



## BOOK REVIEW

# Julian Baggini (2018). *How The World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy*. London: Granta

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The concepts of dialogue and intercultural dialogue have gained popularity in contemporary humanities and social sciences as well as in international relations. In philosophy, various attempts were made to conceptualise the dialogue and to explicate its ontological, epistemological, ethical and other aspects. History of philosophy, in particular, has to deal with the problem of plurality of philosophical systems, discourses, traditions. While unsystematic attempts to conceptualise historical development of philosophical thought are known since Antiquity history of philosophy as an institutionalised form of philosophical knowledge existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is an interesting and a significant moment that institutionalised forms of history of philosophy appeared in the situation of religious plurality and conflicts (Santinello & Piaia, 2011). Classical canon of history of philosophy was centred mainly on the Western European tradition, while traditions of the East (for example, the Chinese or Indian), though represented fragmentarily, were deprecated for lack of conceptualisation and systematic form. Today, after criticisms of Eurocentric and orientalist views in history of philosophy (Kimmerle, 2016) non-Western intellectual traditions receive more attention. The interest in a dialogue between philosophical traditions motivates not only specialised research but also popular books for the wider audience as well. An example of such popularising approach can be found in Julian Baggini's "How the World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy" (Baggini, 2018).

Julian Baggini is well known for his popular works in philosophy. Baggini has published more than twenty popular books on various philosophical issues. His interests are quite wide and are not limited only to the familiar problems of the English-language tradition and Western philosophy as a whole. So in his last for today book he refers to the diversity of world intellectual traditions. Baggini describes his approach as "philosophical journalism" (Baggini, 2018, p. 14).

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His first two books are, in fact, collections of interviews with famous contemporary English-speaking philosophers (Baggini & Stangroom, 2002, 2003).

Although most people do not articulate their beliefs about the nature of personality, the possible sources of our knowledge, ethical issues as philosophical doctrines, these beliefs are deeply rooted in cultures and, as Baggini writes, influence our ways of thinking and living. While academic philosophy is usually presented in textual form “folk” philosophy – in preliterate cultures especially – existed mostly in non-systematic and non-textual forms. Sedimentation, a notion borrowed from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, refers to this implicit process of assimilation of meanings: “Just as a riverbed builds up sediment comprised of that which washes through it, values and beliefs become ‘edimented’ in cultures. In turn, those values and beliefs begin to sediment in the minds of the people who inhabit those cultures from birth, so that we mistakenly take the build-up for an immutable riverbed” (Baggini, 2018, p. XIV). Inarticulate philosophical attitudes “create the rhetorical space in which cultures think, explain and justify” (Baggini, 2018, p. XVI). Baggini rejects, though, cultural essentialism, highlights the importance of various kinds of gaps, and ruptures in the history of philosophy.

One has to avoid both extremes in comparing different philosophical traditions, neither we should overestimate similarity nor overemphasize difference. In his opinion, our “shared humanity” and perennial philosophical problems allow us to appreciate ideas and experiences of other peoples and cultures. Baggini’s main task is a study of diversity of world philosophical thought in order to “dig up” the hidden foundations of how the world today thinks. In a prologue “Historical Review: From Axial to the Information Age” Baggini examines the diversity of philosophical traditions in world history, he notes that recent ideas about philosophy were developed during the period of the Western dominance. This, in particular, led to the spread of the Greek word “philosophy” or its variants in other languages, although in many cultures for a long time there was no special term to denote this kind of speculative thinking. Along with classical texts and philosophical schools, there are also oral traditions in many parts of the world. Baggini proposes using L. Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance” to indicate typical features of various intellectual traditions. According to Baggini, people are engaged in philosophy, “whenever they set their minds to a systematic investigation of the nature of the world, selfhood, language, logic, value, the human good, the sources and justifications of knowledge, the nature and limits of human reason” (Baggini, 2018, p. XXX). Although boundaries between philosophy, religion, and folklore are not clear, they might be distinguished. Complicated relations between philosophy and religion are important for Baggini:

We must acknowledge that the strict secularization of philosophy is itself a philosophical position that requires justification. To simply stipulate that faith separates you from philosophy is as deeply unphilosophical as stipulating that a sacred text must have the last word. Both positions need to be argued for as part of a shared philosophical enterprise (Baggini, 2018, p. 51).

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The main body of the book is divided into five parts, covering one of the main areas of philosophical knowledge: “How the World knows” – epistemology, “How the world is” – ontology, “Who in the world are we?” – anthropology, “How the world lives” – ethics) as they are presented in different cultural traditions; the fifth part contains conclusions of a more general character.

Baggini, in the second part, observes that many positivists and science methodologists insist on a decline or even the end of traditional metaphysics with its speculative explanations of what the world is. Although natural sciences now successfully resolve problems, which previously pertained to the domain of philosophy, there remains a large number of problems that cannot be subject to the expertise of positive scientific research. Even if one abandons the idea that metaphysics can explain the world as it is, it still continues to study the human experience of interaction with the world. Baggini calls this kind of research a “phenomenological metaphysics”. It will continue to be relevant even when the objective world is explained by positive sciences. Such understanding of metaphysics, as Baggini believes, could be not only recognized as relevant for contemporary texts, but is partially applicable to the metaphysical systems of the past, which can be understood in terms of a “phenomenological” rather than traditional “scientific” metaphysics.

In the third part, Baggini analyses three theories of the self in various philosophical traditions: the idea of the lacking self (no-self), present in Hinduism, Buddhism, and modern analytical versions of the philosophy of consciousness; the relational ideas of the self, exemplified in Japanese and Chinese systems, and in African folk philosophy, which Baggini describes as “pro-social”; the idea of atomized, self-sufficient personality in the European philosophy. Relational and atomistic views on the self are clarified by the categories of Th. Kazulis: “intimacy” and “integrity”. Imbalance or even dominance of either of these characteristics, according to Baggini, can lead a cultural crisis. The latter is familiar in contemporary Western societies, where “much of the rise of populism and nationalism in the West is a backlash against the gradual erosion of belonging” (Baggini, 2018, p. 215). Baggini addressed the lack of integrity in previous works, and, in particular, the essay “In Defence of Hierarchy” that was written in collaboration with S. C. Angle, K. A. Appiah, D. Bell and other intellectuals (Angle et al., 2017).

The fourth part discusses the cross-cultural study of values from a philosophical perspective. Baggini uses the mixing desk metaphor: “In the studio, producers record each instrument as an individual track, playing them back through separate channels... The moral mixing desk works in much the same way. Almost everywhere in the world you’ll find the same channels: impartiality, rules, consequences, virtue, God, society, autonomy, actions, intentions, harmony, community, belonging and so on” (Baggini, 2018, p. 314). The main values, thus, in some variants could be found in almost all cultures, but the difference is in their relation to each other and the overall synthesis. Such understanding of cultural values, according to Baggini, allows to emphasize moral pluralism. Moral pluralism, however, does not mean relativism that is based on the principle of non-interference (“laissez-faire relativism”), but it proceeds from the concept of a harmonious combination of different values within a unified vision of a particular

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culture. Baggini proposes to distinguish pluralism and relativism. In Isaiah Berlin's approach, objective variety of values cannot be reduced to the predominance of any one of them and to the rejection of all others as false (Berlin, 2000, pp. 14–17). At the same time in philosophy comparison and criticism of various systems is possible:

Real dialogue requires careful listening but also mutual examination and questioning. I would go so far as to say that to refuse to criticise in all circumstances is in itself disrespectful, since it treats “other” philosophies as more fragile and less able to stand up to scrutiny than our own. Criticism and disagreement are only disrespectful when they come from a combination of arrogance and ignorance (Baggini, 2018, p. 234).

In the final part, Baggini summarizes his survey of world philosophical traditions and offers his understanding of the major regional traditions of philosophical thought. He begins with the East Asia, which includes China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. The main virtue here is harmony, which requires constant self-improvement through various types of practical activities. This region is characterised by dominance of “metaphysical agnosticism”, which does not entail a complete understanding of reality. An important role is played by the “correlative” concepts of the self, as well as the concepts of emptiness and inconstancy with a certain ontological meaning. For Indian thought, which possesses a highly developed arsenal of philosophical knowledge, as Baggini notes, a focus on tradition and authority as sources of knowledge is widespread. Its key philosophical characteristic is a “soteriological focus” that suggests a profound difference between the genuine and external aspects of reality and corresponds to “ethics of detachment”. The philosophy in Islamic cultures (the Arab world, North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia) is characterised by a close relationship with theological doctrines and religious tradition in general, which deals with the most diverse aspects of everyday life. Moreover, historically, Islamic philosophy has been characterised by significant role of interpretative practices, which sets a certain impulse for the culture of Islamic countries as a whole. Western countries occupied a dominant position in the field of philosophy over the centuries “for reasons noble and ignoble”. The most important features of the Western tradition as a whole include the following: the search for truth (“truth-seeking” orientation as opposed to traditions focused more on “way-seeking”); interest to issues of cosmogony, to the structure of the world as a whole; value of truth and knowledge as such; a desire to resolve contradictions; an interest in the study of laws and principles; a desire for impartiality as a moral virtue and a cognitive imperative. Baggini explores the intellectual practices of “traditional societies” that are available today on the basis of the reconstruction of oral folk traditions – “folk philosophy”. In particular, the author analyses fundamental connections between the nature and the people who inhabit it, and this connection seems so deep that it is often not possible to separate one from the other. Such cultures, as a rule, do not consider the individuals in isolation from the community to which they belongs, which sets their “communitarian ethos”. Baggini writes that Russian philosophy as

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a special intellectual tradition is characterised by criticism of the Cartesian concept of the self-sufficient person, different from the Orthodox ideal of “kenosis”, which implies a consciously humble relation to the believer’s self. In contrast to the Western European rationality, in Russian philosophy, intuition is prioritized in epistemology, it leads to a convergence of philosophy and literary and poetic creativity, as well as a difference in the concepts of truth as *istina* and *pravda* as an intuitive and morally coloured cognitive value. In social thought, Baggini highlights the Russian ideal of *obshchina* (commune) as a harmonious voluntary community.

At least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts to analyse world history of philosophy including various periods and regions existed, but today we have much more factual knowledge about various philosophical traditions and some new methodologies of qualitative as well as quantitative analysis. Such a new approach in the history of philosophy could be a part of a broader study of the social and cultural context of the development and transfer of philosophical knowledge. The use of “global history” is growing in history and other fields, which merited some attempts to conceptualise it (Conrad, 2017; Stanziani, 2018). But Baggini’s book is a rare example of “global” history of philosophy. Another example might be found in “The Idea of a Global History of Philosophy”, presented by a Norwegian philosopher Gunnar Skirbekk at the 24<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy in Beijing in 2018. Later its extended version was published (Skirbekk, 2018).

According to Baggini himself, one of the impulses to write the book was the discussion about the nature and role of comparative research in contemporary philosophy. In particular, the question is whether comparing philosophical systems is just studying diverse cultures through a comparison of ideas from different philosophical traditions, or could it give a new knowledge on the basis of comparison, striving to develop “hard-core philosophy” (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2015, p. 10). Baggini identifies at least three aspects, in which comparative research can have a heuristic effect in philosophy. Firstly, a combination of different perspectives allows us to get a better view than any particular approach could offer: an example is the famous Indian parable about blind men exploring an elephant and exchanging their particular impressions. Baggini uses an analogy with Cubist painting, which combines different perspectives. He calls this aspect of his study a “Cubist perspective”. Secondly, different philosophical concepts add new theoretical problems and problematize existing ideas. As Baggini writes,

This is the best way to think about the question of what it means to be a person or a self. It is easy to think there is a single question here. In fact, it disguises myriad questions, such as: What is the self made of? Is the self permanent? How do relations to others fashion the self? What gives us our sense of identity? In different traditions “the problem” of the self is likely to involve only one or some of these questions and others are set aside (Baggini, 2018, p. 318).

In various intellectual traditions, a “problem” usually involves only one or at the best a few of the possible aspects. The comparative approach, due to the

“disaggregating” perspective, allows to obtain a more “objective” understanding by dividing the apparently simple question into more complex parts. Thirdly, multiple perspectives show that there is no one legitimate way to understand the world and to establish social norms. The division between these three perspectives is not strict, but the author intends to demonstrate their potential to enrich our knowledge in the general framework of a comparative study of philosophy, while not abandoning the desire to search for objective criteria for this knowledge.

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