

Universality, Necessity, and Progress: Marx and the Problem of History

Amy Allen (Pennsylvania State University)

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In response to postcolonial critiques of the Eurocentrism of Marx's theory of history, a new wave of scholarship has questioned whether Marx held on to this theory in his late work. Scholars have argued that in Marx's late journalistic and ethnographic writings, his teleological and stadial theory of universal history gives way to a multilinear and non-Eurocentric view. In this talk, I argue that the theory of history that is employed in Marx's early work has three distinct components: universality, necessity, and progress. Although all three of these elements are combined in Marx's early work, they can be disaggregated, and, importantly, rejecting one of them doesn't necessarily entail rejecting the other two. In Marx's late work, in fact, what we find is a multilinear view of the history that nevertheless remains committed to claims about historical necessity and progress.