

THE PROJECT AS HOPE. THE HOPE AS PROJECT. RORTY AND BLOCH

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Je crois que l'espoir fait partie de l'homme.
Jean Paul Sartre

Abstract. Hope is in the fabric of dreams and for most people remains something wonderful but undefined. However, hope is very much functioning as a trigger for artistic and political thought, as well as a political engine of change. Hope relates desire and belief and it may entail optimistic disposition, but without necessity. Hope might be situated either in personal life or in socio-political life. It may be the mark of the stubborn determination of lucid activism. Hope may entertain a philosophy and phenomenology of belief as well as a philosophy and phenomenology of change, transformation, a creative and political philosophy of future time. Hope is dependent on the perception of a horizon, an attainable and bright horizon (seen as an everchanging delineation between ontology and imaginative projection). In this interpretation hope entails a political philosophy of change. This relates to an ontological interpretation of man with axiological and moral accents. The essence of hope originates in a far reaching clear and focused vision. As a consequence, the metaphor of "horizon" correlates closely with the idea of hope and, eventually, with the socio-political actualization of hope. In this paper we approach the duality of hope as project and, the other way around, of project as hope, in social and political sphere, starting from the insights in Rorty's and Bloch's works, taken separately, but also taken together, in comparison, emphasizing the activist utopianism, the lyricism and the purposeful (actional) characteristics of hope as political trigger of change in both Rorty and Bloch.

Keywords: hope; creativity; socio-political change; thought and action; utopia.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of hope needs to overpass the emotional psychological state. It relates desire and belief and it may entail optimistic disposition, but without necessity. Hope might be situated either in personal life or in socio-political life. It may entertain

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a philosophy and phenomenology of belief as well as a philosophy and phenomenology of change, transformation, future time. Hope is dependent on the perception of a horizon, an attainable and bright horizon (seen as an ever-changing delineation between ontology and imaginative projection). In this interpretation hope entails a political philosophy of change.

A philosophy of hope belongs to an ontological interpretation of man with axiological and moral accents. Hope could be interpreted in various ways and among these we may emphasize either hope as a drive towards an aim, or hope as a movement towards positive (valuable or cherished) transformation and change. The essence of hope originates in a far reaching clear and focused vision. As a consequence, the metaphor of “horizon” correlates closely with the idea of hope and, eventually, with the actualization of hope itself.¹ Hope is a drive and/or an idea associated to a beneficial and optimistic human state and attitude. In social and political realms hope it is a complex phenomenon in personal and political life.

Either as a *fuzzy “good” thought*² or as a concretized ideal and aim, hope is often the basis of a social and political project, or an agenda setter for the philosophical vision of man and sometimes for the whole mankind. The entire direction of a life might be determined by hope. The emergence of a modern worldview that conceives of history as contingent and thus conceives of the future as a space for potential fundamental change, describes the space where the significance of hope is found, evaluated and valued.

In this paper we approach the duality of hope as project and, the other way

¹ In a way, hope means to “keep your eyes on the prize”, as the popular idiom goes. Originates in an orientation toward goodness, in general, with an axiological and moral type of aspirational horizon in view; horizon being a sort of limitative, but changing threshold between ontological and metaphysical realms, between the ontic and the oneiric. This revealing metaphor relies on the philosophical insights of the Romanian philosophers Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) and Constantin Noica (1909-1987). In Lucian Blaga man is an ontological creation evolving between and within two horizons. First is the horizon of mystery, a gate toward the “metaphysical darkness” (where man has a limited but fruitful access and where the human being sends “flamed arrows”), wherefrom the human being brings into ontology antinomic, paradoxical and metaphoric achievements of knowledge and art. Second is the horizon of culture, entirely created by man (a genuine ontological environment). Man is not just an inhabitant of history and culture, but also a genuine creator of these realms in the same way the “ironist” is the creator of original (but tolerant) vocabulary and world vision for herself. We have emphasized certain correlations between historical being in Lucian Blaga and the “ironist” in Richard Rorty in Henrieta A. Șerban and Eric Gilder, *Blaga and Rorty. The Historical Being and the Ironism*, “Revue roumaine de philosophie”, nr. 1-2, 2006, pp. 19-29. In Constantin Noica, “horizon” is related to the ontological characteristics of man to inherit and entertain becoming as a paradoxical “non-limitative limit” for a human being who is an “open totality”, a concept which relates to the Rortian philosophy of the “ironist”, too, but which remains to be addressed in a separate paper in the future. In Bloch, instead of “horizon” we have the concept of “Front”, which we present and discuss later on, in this paper.

² Richard Rorty as a (neo)pragmatist, openly mentions John Dewey and hope described by Dewey first as “the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiable different from, and unspecifiable freer than, the past”. This is a relevant point, but Rorty improves more on his own political perspective on hope. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Middlesex, Penguin Book, 1999, p. 120.

around, of project as hope, in social and political sphere, starting from the insights in Rorty's and Bloch's works, taken separately, but also taken together, in comparison.³

RICHARD RORTY – SOLIDARITY, HOPE AND UTOPIA

In his 1989 work, titled *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty discusses in fact contingency, “ironism” and solidarity from the perspective of the equal legitimacy of the individual and liberal aim of self-creation and of the aim of human solidarity. We see solidarity, autonomy and human self-creation as main triggers of hope. Our interpretation of Rorty is enrooted in these aims, as well as our discussion of hope finds its roots in the idea that our self-designed and self-assumed aims are essentialized projects built around a nucleus of hope.

This equal legitimacy of self-creation and solidarity is crucial for any conception of an axiological and ethical horizon of becoming and for any conception of a desirable future. The idea of equal legitimacy of self-creation and solidarity is announced explicitly by Richard Rorty from the Introduction of the above-mentioned *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, while emphasizing the following direction and conceptual space for his work:

This book tries to show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private, and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable. It sketches a figure whom I call the 'liberal ironist.' I borrow my definition of 'liberal' from Judith Shklar, who says that liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do. I use 'ironist' to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease.⁴

This larger introductory paragraph describes the context and the main directions for our interpretation of hope: contingency, historicism, nominalism, self-creation, *liberal ironism*, the liberal ironist, the rejection of cruelty and humiliation. In our interpretation, the connection among self-creation, the refusal of cruelty and hope (either in relation with solidarity or not) is central to the investigation.

The main obstacle in our Rortian reading of hope is the mistaking of the precise Rortian terms “ironism” and “ironist” for plain and more general notion of irony. Irony

³ The comparison Rorty-Bloch is addressed also in Claudia Bloeser and Titus Stahl, “Hope”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/hope/>, accessed 8 May, 21 June, 13 September 2021.

⁴ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. xv.

is an obvious impediment to solidarity and, implicitly, for hope. More exactly, irony is often one of the weapons of cruelty and humiliation. Within the Rortian analytical framework described above for the interpretation of hope, irony, cruelty and humiliation work against solidarity and hope. The definition of the “ironist” should be carefully followed as phrased by Rorty:

I shall define an ‘ironist’ as someone who fulfils three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one’s way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old.⁵

The defining traits of an ironist start from doubt and relativization of “vocabulary”, which allows for the relativization of worldview, of the closeness to reality and, thus for an increased openness towards the others’ perspectives and possibly for an increased tolerance. „Ironism” represents this open attitude toward the others and life, the attitude based on relativism and the detachment from any certainties about the achievement and understanding of ultimate realities. This is not disinterest for truth and reality and it is not complacency in a state of confusion. The ironist understands that people are more than their beliefs; which may be, on the one hand, wrong, and, on the other hand, perfectible, however fundamental or endeared they may be. As a consequence, in the Rortian theory of solidarity we have an enlightened understanding of relativism. Rortian relativism is not taken to the extreme, to lead to the impossibility of knowledge or truth; it is just a more flexible approach to knowledge, to the others and to life, so that it allows for a more participative notion of truth and knowledge.

In Rortian perspective, we may all contribute to truth and knowledge, provided our different perspectives, as truth and knowledge are something to be comprehended gradually better, to be achieved and “composed” (made), similarly to an image that gradually comes more and more in focus; not something possessed solely by some elites, neither something to be suddenly grasped (discovered). It is a neopragmatist point of view, with accent on action, practice and practical consequences, similarly to “classical” pragmatism, but also with an accent placed on language as the great mediating instrument in the construction of reality and the continuum thought-language-action. We are all a vocabulary away from reality, so to speak, and we all have our vocabularies to rely on when we act in the world. Having this in common brings people closer together, increasing the possibility of solidarity.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

The ironists understand that the vocabularies they employ are “final” only in the sense that they are the best they’ve got at that point, but not beyond, change, challenge or improvement. There are no “higher instances” than themselves to decide about their vocabularies.⁶ They have to do that all the time, to shape and adjust their vocabularies (their vision of life and the others), especially if the path towards the self-creation and the happiness deriving from it (a new understanding of *eudaimonia*) is decided by the liberal aim to avoid cruelty and humiliation, not solely for themselves, but for everyone. Thus, is the “bright horizon” orienting their life.

This is what brings conscience and morality, not only language and its poetic insights into the decisions and hopes that one makes. At the same time, this aim forges a type of liberal self-identity, ideal for an ideally liberal state: “To see one’s language, one’s conscience, one’s morality and one’s highest hopes as contingent products, as literalizations of what once were accidentally produced metaphors, is to adopt a self-identity which suits one for citizenship in such an ideally liberal state.”⁷ The ironists arrive to embrace the demand to exemplify the virtues they hope their (perfect) liberal society shall embody.⁸ And this is the reason why this Rortian project of a perfect liberal society is also termed a “postliberal utopia”. It is something improbable (utopia is an unactual idealization and means nowhere and never) that could happen but it does not exactly take place. At the same time, it is not impossible to conceive it as the gradually achieved consequence of a hopeful ironist project of solidarity set in motion by significant parts of society deciding to pursue “ironism”, thinking, acting and self-creating themselves as ironists. This way, postliberal utopia represents nothing more than a project of solidarity and a grand framework for all sorts of individual hopes as project to fulfil and manifest autonomy and self-creation.

In Rorty’s view, the ironist has the capacity to evaluate “the founders and the transformers” of society, as well as “the acknowledged legislators of her language and thus of her morality”, as people with privileged vocabularies “who did happen to find words to fit their fantasies, metaphors which happened to answer to the vaguely felt needs of the rest of the society”, but the ironist may realize that they do not necessarily target the hopes she entertains for a better society. However, the fundamental hope in Rortian perspective is to not be destroyed:

On her conception [of the ironist, our emphasis], human solidarity is not a matter of sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one’s world – the little things around which one has woven into one’s final vocabulary [her life] - will not be destroyed.⁹

⁶ The generic trait of ironists is that they do not hope to have their doubts about their final vocabularies settled by something larger than themselves. This means that their criterion for resolving doubts, *their criterion of private perfection, is autonomy rather than affiliation to a power* [our emphasis] other than themselves.” *Ibidem*, p. 97.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

Private ironism¹⁰ (confusingly termed, sometimes „private ironism” and „private irony” in the text,) represents the basis for liberal and social hope. Social hope is simply the project of a better and less cruel future: “the hope that life will eventually be freer, less cruel, more leisured, richer in goods and experiences, not just for our descendants but for everybody's descendants”.¹¹

The Rortian solution to the Heideggerian hope of authenticity and of escaping into eternity (*ktēma eis aiei*) is to act in accordance with individual views (personal vocabularies) and according to the principle of avoidance of cruelty and humiliation.

Liberal hope is guaranteed by ironism in Rorty's view. The end of liberal hope allows for the exercise of the “bad” type of irony, the current, common-sense type of irony, which spreads alienation, marginalization and the “normality” of hierarchies and humiliation in society, while ironism is rather self-irony and a detachment from the given and authoritative vocabulary – ironism is an expression of individual autonomy and individual autonomy is the foundation for the success of individual and social hope.¹² Cruelty and solidarity are opposites. The secret hope that keeps life unfolding, including social and political life and all the kinds of projects that brings future closer is that we can avoid cruelty and humiliation and that we can enjoy togetherness.

According to C. Bloeser and H. Stahl, in Rorty, hope, as a ground for politics, “does not require foundations”¹³, while knowledge, as a basis for politics, does; and is possible for hope to be also “unjustifiable”.¹⁴ They also emphasize that Nicholas Smith considers that unjustifiable hopes are not those either deprived of justification, or inadequately justified, although there is (or would be) a possible justification.¹⁵ In our view, in Rorty, it is merely that hopes are incipient projects, directions to be pursued, diffuse options for the improvement of togetherness that for certain people and within certain circumstances may be regarded as hopes for the impossible, or impossible dreams (utopian projects), either part of existing narratives of progress or structuring new narratives of progress.¹⁶

The fundamental aspect in an analysis of hope is hope as a project of actualized autonomy (via the avoidance of humiliation and cruelty). All sorts of other hopes are enhanced by this “fundamental” ironist hope. Understanding contingency, Rorty shows that some people might choose to use contingency for their benefit, for more beautiful

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 73-94.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 187.

¹³ Richard Rorty et al., *Against Bosses, Against Oligarchies: A Conversation with Richard Rorty*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002, p. 58. See also Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 208.

¹⁴ Claudia Bloeser and Titus Stahl, “Hope”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/hope/> accessed September 3, 2021.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ See also Nicholas H. Smith, “Rorty on Religion and Hope”, *Inquiry*, Vol. 48, No.1, 2005, pp. 76–98, especially p. 94. doi:10.1080/00201740510015365.

and better lived lives, for themselves, in their self-interest, which might be possible to works also in favour of a more qualitative togetherness and in favour of solidarity. Hope has the structure of a project, and we can see that the project has the appeal of hope.

ERNST BLOCH – UTOPIA, HOPE AND PROJECT

To set the scene, let us appeal to grand terms of comparison. *The principle of Hope* is the opposite of *Leviathan* and opposite of *The Decline of the West*. Its importance is similar, but its encyclopaedic vision is lucidly optimistic, realistically utopian and far reaching; piercing through angst and disappointment to recover artistic and political inspiration witnessing the power of man to renew and change things. Bloch's human being does not simply long for a better future, but turns dreams into paths towards that future. This is the human being who dreams, thinks and act, a true hymn to human creativity. Restless, thoughtful and creative, this human being is not only passively envisioning a better tomorrow, but "she" is to *grab* out of the realms of the future that freer and more fulfilling present "she" desires.

For Ernst Bloch, hope is the expression of the „anticipatory consciousness“, a core characteristic for human ontology. Hope is a first mover, previously disregarded in the philosophical tradition and in political philosophy. It is probably the affective component that hope obviously presents that excluded hope from traditional analyses and theories in political philosophy.

Hope is, in the perspective approached in *The Principle of Hope*, a manifestation of consciousness and of the self. This monumental work is not easy to capture in a concise manner. However, one aspect that opens an interpretative central direction in the anthropological philosophy of *The Principle of Hope* is the criticism of the American way and the great relevance of the "archetype of the little man". This has a socialist interpretative connection, built upon the dialectic struggle of the old against the new, which does not make the object of our investigation in this study. Anyway, Ernst Bloch's socialist views are too philosophical, comprehensive and complex to be treated as mere socialism.

Hope emerges as subject in the philosophy of becoming and change. The struggle of the new against the old, with moral, not only with political tangents, as well as the recurrent incompleteness of the new and the positive expectations from radical change remain main philosophical themes in Ernst Bloch, besides and beyond the socialist vein. They keep the fore as main directions in the philosophical heritage of the philosophical, intellectual, cultural "left", which may or may be not more or less political, even today.

Aiming to follow the "utopian", contingent and solidarity enhancing aspects in *The Principle of Hope* and to clarify the main terms of comparison with the Rortian perspective on hope, we remain, however, close to the core of Bloch's approach. In

Bloch, “the little man” has to break out of the entrapment of the routine daily life. Hope as herald and creator of change via art, politics and knowledge is the “consistent”, sure way out of this entrapment.

At the same time, hope is the opposite of fear and in this interpretation, each manifestation of hope is a free action, a human victory against fear and anxiety. Hope is something that the human being is able to anticipate. In Bloch, hope brings about a sort of specific novelty, the “new” that “I”/“we” have designed. Hope brings about a sort of “we” where the “I” does not get entirely lost or dissolved. For the dreams are always someone’s dreams first and they get to be shared afterwards.

On this train of thoughts, the reasoning indicates that all elements delineated above point toward a connection between hope and the emancipation from the mainstream and prescribed ways of life similar to that of the Rortian ironist. We shall discuss more about these comparative connections in the next chapter of the study, but we are openly attempting an accurate reading of Bloch that allows for a Rortian interpretation.

From Bloch’s comprehensive perspective on history, hope has a prospective dimension and a cognitive dimension, closely inter-related. At the same time, hope does not rely on the general and widely accepted type of knowledge, but only assesses a hypostasis of the way things may be; an acknowledgement of a cognitive type. It is interesting that for Bloch hope implies “venturing beyond”, the same way thinking does, in a clearly Faustian manner, Bloch manifesting Goethe’s influence in this respect.

When Ernst Bloch considers his philosophy utopian, he approaches things as “concretely utopian”, a paradoxical view, enrooted in possibilities and engagement. Relatedly, the most important aspect in our analysis in this study is that Bloch’s philosophy of hope presents it as the most human of all affects and manners of thinking inter-related, as a kind of privileged human *access to reality*, via “expectant emotions”, creativity and daydreams.

Let the daydreams grow even fuller, since this means they are enriching themselves around the sober glance; not in the sense of clogging, but of becoming clear. Not in the sense of merely contemplative reason which takes things as they are and as they stand, but of participating reason which takes them as they go, and therefore also as they could go better. Then let the daydreams grow really fuller, that is, clearer, less random, more familiar (...) Thinking means venturing beyond.¹⁷

So, hope begins with “venturing beyond” and “venturing beyond” calls for a project in Bloch’s understanding of what we may call a consequential type of hope, hope that makes the difference and becomes a trigger for change. In Bloch, daydreams are not of that sort that might be postponed forever, but they are meant to be accomplished in a future which does not even has to be very distant. They are also meant to be accomplished concretely and politically. As a consequence, these daydreams are in Bloch political thought that have to get eventually the organized form of a project and therefore

¹⁷ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* [*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 1959], Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1986, pp. 3-4.

hope is not entirely a utopian endeavour. *The Principle of Hope* is from this perspective the encyclopaedia of hope as the world's greatest anthropological philosophy catalogue of the manifestations of "venturing beyond" (the quotidian, the beaten track, the limits imposed etc.).¹⁸

The venturing beyond is an adventure into the not yet conscious. This seems paradoxical. How can this be?¹⁹ The prospective and anticipatory role of thinking enhanced by the rejection of want brings to conscious attention the "not-yet-conscious" and this takes the form of hope in the "Front" of consciousness. This "Front" is a first scene where hope is presented (hope "dawns", says Bloch) and where it takes the more concrete shape. Once hope as emotion and thought is present the "not-yet-conscious" or the "unbecome" takes the scene, the "Front" of preoccupations and seeks to be more and more concrete, or more and more well-articulated. As opposite of fear thought and emotion articulate not only anticipatory ideas, but also future actions. Thought, emotion and action entangle with imagination and become a factor shaping the course of events, utopian, but not deprived of consequence, but in the sense of a utopia that is going to have an impact – a "forward dream", which is in fact a project. From this perspective, imaginative thought and militant attitude are equally important in the structure of hope.

Everything is, before being manifested, a mere possibility. As a "forward dream", hope is a project; it yields something out of nothing and becomes ever more engaging. Hope engages the Here and Now in its multiple aspects – daydreams, symbols, ideals, archetypes and ideology – creating the blueprint for change, a change inducing the creation of *Novum* with historical, artistic and political results. Hope sets in motion and expresses metaphysical and socio-political possibilities, too. Hope is a counter-weight to the concept of repression in its novel manner of perceiving the status quo in all the opportunities it may present and in all the absent elements that may be made present.²⁰

In Bloch's philosophy, hope, optimism and utopia are not a fuzzy mix. Hope is the outcome of the creative thought open to possibilities and opportunities, as well as an outcome of the more imaginative sensitivity and imaginative thought able to imagine, project and to design possibilities not-yet-present. There is an attitude of "militant optimism" in the understanding of hope as project, which activates assumptions and

¹⁸Yet unrevealed dreams, projects, hopes are paramountly more important in Bloch than the sum of varied impositions man has to face, hence, the input of creativity goes hand in hand with that of knowledge and "liberal" (in a very wide understanding of the term) politics originating in a *hopeful* or projective individual ontology; an aspect which sends to the philosophy of Lucian Blaga in a similar extent in which it relies to the philosophy of Richard Rorty. The not-yet-conscious "Front" (of consciousness) in Bloch is similar to the concept of "horizon" in Lucian Blaga. For both thinkers, people venture into the "Front" or in the "horizon" to grab and bring about creations (things, "doings") into existence – be they art, knowledge, or political projects.

¹⁹In Romanian philosophy, Constantin Noica (1909-1987) wondered also "How could be the new possible?" [in his *Sketch for the history of how something new is possible*, 1940] out of a similar preoccupation with becoming and ontology.

²⁰Ernst Bloch, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 128.

expectations into a possible and not too distant acknowledgeable actuality that we can experience. In this respect, we should emphasize a new direction to capitalize upon Bloch's thought.

Potential states of affairs are not inevitable as the elements. The human spirit is the great creator of history and actuality alike. Hope is at the centre of all that as determining thought. Hope makes it that the limits of possibility extend to the limits of thought. Active thought and decisions, once triggered by hope, gain the form of a blueprint, the form of a project, which harvest hope and its utopian projections, capitalizing them in projects of artistic and socio-political change. Hope is a counter-weight not only to fear, but also to materialistic dialectical concepts and plans of socio-political change in a revised form of Marxism, more philosophical, more comprehensive and extremely spiritual. In Bloch's vision, hope infuses a "warm stream" into socialist change, thus empowering socialist change way beyond the consequential scope of "militant optimism", expanding the potential, probable and possible developments beyond the materialistic envisioned strict (historical and materialistic) determinations due to hope.²¹ Thus, even social theory is situated in a different, more spiritual, cultural and philosophical horizon; a horizon of future change, understood as well in the tradition of the Marxist *Theses on Feuerbach*, that is, developed by the active contemplation of idealism and ideals.²² In relation to this aspect, in an interpretative approach, in our view, we may emphasize that hope functional here and now and hope as a lifelong attitude of not giving up is teachable. This is crucial for a social theory of change, but remains to be developed in a future study.

Hope and materialism do not seem a viable combination. Despite this first reflex, a Feuerbachian-Marxist tradition that understands the unity of theory and practice and which has the potential to purge the quite unrealistic dichotomy²³ of realms – the oneiric (considered hastily childish and powerless) and the bleak materialistic determinism – firmly situates Bloch's vision of social theory within the horizon of change and comes very close to Rortian postliberalism (although it is not Marxist; neither explicitly, nor in intent). Both have the ground of voluntary rejection of privilege (be it of knowledge or insight, not merely economic and/or political, of class and power).

HOPE AS PROJECT AND PROJECT AS HOPE IN RORTY AND BLOCH

Human dreams and hopes are still human decisions with a political reordering force of social change (for the better), in both Rorty and Bloch. Both reject knowledge/truth or historical inevitability as grounds for any socio-political theory of change.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 201 *sqq.*

²² *Ibidem*, p. 285. K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm> discuss social theory as the theory that occupies the "horizon of the future".

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 1371-1372.

There is more metaphysical terminology in Bloch, while Rorty rejects the metaphysical approach to political action. In Rorty's view, metaphysics cannot be ground for solidarity, since, traditionally, it has always become a ground for impositions and discrimination. While truth is not cancelled, it is interpreted in pragmatic manner closer to a concept of personally derived meaning and meaningfulness. Genuine vocabularies decided upon by the human being in question are going to be both functional and meaningful in a personal vision of life oriented against suffering and humiliation for everyone and not only for oneself. In Bloch metaphysics has the role of emphasizing the historically determining role of change with artistic and political aspects. In both Rorty and Bloch, hope is ground for progressive political theory and practices. Literary style is found in the very writings of both thinkers and they both relate to art to emphasize the creative nature of a human being who is prone to create that is also to change. In Rorty, literature, namely poetry has a more important role, while in Bloch there is an anthropological wider interest in all forms of art in a comprehensive and encyclopedic approach. Rorty's accent on poetry and poetic visions of the world seen as quasi-revolutionary, almost revolutionary or entertaining a bias toward fresh and potentially renewal approach to the world. All this is enrooted in Rortian ironism. In Bloch there is a principal line of interpretation of art as the actualization of progressive thought in various forms. Human being as well as human art and culture is not an imitation and any type of "mirroring" of the world is rejected in both authors. The human being is characterized by creative powers that manifest artistically and politically. And in both authors the reader encounters an impressive closeness between the artistic and the political transforming actions upon the world. Creation and politics are world transforming forces mastered by man. Revelation and the processes through which the things that are not-yet-conscious becomes present to the fore – in the Front – and becomes something conscious is both artistic and political and it is only the first stage of a larger process of world-transformation.

In Rorty, once we achieve the ironist habit, *hexis* and attitude, the avoidance of cruelty and humiliation for oneself and for the others are inevitably ensured and hope is fulfilled through the project of solidarity is set in motion accompanied by a particular poetic-revolutionary view of the world. In Bloch this aspect of unavoidable utopian completion is not suggested (inaction, counter-forces, fascism represent some of the obstacles which any realist utopia has to surmount).

Bloch aims at capturing the ultimate reality through this metaphysical approach, differently than Rorty who embraces a contingent liberal politics without any need to resort to political models per se. But these differences are not merely differences of thought, they are very much historical and cultural differences. In Rorty, hope itself is a basis for political theory and action, while in Bloch it is the key ingredient for a novel type of dialectical materialism, rendered more complex and spiritual via a metaphysical vocabulary.

In Rorty, hope is derived from a hermeneutics of contingent ontologies self-assumed poetically or at least linguistically (via "vocabularies") leading to expected,

designed and unexpected agreements and genuine, more respectful and more rewarding disagreements, too. Hope of agreement lasts as long as the prospects for interaction.

Lyricism is an important part in the interpretation of hope in both Rorty and Bloch. Lyricism is the “sign” and the foundation of the “personal”. Hopes may be selfish, contingent and even “unjustifiable”²⁴ or an “impossible hope”²⁵.

Language suspended the possibility to find one and the same context for all lives, one and the same relation to life. And this is the reason why someone’s “end of the road” be represented as a question of perspective and not as a certainty for someone else. The human being describes herself in her own terms both in Rorty and Bloch. Her descriptions, her very own “mobile army of metaphors” capture a particular view within which some things become more clear, more possible, hopeful. The opposite of fear, nihilism and fatalism, hope is emphasized as a narrative of solidarity and social progress in Rorty and Bloch. Reading Rorty with Bloch and Bloch with Rorty, in both philosophers, searching for the truth and the singularity of reality, while “embracing” the world in a personal approach (or, “vocabulary”) creating the context and defending the singularity of perspective stimulate thought in the horizon of change; this is, indeed, the ground for hope and betterment.

Hope is in both authors a narrative of political progress: in Rorty it is a contingent narrative, but in Bloch it represents the ground for a grand narrative of progress. For both authors, hope is at the core of any personal political project and part of a basis for a wider political project of solidarity. A moral subject is a hopeful subject. In Rorty, the moral subject is a factor of change and a person who can be humiliated and acts against humiliation as a creator of her own vocabulary, views and reality. In Bloch, the moral subject is a creator, a militant for a social betterment.

The projects of self-creation are hopeful and the philosophy of hope calls for a philosophy of action and becoming. For an enlarged context of discussion, in our 2021 book, *Neopragmatism and postliberalism. A Contemporary Weltanschauung*, correlating the Rortian neopragmatism and the Rortian liberal utopia as dimensions which reinforce each other (discussed in relation to the idea of historicity, creativity and human spirituality found in the writings of Lucian Blaga, Ernst Cassirer, Gaston Bachelard, Mircea Eliade or Richard Rorty, as well as in William James, in his meditations on religion), we are proving the creative and actional drive of the human being found at the core of a philosophy and reality of hope. In Rorty and Bloch, but also in Lucian Blaga, it all begins with inspiration, or revelation – a metaphysical, or creative or political type of awakening. In *On Philosophical Consciousness* (1947), Lucian Blaga captures unparalleled the crucial and defining idea for both philosophy and man, or the human being: *Philosophy represents the great opening, the great exit from “the infinite sleep in which our being floats”*. The human ontological environment can prove to be either a swamp of common sense or an ocean of openings, depths, confrontations and tensions produced by

²⁴ This happens, especially, in Richard Rorty. See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 208.

²⁵ Nicholas Smith, *op. cit.*, 2005.

“awakening”, but in either case, in Bloch, Rorty and Blaga, the individual is able to overcome “settled” environments, via transforming hopeful thought.

For neopragmatism and postliberalism, the philosophical approach represents the ability to reinterpret, re-describe and re-evaluate things to get out of the entanglements of prejudice (including metaphysical prejudice), final words, dictations, labels or predetermined aspects of any kind. In this sense, Lucian Blaga, like Richard Rorty, rejects common sense. For Lucian Blaga, but in our interpretation (because there is no explicit concern for common sense in Lucian Blaga), the refusal of common sense is a philosophical attitude of a coherent type in relation to the idea of a specific human ontological mode. More precisely, the human being does not live only in the “immediate” (exclusively within a sphere of things), according to Lucian Blaga's formula, even if it may seem so, at first sight.

The observations emphasized go to underline the wider philosophical context adequate for conceiving this rich and creative human ontology prone for ever enriched becoming. Maybe not every human being, maybe not always, but every human being will certainly at some point give the measure that the human being does not live exclusively “immediately” and exclusively for the security and safety of today or tomorrow. The human being exists by asserting herself ontologically and realizes this, in fact, “on the horizon of mystery” and, the smallest or greatest moments of creativity, or joy, or overwhelming pain that gives birth to art, the human being asserts herself and reaffirms herself as a creative being, as a demiurge, as a being living within the horizon of mystery.

This perspective is a fertile key of interpretation for the Rortian (poetical) postliberal utopia. Richard Rorty rejects common sense as a sort of prescribed ontology, in another related manner: common sense is the “guardian” of a compelling metaphysical moment (especially in an interpretation from the perspective of pluralistic socio-political philosophy). In other words, for Richard Rorty, common sense is the expression of stagnation and impossible emancipation, at the same time it is the main obstacle to the adequacy of our relationship to the world and to others in the spirit of deeply human and ethical meanings.

Richard Rorty explains in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* the observation that contemporary philosophers become less metaphysician types and less essentialists, being better described by the term *theorists*. The method of *redescription* applied to the current reporting to the world and its associated irony as an attitude of openness, tolerance and solidarity is also a manifestation of sensitivity to the narrative dimension of being and knowledge, resulting in the rejection of “essences” and metaphysical essentialization, deep human openness to others and their “vocabularies” (*i.e.*, their perspectives – on Others – on the world and life)²⁶. Richard Rorty's *redescription*

²⁶ Via Rortian redescription, we are situating ourselves almost as if under a persistent (Rawlsian) „veil of ignorance”, which has the advantage to remind us all, in a Socratic manner, the fact that we „know that we do not really know anything”, which allows us and maintains us, at least potentially, the ability to entertain fresh views, „un-essentialist” and “non-foundationalist” on the world and in what concerns the others... if we were to divagate towards and from the Rawlsian metaphor.

constitutes a method and solution for recovering the human relationship to the world and toward other people, by signifying and re-signifying the world in a technological era, which is fragmented, cluttered with essentialisms, rigid attempts of ideologization and, more recently, generalized post-truth rudimentary manipulation.

The human being's creative assertion is defining for this special type of creature. In Emil Cioran, too, creativity makes the human being a demiurge and, at the same time, raises the being to the highest peaks of spirituality, loneliness, lucidity and despair in the sense of destroying the original balance of the spirit and disintegrating the being into consciousness, which are "fruits demiurgic temptation".²⁷ Hope is in the deepest fibre of the human nature and needs no justifications and no foundation. This is the idea at the core of the Rortian perspective on hope

Redescription is hope and all the projects of self-creation and self-fulfilment are types of projects of hope. If the avoidance of cruelty and humiliation is utopian, we have in this theoretical construction, actually, a postliberal utopia, and not a "traditional" literary or philosophical utopia, built around a main axis which undertakes an actional interpretation of hope as project, for here and now, or for the nearest future.

Hope is dependent on a personal horizon and it has the potential to create a social horizon of change part of a *Weltanschauung*. At various significant levels, the future itself is dependent on hope. The absence of hope may lead to bleak visions of future or to the cancellation of future. Not only political deliberation and political projects presuppose hope, but any type of political activity collapses and becomes meaningless and purposeless in the absence of hope. Thinking hope is an occasion to understand politics as the art of the meaningful present which may lead to the desirable future that keeps us together, solidary and with a lively feeling of belonging.

²⁷ Emil Cioran, "Nae Ionescu and the drama of lucidity", in Romanian, *Vremea*, Year X, nr. 490, 6 June, 1940.