

Philosophy of History: Objectivity and Periodization, from Medieval to Renaissance

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Abstract:

This paper examines two central themes in Philosophy of History —objectivity and periodization— through the perspective of the shift from the medieval period to the Renaissance, incorporating both Western and Islamic viewpoints. Initially, analyzes historical objectivity by comparing modern historiographical discussions—spanning from Enlightenment positivism to post-modern critiques of “constructed” narratives—with the classical Islamic emphasis on “source-criticism” and sanad (isnād) techniques for validating accounts. We demonstrate how these Islamic methodologies foreshadow current issues surrounding bias, evidence, and the author’s viewpoint.

The analysis covers different models of periodization, particularly the transition from a linear, teleological framework (where history is seen as an inevitable progression from the “dark” Middle Ages to a more enlightened modern era) to more intricate, cyclical, or overlapping models. In this context, Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) offers a significant Islamic perspective; his non-teleological theory of ‘umrān (social structure) and his cyclical model of rise, peak, and fall challenge rigid classifications of historical periods and encourage a more diverse understanding of historical change. By comparing Ibn Khaldūn’s insights with Western theories concerning objectivity and periodization, this research advocates for an intercultural approach to history that reconciles claims of neutrality with an awareness of varied temporal experiences—demonstrating how the periodization of the medieval-Renaissance era can be reconsidered through the lens of Islamic historiography.

Keywords:

Historical Objectivity, Periodization, Medieval to Renaissance, Ibn Khaldun, Islamic Historiography.