put forward general descriptions, such as humanization through the abolition of oppression, exploitation and alienation.

Bloch’s and Freire’s works are highly relevant today and deserve more attention than they have received so far. Their ideas can be likened to what is called “Flaschenpost” in German: “notes in a bottle cast into the chaotic and irrational sea of capitalist dominated modernity in the hope that they would be found “ (Ott, 2014, p. 68)<sup>1</sup>. Bloch and Freire encouraged their readers to read texts critically and imaginatively. Therefore, any reader of Bloch’s and Freire’s works should feel free to

<sup>1</sup>Ott made this comparison with regard to the ideas of Bloch and Adorno.

question, challenge or modify Bloch's and Freire's ideas according to his or her own hopes and dreams for a better future.



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