

Summary

This book is an attempt to overcome relativism in philosophy of history. Especially accounts of historical work inspired by narrativist and constructivist claims tend to emphasize plurality in history and, consequently, they sometimes lead to relativistic interpretation of history. Since there are several alternative but equally plausible accounts of the same past events, it seems we must acknowledge relativism reigns in history. In the book, however, I show there is a way around relativism. To avoid relativism, we must reject both dualism of scheme and content and representationalism from which it results.

In the first chapter I introduce a narrativist interpretation of historical work drawing on the views of Arthur Danto, Louis Mink, Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit. Then I outline a standard characterization of relativism with a special focus on conceptual relativism. I underline two key theses of relativism: a thesis on relativity and a thesis on unresolvable plurality. It means that according to relativism, there is a certain type of relativity, namely, certain items could be assigned specific properties only within a certain framework or scheme. Moreover, it is important to note that it is not possible to objectively choose the right framework from these alternative frameworks. Given the main tenets of narrativism, it is possible to show relativistic implications of narrativist account of history.

In the second chapter I focus on relativist narrativist interpretation of historical work. First, following Donald Davidson, I claim that conceptual relativism results from the dualism of scheme and content. Then, I discuss in more detail some of the key views of Hayden White and present them using this dualistic framework. Finally, I connect a dualistic interpretation of narrativism with the so-called representationalism. According to representationalism, the point of doing history is to represent past events. This seemingly innocent idea could be, however, linked to dualistic and relativistic account of history.

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In the third chapter I start with a criticism and rejection of dualism standing behind conceptual relativism. Subsequently I introduce the views of Paul Roth and Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen who offer interesting philosophies of history shifting from a narrativist approach to a more pragmatic view of what is going on during construction of historical works. Both authors reject to view historical works as simple representations and they prefer to interpret them either as outcomes of concrete community-sanctioned steps or as argumentative proposals. Thus, both authors avoid dualism of scheme and content and they advocate a certain type of non-representationalism, rejecting the framework of correspondence. In this way, they avoid the threat of conceptual relativism in history. Therefore, I conclude that relativistic interpretation of historical work could be overcome, if we reject dualism of scheme and content and related representationalist picture of history.