

Eating in a transnational food chain: Culture, identity, and the most pressing questions of a global food system

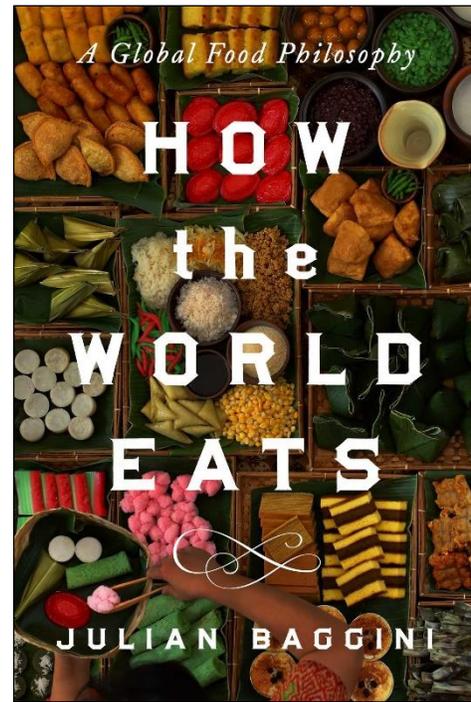
Book review by

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Review of *How the World Eats: A Global Food Philosophy*, by Julian Baggini. (2025). Published by Pegasus Books (distributed by Simon and Schuster). Available as hardcover, Kindle, and audiobook (read by the author); 464 pages. Publisher's website:

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/How-the-World-Eats/Julian-Baggini/9781639368198>



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In a world where we rely on an extremely intricate web of players to deliver food daily to our plates, Julian Baggini does not stray away from

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delving into the interlinking of politics, power, and choice that contribute to our transnational food systems complexities in *How the World Eats*. In a year when tariffs on goods and deportations of farmworkers are being put into action by the current Trump administration, reading this book will be crucial to understanding how people interact with each other when it comes to food and why it matters so much. *How the World Eats* is highly relevant and necessary to read in 2025. Baggini brings a philosophical background to exploring our global food system— one that is crucial to understanding how and why decisions are made and how we choose to feed ourselves as human beings.

While most of Baggini's work has been rooted in secularism and national identity, after reading this book, I can understand how this background, when combined with philosophy, is helpful when examining why specific communities and individuals make certain choices about food consumption or why certain facets of the food system face so much scrutiny. This book is perhaps an ode to the need to allow a variety of disciplines to enter the world of evaluating our food spaces. I was initially skeptical about how a philosopher could cram so much information about the global food system into around 360 pages and was taken aback by everything he decided to delve into. While perhaps not every single topic is successfully discussed, the majority of food system topics are, and are coupled with discussions that are not common in food system worlds. To the readers' surprise, he creatively ties together topics that one may not talk about together often, such as the 10 principles of agroecology and zoonotic plagues or the socio-emotional validity of food consumption in space. He begs us to deepen our thinking on how varied topics can be interlinked. Baggini's philosophical aspect is exactly the multifaceted approach that is needed to provide a sweeping and thoughtful analysis of our global food system.

Throughout this book, Baggini pulls on threads that start to unweave our complicated global food system narratives pertaining to the powers that control our food, how it is produced, and how it is consumed. In the introduction, he starts with tracing something as simple as a bowl of cornflakes, down to its influence on irrigation, CAFOs, and machinery. This foreshadows how the rest of the book will play out; what you thought were "simple" solutions to today's pressing global food system issues may not be as simple as you thought. He divides the book into four parts (Land, People, Other Animals, and Technology), while exploring current topics in food systems, waste management, the International Space Station, culture, veganism, ethics, modern-day slavery, soil management, food security, aquaculture, technology, COVID-19, and more. Baggini paints a picture in which every part is connected, even if a whole ocean away from each other. On the one hand, he forces the reader to feel less removed

from other parts of the world, while on the other hand, he makes you question how all of us inhabiting this Earth can live in such vastly different realities. Baggini connects those dots in *How the World Eats* and personalizes why this transnational system is not as far removed from your everyday actions as you may have once believed. At the end of Section 2, he states, "Food is ultimately provided by the land and the sea, rivers and lakes, plants and animals. But the food system is shaped by people, politics, and business" (p. 179).

Baggini touches on hot-button issues such as meat consumption and labor in a way that made me question my own biases, why I have believed certain narratives, and the fact that these topics are not as black-and-white as the world has made them seem. He scrutinizes a variety of divisive topics with full force but does so with grace and without villainizing the other party. Having Baggini mediate a conversation between those with opposing beliefs would be worthwhile to see in real time. In the introduction, Baggini states, "advocates of food ideologies need to accept that their best cannot be the enemy of the common good, and that to heal the food world, they need to find common ground alongside people they disagree with profoundly" (p. xviii). This theme is beautifully carried throughout the book as he introduces solution-based frameworks. One of the most profound strengths of this book is the examination of the gray areas within complex and sometimes painful food system issues. Diving deep into the nuanced complexities of highly pressing issues through a multidimensional lens facilitates a more constructive and informed discourse rather than adopting a binary framework, particularly within the context of the global food system. Baggini calls for us as humans to stop trying to apply a one-size-fits-all approach and instead explore multiple possibilities for solving complex food system problems while challenging fixed ideas and systems in place. In Chapter 3, he states, "the question of how we feed ourselves is a normative one, meaning that it involves value judgements" (p. 41).

Each of the four sections of the book that were mentioned earlier ends with a chapter titled "Taking Stock," synthesizing Baggini's thoughts and conclusions from the culmination of the section's

chapters. While I will admit that some sections seemed slightly convoluted due to the abstract connections and large number of topics, the “Taking Stock” chapters provide the reader with a comprehensible overview and a better understanding of each topic’s relationship to one another. In the conclusion, he charges the reader with adopting seven principles for reshaping our global food system: “Holism, Circularity, Puralism, Foodcentrism,

Resourcefulness, Compassion, and Equality” (p. 361). These themes are deeply prevalent throughout the reading and encompass what the call to action of each chapter holds. Overall, I believe this book to be an insightful and unconventional look into our global food system that both food system professionals and the general public should read. 