

## Theological-Political Fragment

Only the Messiah himself completes all history, in the sense that he alone re-  
deems, completes, creates its relation to the messianic.<sup>1</sup> For this reason,  
nothing that is historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to anything  
messianic. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical  
dynamic; it cannot be established as a goal. From the standpoint of history,  
it is not the goal but the terminus [*Ende*]. Therefore, the secular order can-  
not be built on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and theocracy has no politi-  
cal but only a religious meaning. To have repudiated with utmost vehemence  
the political significance of theocracy is the cardinal merit of Bloch's  
*Spirit of Utopia*.<sup>2</sup>

The secular order should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation  
of this order to the messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philoso-  
phy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, en-  
compassing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow  
points to the goal toward which the secular dynamic acts, and another  
marks the direction of messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free  
humanity for happiness runs counter to the messianic direction. But just as  
force, by virtue of the path it is moving along, can augment another force  
on the opposite path, so the secular order—because of its nature as secu-  
lar—promotes the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The secular, there-  
fore, though not itself a category of this kingdom, is a decisive category of  
its most unobtrusive approach. For in happiness all that is earthly seeks its  
downfall, and only in happiness is its downfall destined to find it.—  
Whereas admittedly the immediate messianic intensity of the heart, of the  
inner man in isolation, passes through misfortune, as suffering. The spiri-

<sup>1</sup>The Kaiser Wilhelm Bridge, Berlin, early twentieth century. Photographer un-  
known. From Max Osborn, ed., *Berlin: Ein Rundgang in Bildern durch das alte  
und neue Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1913).

tual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds to worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its special but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.

To strive for such a passing away—even the passing away of those stages of man that are nature—is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.

Fragment written in either 1920–1921 or 1937–1938; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften II*, 203–204. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

## Notes

1. The dating of this fragment remains a puzzle. Benjamin's literary executor, Theodor Adorno and Gershom Scholem, both attached enormous importance to the text; yet they were adamantly opposed in their attempts to date it. Scholem insisted that its ideas are consonant with Benjamin's ideas from the early 1920s. Adorno recalled that Benjamin had read the text, describing it as the "newest of the new," to Adorno and his wife in San Remo in late 1937 or early 1938 (Adorno also claimed to have given the text its title, "Theologisch-politische Fragment.") Rolf Tiedemann sided, however reluctantly, with Scholem, and dated the text 1920 or 1921. The editors of this edition view it, with equal hesitancy, as an early formulation of the complex of ideas that finally took shape in the essay "On the Concept of History" (1940), to appear in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
2. The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), a personal friend of Benjamin, taught at the University of Leipzig (1918–1933), where he drifted toward Marxist thought in the 1920s. After a period of exile in Switzerland and the United States, he returned to Germany in 1948, teaching at Leipzig and Tübingen. He is the author of *Geist der Utopie* (The Spirit of Utopia; 1918), *Spuren* (Traces; 1930), and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Principle of Hope; 3 vols., 1952–1959).

# A German Institute for Independent Research

When the dispersion of German scholars began in 1933, there was no field which gave those working in it a reputation that excluded them from other disciplines. Nevertheless, Europe's gaze was upon them, and it expressed more than concern. It harbored a question of the kind addressed to those who have confronted an unusual danger, or been visited by some unprecedented horror. It took some time for those affected to form a clear image of what had descended on them. Five years, however, is a considerable period. It focused on one and the same experience, used by each in his own field in his own way, it was enough to enable a group of academics to give an account, to themselves and others, of what had befallen them as scholars and what would determine their future work. They owed this account not least, perhaps, to those who had showed them trust and friendship in exile.

In the Weimar Republic, the group in question formed around the Frankfurt-Institut für Sozialforschung. It cannot be said that, in terms of their disciplines, these scholars formed a unified academic body. The institute's director, Max Horkheimer, is a philosopher; his closest collaborator, Friedrich Pollock, an economist. Other members are the psychoanalyst Fromm, the economist Grossmann, the philosophers Marcuse and Rottweiler (the latter also a musicologist), the literary historian Löwenthal, and a number of others.<sup>1</sup> The idea which brought this group together is that "social theory can develop today only in close association with a number of disciplines, principally economics, psychology, history, and philosophy." Equally, these scholars have the common aim of orienting the work in their own disciplines toward the current state of social development and the theory relating to it. What is involved here could hardly be called a doctrine, still less a