

OPINION

By Kolyo Videv Koev, Prof., DSc, Professional field 3.1 Sociology, anthropology, and cultural sciences

of the materials submitted for participation in a competition for holding the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in Professional field 2.3 Philosophy (History of Philosophy. New Philosophy – XIX c.) at the Department of Philosophy, Sofia University

I am appointed to the scientific jury of the competition according to Order РД 38-382 of 11.07.2022 of the Rector of Sofia University Prof. A. Gerdzhikov. The only candidate for this competition is Dr. Dimitar Bozhkov, currently an Associate Professor at the Department of History of Philosophy, Sofia University.

The set of papers presented by Dr. Bozhkov is in accordance with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of Sofia University.

For participation in the competition, Dr. Bozhkov has submitted a total of 12 scientific papers, including 2 monographs, a chapter of a collective monograph, 5 studies in scientific journals and collections, and 4 articles in scientific journals and collections which is more than enough to meet the requirements of the competition. To this, I will add his participation (between 2012 and 2022) in 9 projects, of which he was the leader of 4. Between 2014 and 2020. Dimitar Bozhkov has presented papers at 17 scientific forums.

The main field in which the candidate's analyses unfold is that of the philosophy of history in its intersections with sociology, theology, and aesthetics on the one hand and political action on the other. Here I would single out: the studies of the hybrid between Marxism and messianism (Appendix 1) and of the so-called "critical philosophy of history" in the context of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* (which would mean tracing the relationship between concrete historical

research and philosophy of history: Appendix 2); the consideration of the metamorphoses of the body in the Florentine Renaissance in Abi Warburg's project on the "afterlife of Antiquity" (Appendix 4); the analysis of the problem of the sedimentation of ancient rituals and practices in art, allowing one to derive Abi Warburg's "specific philosophy of history" (Appendix 6); tracing the formation of the so-called "New Left" through the interaction between philosophy and New Left movements (Appendix 8).

Central to the trajectories of analysis thus outlined is the work on the boundaries between the philosophy of history, theology, and politics, most clearly manifested in the two monographs by Dimitar Bozhkov. I will focus my attention first and foremost on the monograph presented as a habilitation thesis, *Marxism in Messianism*¹, insofar as it best delineates the candidate's main topic of interest – the interrelation and interaction between Marxism and messianism in various philosophical and political projects – already taken up in his dissertation (presented here in revised form as the monograph *History and Emancipation. Clio in the Passages of Modernity*²).

Before that, however, I will draw attention to an important fact about the candidate's career development. A review of the courses Bozhkov lectured at the university shows both the systematic and consistent nature of his work and the unity between research and teaching. Eloquent in this sense are the titles of the following courses: 'The Contradictions of Political Theology and the Problem of Revolution: Walter Benjamin and Jacob Taubes', 'The Philosopher and the Big City', 'Anarchism and Social Movements', 'Images of the Body'.

The monograph *Marxism in Messianism* is devoted to an explosive topic from the point of view of orthodox Marxism, which rejects any linking of Marx's vision of history with messianism. On the other hand, a treatment critical of Marxism reduces Marx's philosophy of history directly to a secularized version of Christian eschatology. The perspective stated by the author, in turn, presupposes, more generally: that by illuminating each other's completely heterogeneous

¹ However, the author should clarify the title. I assume that it is still *Marxism in Messianism*, as it is written on the cover of the monograph, but in the general list of publications there is a title *Marxism is Messianism*?! More generally, though, I think the title (I assume it is *Marxism in Messianism*) does not sufficiently accentuate the author's key theses.

² Which is precisely why I will not discuss it in my Opinion.

traditions, their "emancipatory charge" can be better discerned, and unexpected intersections between them can be read, potentials invisible on the surface made manifest. In this sense, Bozhkov tries, as he puts it, to "reverse" the critics' thesis and thus neutralize it, seeking to make manifest the "positive moments" in the link between eschatology and Marxism³. This he does through Karl Löwith and a "leftist" reading (through the idea of "revolution") of Carl Schmitt's vision of "political theology."

Marxism in Messianism is a loosely interconnected collection of essays on the relationship between Marxism and messianism, examined through a constellation of ideas by writers such as W. Benjamin, K. Löwith, E. Bloch, J. Taubes, G. Scholem, F. Rosenzweig, M. Buber, etc. Such an organization becomes possible and demonstrates its fruitfulness through the application of a construction named by Goethe and tested by Weber in the *Protestant Ethics*: "elective affinities" (Wahlverwandschaften). In this case, this concept is borrowed from the religious-sociological studies of M. Löwy, who gives it a methodological status, revealing through it the non-obvious "affinity" between "economic, political, religious and cultural phenomena". D. Bozhkov uses the term in this sense and it yields good research results in deciphering "the relationship between social utopias and Jewish messianism in Weimar Germany when the collapse of the old world made way for the coming of the new. This particular historical moment of crisis allowed for the most unexpected syntheses of thought, which, however, then had an enormous impact on the subsequent history of philosophy and social thought" (p. 62).

In his study of the Paris Arcades, Walter Benjamin stresses the need for the historian to build a sensitive but sturdy "philosophical structure" with which to "draw the most vital aspects of the past into his net." This is not an arbitrary decision on the part of the historian, but an ability to achieve a relevant to the "critical moment" or – as we can also call it – a kairologically-relevant disposition in order to give expression to the "claims of the past", which is tantamount to "blast open the continuum of history". In a such Benjaminist context, another important thinking tool is formulated, labeled by the author as "potentials in the past". This notion allows Bozhkov to unfold a specific philosophy of history that emphasizes the "present" (as recognizing the

³ Emphasizing "the structures of the present and the hidden possibilities for their transformation" (p. 66)

"promises of the past"), free, however, from any presentist overtones. From such a perspective, the monograph notes that Ernst Bloch's study of Thomas Müntzer shows how "another medieval tradition of resistance and rebellion" could be confronted with "the anti-capitalist romanticism that was fashionable in his time," and that the religious anarchism of Jacob Taubes comes into a constellation with "currents marginal to official religions, but which turn out to have a common root in Jewish messianism"⁴. In these analyses (to which we must add the interpretation of Catholic Marxism in Latin America in the last chapter of the monograph), moreover, Bozhkov seeks, in his own words, to account not for how different religious beliefs serve a given power, but what their critical resources are in relation to the political situation (p. 9).

Focusing on the present as the intersection between Marxism and messianism also highlights the status of human action, and it is here that we can see well how Marxism modifies the messianism of thinkers such as Taubes and Benjamin (for example, in Benjamin's idea of the human action being endowed with "weak Messianic power").

A significant contribution of the habilitation work is how Dimitar Bozhkov "reads" the idea of "utopia" as another meeting point between Marxism and Jewish messianism, or more precisely between "the messianic and the revolutionary", to gain the opportunity of conceiving "the present in terms of the possibilities of the future" (p. 65). But this opening of the present to the coming is not simply a pre-vision of the "distant and bright future"; rather, utopia is centered on the "critical potential of the present" for the sake of "a philosophy of the future that works, however, with the real possible rather than with abstract constructions and thus has its own socially transformative potential" (p. 72). The utopia thus treated also manifests the incompleteness of the past, which precisely through this character "affects" the present.

I have tried to present *Marxism in Messianism* not in a linear way, but rather by marking the achievements of the work – mostly in methodological and theoretical terms – that legitimate the candidate's claim to the title of 'Associate Professor'. To the academic contributions thus

⁴ And Marx, Benjamin, and Bloch, respectively, would prove to be unexpected heirs to "the line going from the apostle Paul and Marcion to Joachim" (p. 184).

highlighted I would add the high informative value of the monograph, which presents authors little known to the Bulgarian reader, such as Jakob Taubes, Ernst Bloch, and Gershom Scholem, viewing them through the specific prism of Jewish messianism in its explicit or implicit relation to Marxism.

The Statement of contributions adequately reflects the achievements of Dimitar Bozhkov. I wish, however, that they were formulated in the form of an actual self-assessment rather than as findings. For what does such a formulation in the Statement tell us about the actual contribution of the candidate: "The dialectic between faith in God and faith in the change of the world is examined"?

In the context of the more peripheral criticisms, I will also allow myself a remark, which unfortunately I have to make often. It does not befit an intelligent and interesting work such as the monograph discussed here to be accompanied by so many grammatical, literal, and other errors that inhibit good reading.

The volume devoted to the Opinion does not allow me to enter a lengthy argument with the author's theses. Therefore, I will allow myself to discuss mainly a comment by Dimitar Bozhkov on p. 98 of the monograph.

A passage from the "Theologico-Political Fragment" is quoted there, in which Benjamin points out that "the Kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic; it cannot be set up as a goal, but the end. From the standpoint of history, it is not the goal but the end". In his commentary on this quote, Bozhkov states that this is crucially important because "*if messianism had a goal* (emphasis mine - K.K.), it would be simply a progressist ideology that works by ends and means" (ibid.). It seems to me that in this case the motive of goal setting (hence the lack of a "telos") is misaddressed. In this passage, Benjamin warns against a teleological treatment of the relation between the "profane" (historical) and the "messianic," rather than against ascribing goal-setting to messianism. For "from the standpoint of history" (as in the quotation), *i.e., in terms of the profane order* (the "quest for happiness," to follow the quoted fragment), the Kingdom of God is not a goal but an end. More generally, I would say that unfortunately, the analysis of the teleological/a-teleological character of Benjamin's

"messianism" in the monograph ends too soon and only at the relation of ends and means. It could go on (as some interpreters of Benjamin have suggested), for example, *toward a specific teleological vector of profane order*, toward the reconstruction of a "teleology without an end goal" (as Benjamin himself called a chapter of his lost work on politics), with interesting possibilities for the theoretical deepening of another concept from the monograph, "social action."

In conclusion:

After reading the materials and academic works presented in the competition, analyzing their significance and the scientific contributions contained in them, I give my positive assessment and confidently recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy for the election of Dimitar Bozhkov to the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" in the professional field 2.3. Philosophy, scientific specialty History of Philosophy.

10. 11.2022

Reviewer: Prof. K. Koev