**Alienation**

From the Christian doctrine of original sin, through G. W. F. Hegel’s conception of freedom and the situated subject of existentialist thought in the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche’s pronouncement that ‘God is dead’, Western experiences of alienation can be understood as taking three basic forms: the individual’s estrangement from nature, self and society. The loss of established values, no less than the burdens of tradition, have each been held responsible for widespread experiences of dislocation within industrial society, where nature has come to appear as either a resource to be exploited or as aforce of decay. For Karl Marx, alienation is a result of historically specific social and economic contradictions characterizing capitalist society; specifically, it results from the exploitative conditions estranging workers from the means of production, the products of their labour, their fellow workers and ultimately, themselves. Often associated with a feeling of forced passivity, alienation became a primary experience and critical concept for many modernists. Fractured by the contradictions manifest in Western societies, the individual appears as a fragmented subject of experience. Sigmund Freud argued that consciousness is estranged from itself, maintaining an unconscious reserve of repressed traumatic experience which continues to unwittingly motivate our conscious decisions. Plumbing the depths of alienation, T. S. Eliot wrote: ‘I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas’.

*Christopher Bradd, York University*

**References and further reading**

Eliot, T. S. (1920) ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, New York: A. A. Knopf.

Freud, S. (1904) *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, trans, J. Strachey and A. Richard as *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, 1973.

Marx, K. (1932) *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe Abt. 1, Bd. 3*, Berlin: Dietz, trans. M. Milligan, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961.

Nietzsche, F. (1887) *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Leipzig: Verlag von E. W. Fritzsch, trans. W. Kaufman, *The Gay Science*, New York: Random House, 1974.