

Reflections on Walter Benjamin's *Theses on Historical Philosophy*

Atsushi HIRANO

In 1940 Walter Benjamin put an end to himself. Shortly before his death he wrote 18 articles on history and historical philosophy which are thought to have been written as a kind of testament by this unique critic. They reflect not only the themes in which he was engaged but also his way of observing things and of thinking. It was a hard time in which he wrote the articles, which therefore took on the character of polemic and provocation. He was forced to write against dominating powers and against any kind of thought of progress, on which modernism is based. The modern notion of time as mechanical calculation is especially criticized severely. Instead of homogeneous time he demands a new conception of time circulation in which the present time should liberate the suppressed past, and then the present could liberate itself by means of the recovered richness of the past. A kind of dialectic can be found in this way of thinking of time. When he wrote, Benjamin was doubtless thinking of drastic changing of social systems, but in the background of his dialectical materialism there must clearly be a philosophical, cosmological and religious notion, which he calls in this paper "messiahism". One day the Messiah should come upon us. We, the people on earth in the present, have a slight ability of the Messiah and so must be conscious of his coming. The structure of this thinking continues to be of importance.