

WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This article is about the history of Western philosophy from its development among the ancient Greeks of Classical antiquity to the present. The idea of ‘Western Philosophy’ is the product of a legitimization project for European colonialism, through to post-second world war Pan-European identity formation and white supremacist projects. Thus argues Ben Kies (1917-1979), a South African public intellectual, schoolteacher, trade unionist, and activist-theorist. In his 1953 address to the Teachers’ League of South Africa, The Contribution of the Non-European Peoples to World Civilization, Kies became one of the first people to argue explicitly that there is no such thing as ‘Western philosophy’. In this paper, I introduce Kies as a new figure in the historiography of philosophy with important insights, relevant today. I outline his three key arguments: that ‘Western Philosophy’ is the product of political mythmaking, that it is a recent, largely mid-twentieth century fabrication, and that there is an alternative to ‘Histories of Western Philosophy’, namely ‘mixed’ or entangled histories. I show that Kies’ claims are supported both by contemporary scholarship and bibliometric analysis. I thus argue that Kies is right to claim that the idea of a distinctive, hermetically sealed ‘Western Philosophy’ is a recent, political fabrication and should be abandoned. We should instead develop global, entangled historiography to make sense of philosophy and its history today.

Key words: article, history, philosophy, development, ancient, methods.

Аннотация

Эта статья посвящена истории западной философии от ее развития у древних греков в период классической античности до наших дней. Идея "западной философии" является продуктом проекта легитимации европейского колониализма, вплоть до формирования общеевропейской идентичности после второй мировой войны и проектов сторонников превосходства белой расы. Так утверждает Бен Кис (1917-1979), общественный деятель Южной Африки, школьный учитель, член профсоюза и активист-теоретик. В своем обращении к Лиге учителей Южной Африки в 1953 году, посвященном вкладу неевропейских народов в мировую цивилизацию, Кис стал одним из первых, кто прямо заявил,

что такой вещи, как "западная философия", не существует. В этой статье я представляю Киса как новую фигуру в историографии философии, обладающую важными идеями, актуальными сегодня. Я излагаю три его ключевых аргумента: что "западная философия" является продуктом политического мифотворчества, что это недавняя выдумка, в основном относящаяся к середине двадцатого века, и что существует альтернатива "Историям западной философии", а именно "смешанные" или запутанные истории. Я показываю, что утверждения Киса подтверждаются как современными исследованиями, так и библиометрическим анализом. Таким образом, я утверждаю, что Кис прав, утверждая, что идея особой, герметично закрытой "западной философии" является недавней политической выдумкой и от нее следует отказаться. Вместо этого мы должны развивать глобальную, запутанную историографию, чтобы понять смысл философии и ее истории сегодня.

Ключевые слова: статья, история, философия, развитие, древний, методы.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola G'arb falsafasining klassik antik davrdagi qadimgi yunonlar orasida rivojlanishidan to hozirgi kungacha bo'lgan tarixi haqida. G'arb falsafasi g'oyasi Evropa mustamlakachiligi uchun ikkinchi jahon urushidan keyingi Umumevropa identifikatsiyasini shakllantirish va oq supremacist loyihalar orqali qonuniylashtirish loyihasining mahsulidir. Shunday qilib Ben Kies (1917-1979), Janubiy Afrika jamoat ziyolisi, maktab o'qituvchisi, kasaba uyushmasi va faol-nazariyotchi. 1953 yilda Janubiy Afrikaning o'qituvchilar Ligasiga qilgan murojaatida, Evropa bo'lmagan xalqlarning Jahon tsivilizatsiyasiga qo'shgan hissasi, Kies 'G'arb falsafasi'degan narsa yo'qligini aniq ta'kidlagan birinchi odamlardan biri bo'ldi. Ushbu maqolada men Kies-ni falsafa tarixshunosligida bugungi kunda dolzarb bo'lgan muhim tushunchalar bilan yangi shaxs sifatida tanishtiraman. Men uning uchta asosiy dalilini bayon qilaman: ' G'arb falsafasi 'siyosiy miqlar mahsulidir, bu yaqinda, asosan yigirmanchi asrning o'rtalarida uydirma va' G'arb falsafasi tarixlari 'ga alternativa mavjud, ya'ni' aralash ' yoki chalkash tarixlar. Men Kiesning da'volari zamonaviy stipendiya va bibliometrik tahlil bilan qo'llab-quvvatlanishini ko'rsataman. Shunday qilib, Kies o'ziga xos, germetik muhrlangan 'G'arb falsafasi' g'oyasi yaqinda, siyosiy uydirma va uni tark etish kerak deb da'vo qilish to'g'ri deb da'vo qilaman. Buning o'rniga biz falsafa va uning tarixini anglash uchun global, chalkash tarixshunoslikni rivojlantirishimiz kerak.

Kalit so'zlar: maqola, tarix, falsafa, rivojlanish, qadimiy, metodlar.

Introduction

Derived from the Greek meaning "love of wisdom", philosophy originally encompassed the love of all wisdom, but only in recent centuries came to refer to a

special branch of enquiry, separate from other sciences, such as “natural philosophy”. A special class of people called “philosophers” has defined itself, which makes a profession of studying things in their separation from human life and practice. In close connection with the practical struggle of the proletariat against bourgeois society, Marxism grew up out of Western philosophy, building on the achievements of Classical German Philosophy, French Socialism and British Political Economy, just as the socialist movement has grown up out of capitalist social relations – the worldwide division of labor, powerful productive forces, science and the modern proletariat. However, Marxism not only differs from Western Philosophy, it is its opposite – it is a “critique” of bourgeois society, and its forms of thought described in Western Philosophy. “Critique” means getting to the roots of something and exposing what it really means, by and for the purpose of overcoming it.

Types of Western philosophy

The ensuing article on the history of Western philosophy is divided into five sections—ancient, medieval, Renaissance, modern, and contemporary. A threefold distinction between ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy was prevalent until recent times and is only as old as the end of the 17th century. Much of Western philosophy finds its basis in the thoughts and teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. You can't begin a study of world philosophy without talking about these guys: the Big Three ancient Greek philosophers. The focus of Modern Western philosophy was reason. This period was marked by separation of philosophy from theology and separation of philosophy from science. There are three main schools of philosophies, that of Rationalism, Empiricism and Transcendentalism. The main styles are then defined as **speculative**, **prescriptive**, and **analytic**. [Speculative philosophy searches for order and wholeness in all ideas and experiences. Prescriptive philosophy examines ideas of thinkers to establish standards for values and conduct.

Ancient

Pre-Socratics.

Classical period.

Hellenistic and Roman philosophy.

Scholasticism.

Renaissance humanism.

Early modern (17th and 18th centuries)

German idealism.

Late modern (19th century)

The Western tradition

It would be difficult if not impossible to find two philosophers who would define philosophy in exactly the same way. Throughout its long and varied history in the West, philosophy has meant many different things. Some of these have been a search for

wisdom (the meaning closest to the Latin *philosophia*, itself derived from the Greek *philosoph*, “lover of wisdom”); an attempt to understand the universe as a whole; an examination of humankind’s moral responsibilities and social obligations; an effort to fathom the divine intentions and the place of human beings with reference to them; an effort to ground the enterprise of natural science; a rigorous examination of the origin, extent, and validity of human ideas; an exploration of the place of will or consciousness in the universe; an examination of the values of truth, goodness, and beauty; and an effort to codify the rules of human thought in order to promote rationality and the extension of clear thinking. Even these do not exhaust the meanings that have been attached to the philosophical enterprise, but they give some idea of its extreme complexity and many-sidedness.

Conclusion

This paper has identified a problem central to the history of philosophy: that one of its most common terms, ‘Western Philosophy’, is vague and ambiguous at best, and the product of distorted, racist historiography at worst. To understand why, I have introduced a new figure to the historiography of philosophy: Ben Magson Kies, a twentieth-century South African activist-intellectual. Kies, in his 1953 *Contribution*, argues that the idea of a ‘Western Philosophy’ is a recently fabricated political myth, grounded in racial thinking, and becoming widespread from the 1940s. Emerging from justifications for European imperialism, Nazism, and post-second world war Euro-American identity formation, the idea fails to capture the history of philosophy accurately and with explanatory power. It should be abandoned. Kies’ insights are supported by recent developments in academic scholarship (in e.g. Allais, *Problematizing*), and philosophers have begun to question the idea of a distinctive “Western Philosophy”, “hermetically sealed off” from other parts of the world (Schuringa, *Idea*). I have also presented qualitative and original quantitative evidence that Kies is correct to identify the proliferation of the idea as a recent (1940s) development. In place of ‘Histories of Western Philosophy’, Kies points towards an alternative conceptualization: seeing the history of philosophy as profoundly ‘mixed’, with entanglements between regions and thinkers as the norm for millennia, not only in Europe but globally. The historiography of philosophy broadly has yet to reflect such insights, although there are such recent developments in individual studies and adjacent disciplines, such as global history Footnote22 Dissolving the conceptual rigidity around ‘Western Philosophy’ would help make visible the philosophical contributions of people globally, against the racism, sexism, and imperial arrogance in the formation of the philosophical canon. A ‘mixed’ or entangled history of philosophy, recognizing contributions from across the planet under specific historical conditions, would contribute to global epistemic justice (Chimakonam, *African Philosophy*). Ben Kies offers the foundation for a global, entangled history of philosophy: an overarching

conceptual framework that makes sense of interconnections between specific figures, themes, and debates, without recourse to problematic pre-established categories like ‘Western Philosophy’ to which reality never quite corresponds.

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