

# THE BLACKWELL ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



Edited by David Miller  
Janet Coleman William Connolly Alan Ryan

# The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought

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*Edited by*  
David Miller

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Blackwell Reference

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# Preface

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This *Encyclopaedia* provides the student (whether professional or amateur) of political thought with a reliable guide to the major ideas and doctrines that influence the contemporary world; it outlines the thought of leading political theorists, past and present, and considers the ways in which thinking about politics has evolved historically. We have confined our attention largely to the western tradition of political thought – although we have included survey articles on Chinese, Hindu and Islamic political thought which we hope will introduce the reader to these non-western traditions, we make no claim to comprehensive coverage. We have included the thought of philosophers, historians, lawyers, economists and sociologists only when they have made some direct contribution to political debate. In order to keep entries on individual thinkers within reasonable bounds, we have made extensive use of survey articles to cover major episodes in political thought (e.g. the Greeks, the Renaissance) and major traditions (e.g. liberalism, Marxism); minor figures falling within the scope of such articles are given two or three lines and cross-referenced. Finally, we have not attempted to deal comprehensively with the specialist literature of modern political institutions, this being the purpose of a forthcoming companion volume, *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Institutions*.

Writing about political ideas is in a small way itself a political activity. Our policy has been to select the best contributor for each topic regardless of academic or political allegiance, and to place no restrictions on choice of approach. We believe that the outcome is a collection of articles that are authoritative without being dull or stereotyped. But the attentive reader will soon become aware that few political ideas can be given a simple, straightforward definition; nor can there be uncontroversial readings of the works of political thinkers. This is uncomfortable terrain for those who believe that to every question there is one right answer. If, besides being informative, we have succeeded in communicating something of the open-endedness of political thinking in the articles that follow, we shall feel doubly pleased.

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October 1986

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## Editorial Notes

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- 1 It is important to make full use of the cross-referencing system. In each entry capitals are used to indicate other entries where fuller information can be found. Consult the index for a complete list of references to a particular topic or person.
- 2 Each entry is followed by a reading list that includes modern English language editions (where these exist) of the texts referred to in the entry, as well as relevant secondary literature. Material that is especially suitable for further reading is indicated by a dagger (†).
- 3 When a particular text is discussed in an entry the date of first publication is given in brackets. (Occasionally, in cases where the text remained unpublished for a long period, the date given is the date of composition.) Texts given in the reading list but not otherwise mentioned have the original date (if this differs from that of the edition cited) in brackets after the title.
- 4 Sources of quotations are normally indicated simply by author's name and a page number; full details are given in the reading list. If two or more works by the same author appear in the list a short title is used to avoid ambiguity.

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# A

**absolutism** The term now has no precise meaning. It is loosely applied to governments exercising power without representative institutions or constitutional restraints. Though often used today as a synonym for tyranny or despotism 'absolutism' is usually applied to early modern states. As a member of a family of regime types it was joined in the nineteenth century by Bonapartism or Caesarism; and in the twentieth, by totalitarianism. All regime types in this family have generated analogous discussions about the questions of whether absolute or total power was ever in fact attained, or is in principle attainable. (See also DESPOTISM and TOTALITARIANISM.)

The term first appeared in French in about 1796 and in English and German in about 1830. Like 'enlightened despotism' it was a neologism coined by historians after the disappearance of the phenomenon it was meant to designate. During the nineteenth century it was for the most part used pejoratively. It is still used by historians of political theory, and by those concerned with the emergence of states from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. On the one side absolutism figures in discussions of sovereignty, constitutionalism, rights, resistance, and property; on the other it figures in historiographical disputes among non-Marxist and Marxist historians about the dating, functions, and class or social basis of the period once described as the age of absolutism (1648–1789). Some non-Marxist historians regard absolutism as a contested concept better rendered as absolute monarchy.

Historians of political and legal thought have learned to exercise caution when treating both the disputes occasioned by more centralized

and efficient monarchies and the theories used to legitimate or to assail them. At issue is the meaning of the language used by early modern theorists and the degree of actual unrestrained power attained in the practices of the regimes they designated. The most prominent advocates of absolutism among political theorists were BODIN and Bossuet in France, HOBBS and FILMER in England. In discussing the contested concepts used by and about them, Daly has proposed that analysts ask the following questions about uses of the words absolute and absolutism in the seventeenth-century political vocabulary:

[W]hat does the user mean? In what part of the century is he speaking? What party, or faction does he belong to? . . . [Is he saying] That the king has no superior? Or is not elected? Or cannot be resisted? Does 'absolute' refer to the king's power to occupy the throne, or to the extent of power the throne gives him? Does it refer to a particular legal right or to the form of government? Does it denote a monarch's right to raise taxes and make law without consent? (pp. 249–50)

Jean Bodin was the most important theorist of SOVEREIGNTY. The disorders of his time in France led him to assume the need to concentrate authority in a centralized state. Political and social stability, he held, required that in every state there be a supreme or sovereign authority, unlimited in its jurisdiction and perpetual in its exercise of power. Sovereignty did not imply for Bodin unlimited power over the persons and property of subjects. The sovereign was subject to limitations imposed by natural law and fundamental customary law (e.g. consent to taxation). But neither natural nor customary law might be enforced by the

## ABSOLUTISM

community; legally, a sovereign could not be resisted or deposed. Sovereignty is absolute and indivisible. Either the prince of an independent state is absolute, or else he is subject to some other power such as the estates, which is then sovereign.

A more theological version of absolutist theory was that of Bishop Bossuet, a contemporary of Louis XIV. Bossuet combined traditional scriptural and metaphorical concepts with newer juridical and Hobbesian arguments. Applying a mode of thought long familiar in France, Bossuet treated the king as placed by God in a position to advance the public interest, as well as to protect humble subjects from local tyrants. Such functions require a powerful central authority. Bossuet went on to claim for the king in the state the same position as that held by God in the universe. A Hobbesian argument was added by Bossuet when he claimed that everyone in the state gains security by surrendering to the sovereign all individual rights. The monarchy, like God, is both constitutive and directive; it alone preserves the people from anarchy. Bossuet multiplied moral injunctions to the king: he should rule in ways at once beneficent and disinterested; he should follow established law; he should remember that God will judge him.

Although 'absolutism' was a nineteenth-century coinage in English, the term absolute was hotly disputed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political and legal discussions of absolute monarchy. In Tudor England Sir Thomas Smith could use the word absolute in both pejorative and laudatory senses. He blamed Louis XI for changing France from a 'lawful and regular raigne' to 'absolute and tyrannical power and government'. But Smith proudly ascribed to Parliament 'the most high and absolute power of the realm of Englande' (see Daly, pp. 228–9).

Ambiguities in Tudor political uses of 'absolute' gave way in the seventeenth century to sharply focused disagreements during the Civil War and after. Parliamentary writers equated absolute power with tyranny or oriental despotism. They refused to allow that the king had any absolute right to obedience.

Samuel Rutherford wrote that 'an absolute unlimited monarchy . . . is the worst form of government' (see Daly, p. 237).

Although Civil War royalist writers agreed about the powers of the king they did not all concur in describing these powers as absolute. Some who held that England was a monarchy limited by law denied that the king had arbitrary power to legislate at his 'will and pleasure'. Even Henry Ferne, when arguing for complete and passive obedience, denied that non-resistance implied absolute monarchy: 'It is not the denial of resistance that makes a monarch absolute, but the denial of a law to bound his will'. Other royalist theorists, after the Restoration, argued that the king's powers were absolute in the sense that they could not be limited by law.

The two best-known theorists to argue that the king's powers were both absolute and arbitrary were Hobbes and Filmer, both of whom applied Bodin's theory of sovereignty to England. Hobbes ascribed exclusive, unlimited, and irresistible power to the 'absolute sovereign', whether king or assembly. He also tried to remove the distinction between limited and absolute monarchy by denying that tyranny meant anything more than monarchy disliked.

Hobbes's theory of sovereignty was shared by Sir Robert Filmer, who almost alone among royalists went on to describe the monarchy as arbitrary in the sense that the king could do whatever he wished. This went beyond denying that any legal limitation could be placed upon the sovereign, or the positive assertion that the king could exercise powers belonging to him. Filmer, like Hobbes, denied that tyranny was a meaningful term. Filmer also identified the powers of kings with those of fathers as being alike natural and bestowed by God.

These positions offered opportunities to Filmer's Whig critics. LOCKE attacked Filmer's identification of absolute with arbitrary monarchy as incompatible with civil society and as no form of civil government. While found among orientals, such as the Turks, such rule was despotic. Englishmen could not accept what Filmer advocated, described by Locke as:

a Divine unalterable Right of Sovereignty, whereby a Father or Prince hath an Absolute, Arbitrary, Unlimited, and Unlimitable Power, over the Lives,

Liberties, and Estates of his Children and Subjects; so that he may take or alienate their Estates, sell, castrate, or use their Persons as he pleases, they being all his Slaves, and he Lord or Proprietor of everything, and his unbounded Will their Law (Locke, *First Treatise*, §9).

After 1689, the term absolute rule became emptied of any practical, political significance in England. The same was not true in North America, where, equated with absolute tyranny and absolute despotism, it appeared in the Declaration of Independence.

Today absolutism is mainly a subject of debate among historians. Marxists continue to search for the class basis of absolutist states. Among non-Marxist historians there has emerged a consensus that the absolutist monarchies of Europe never succeeded in freeing themselves from restraints on the effective exercise of their power by traditional practices, combinations of social forces, and the laws or institutions inherited from the past (see Durand and Vierhaus). Nowhere was complete freedom of action attained, not even in France under Louis XIV whose reign is often used as the model or embodiment of absolutism. At the time when absolute sovereign power was exalted by political theorists as never before, those older orders and estates that were losing power nevertheless succeeded in preventing the victory of absolutism. What remains to be explained about this outcome is the significance of those theorists who criticized or provided alternatives to the political theory of absolutism.

MR

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†Vierhaus, R.: Absolutism. In *Marxism, Communism and Western Society*, vol. I. New York: Herder & Herder, 1972.

**Acton, John Emerich Dalberg, 1st Baron** (1834–1902) British historian. Acton was born into a Shropshire Catholic gentry family with strong Bavarian and Neapolitan connections, and succeeded to the family baronetcy at the age of three. On account of his religion, he did not go to an English university but studied in Munich under the historian Düllinger. Acton moved in high social and political circles; he was the stepson of the foreign secretary Lord Granville and an intimate of Gladstone, and became a lord-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. He served as Whig MP for Carlow (1859–68) and was raised to the peerage in 1869. He was in Rome for the Second Vatican Council and was a leading opponent of the declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870. He owned and edited the Catholic journal *The Rambler* (later *The Home and Foreign Review*). In 1895 he was appointed to the Regius chair of history at Cambridge, which he occupied until his death. The chief monument of this last period of life is his work for the *Cambridge Modern History*. For most of his life Acton worked as a scholar of private means, independent of academic institutions. His projected *History of Liberty* was never written, and his published work consists essentially of lectures and articles. As a historian he is remembered for his concept of the historian's role as that of impartial judge and moral censor.

Acton's political ideas derive chiefly from the Whig tradition, most notably from BURKE, supplemented by the influence exercised on him, as on many intellectual liberals of his generation, by TOCQUEVILLE. Acton was a strong opponent of the concept of unlimited popular sovereignty, which he traced to Rousseau and the French Revolution and which he saw as absolutist and tyrannical. He has been regarded by some as a prophet and critic of

**TOTALITARIANISM.** His own allegiance was given to the notion that liberty was secured by countervailing powers, in a manner which represented an extension of English Whig notions of constitutional balance. He was only rather idiosyncratically related to the English Whig tradition, however. He saw the Catholic church in the past as the guardian of liberty, through its assertion of the superior claims of spiritual interests, which he tended to identify with the supremacy of conscience, and through its function as a buffer against the unlimited sovereign power of the secular state.

Acton also celebrated the right to freedom of conscience asserted in the Puritan tradition, especially as manifested in the American Revolution. In modern times he saw liberty as endangered by what he considered to be the rival doctrine of equality, with its tendency to erode independent centres of power and to promote the authority of the state. He was at the same time a strong critic of the authoritarian tendencies of nationalism when embodied in the centralized nation-state. Chiefly through the work of his pupil J. N. Figgis, Acton had some influence on the doctrines of political PLURALISM which were emerging during the early years of the twentieth century. Acton's own writing tends to be diffuse and not always easy to interpret, being rich and allusive rather than precise and systematic. JWB

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**Adams, John** (1735–1826) American statesman and political philosopher; president of the United States, 1797–1801. Although Adams was a leader of the Federalist movement (which projected and established the American Constitution of 1787), his recognition of the irrational element of political psychology led him into profound disagreement with the more orthodox Federalism of HAMILTON and MADISON. These disagreements are already visible in

his *Thoughts on Government*, a revolutionary pamphlet published in 1776, but they are clearest in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787) and *Discourses of Davila* (1791). His contemporaries' concern with constructing political solutions to conflicts arising out of selfish economic motivations appeared somewhat superficial to Adams. The fundamental human motivation, he thought, was not economic self-interest but 'the passion for distinction'. This passion made men social creatures, although not particularly benevolent ones. The search for esteem could take the form of a desire for fame (hence 'your patriots and heroes, and most of the great benefactors to mankind'), but this drive for approbation was also expressed in economic ambition (*Works*, VI, pp. 232–63). Whatever form the passion took, it remained insatiable and irrational. Therefore it could not be relied upon to produce good government by means of representative schemes such as the one defended by Hamilton and Madison in *The Federalist*, or Jefferson's 'natural aristocracy', for there was no way to ensure that the people would defer to the truly talented and virtuous rather than to the merely rich or well-born (*Works*, VI, pp. 249–50; *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, II, pp. 397–402).

All Federalist thinking had retreated in the 1780s from the republican idealism of 1776. Adams's disillusionment with revolutionary republicanism was simply more profound and more comprehensive. Given his political psychology, a loss of faith in the republican virtue of the American people dictated a return to the idea of a mixed regime. Adams defended the constitutions of the individual states only in so far as they embodied this idea. He interpreted the bicameral legislatures of the states as devices to contain and to balance the aristocratic, socially successful class and the democratic, socially aspiring class. Since neither class sought the public interest, and since the balance between the two was not automatic, a good constitution also had to include an executive (a monarch) powerful enough to mediate between the aristocracy and the democracy. Adams interpreted the Constitution of 1787 in the same terms. He did not recommend hereditary monarchy and aristocracy (although he thought

that these would probably come to America in time), but he insistently interpreted the articulation of American governments in terms of the social hierarchy produced by irrational deference. This made his political thought extremely unpopular. Americans were not prepared to be quite so realistic, and they were still firmly republican. Adams was therefore an isolated thinker, who is often studied as an illuminating contrast to his more influential contemporaries.

JZ

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**Adorno, Theodor (1903–1969)** German philosopher. A leading member of the Frankfurt School, interested chiefly in philosophy and cultural criticism. See CRITICAL THEORY.

**Alembert, Jean le Rond d' (1717–1783)** French philosopher. D'Alembert, who won early fame as a mathematician and geometer, was the most strictly rationalistic of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, the true bearer of Descartes's message of the importance of 'clear and distinct ideas'. His views on politics and society reflect his demand for order in all things. He agreed with VOLTAIRE about the desirability of royal absolutism, not from any sentimental attachment to monarchy but because he thought it offered the best prospect of systematic rule. D'Alembert further believed, with PLATO, that rational government would be best secured if the most rational men, namely philosophers like himself, were put in

charge of the king's government. He did rather less theorizing about politics than other *Encyclopédistes*, but took more action to put his ideas into effect, for d'Alembert occupied a privileged position in the scientific establishment of France, and he used it to promote like-minded intellectuals to key positions in the kingdom (see FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT).

He was a man of frail physique, having started life as an orphan abandoned on the steps of the church of St Jean le Rond in Paris. Although he was later claimed by his natural father, and given a good education, he did not grow to full stature and was considered by such friends as DIDEROT and ROUSSEAU to be excessively discreet, if not pusillanimous, in his dealings with authority. D'Alembert, on his side, mistrusted the imagination and spiritual fire which prompted Rousseau and Diderot to their brave deeds; he saw no advantage to be gained from defiance of the censorship.

Even so, d'Alembert did not respond as did some other *philosophes* to the advances of such powerful foreign monarchs as Frederick of Prussia or Catherine of Russia, both of whom tried to enlist him in their service. He respected their rank, but had no illusions about their intelligence. Moreover, d'Alembert had a sincere attachment to the principle of liberty, and could never share the hope that such enlightened despots as Frederick might be made to serve the interests of freedom.

He was noted for his personal loyalty; until middle age he continued to live with his foster mother, then he moved in with his platonic mistress, Julie de l'Espinasse, and in his writings he urged all French intellectuals to work and stick together, instead of destroying their influence by internecine fighting. He had an exalted conception of the 'republic of letters', which contrasted oddly with his cold view of any other kind of republic. He detested priests; but he looked forward to a world where intellectuals acted as secular priests in society as well as administrators in the state. MC

#### Reading

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## ALIENATION

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**alienation** A central concept in modern social and political theory, in theology, and in sociology and psychology. Most simply stated, alienation refers to the condition of separation or estrangement. The term derives from the Latin verb *alienare*, to separate, remove or take away. Alienation originally referred to the transfer of one person's property to another but gradually it acquired a wider range of reference and came to be associated with the removability or irremovability of such non-material possessions as rights and liberties and with the features or properties which we are said to share by virtue of being citizens or human beings. Hence, in eighteenth-century usage, an 'inalienable right' was one that could not be alienated, i.e. traded, transferred, sold, or otherwise parted with in such a way as to deprive one's heirs. These earlier meanings survive today in the language of the law, in which property (and affections) are still said to be 'alienable'. This is not, however, the sense in which the term has come to be used in modern social theory. In the last two centuries alienation has acquired still other meanings, several of which will be discussed below. The popularity and currency of these modern meanings is a relatively recent development. The 1930 *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, for example, contains an article on 'Alienation of property' – that is, on alienation in its older legal sense – but none on alienation in any of its more modern philosophical, psychological, and sociological senses. By contrast its successor, the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, includes a lengthy entry on alienation (see Lichtheim).

If anything, alienation has in recent years suffered from a surfeit of meaning. For some it is an analytical concept in sociology, for others a synonym for vague feelings of *angst* or even *ennui*, and for yet others a central concept in critical theory. So diverse and varied have these meanings become that some contemporary commentators have suggested that the term has become virtually meaningless, a 'fetish word' for which 'people seem to delight in finding ever different uses'. 'Using the term "alienation"

without explaining any further what one has in mind communicates little more today than does tapping one's glass with one's spoon at a banquet; neither does much more than attract attention' (Schacht, pp. 244–5). Some critics have even suggested that the term be abandoned altogether.

Such a proposal is both extreme and unnecessary. For while it is true that quite different accounts of alienation are offered by Christian theologians, by Hegel and Marx, and by modern existentialists, psychologists, and sociologists, these can be compared, contrasted, and assessed according to the ways in which each answers the following questions: Who, exactly, is said to be separated from what (or whom)? What is the occasion or cause of this separation? What is the result or outcome of this condition of estrangement? Is this condition a good thing, a bad thing, or neither? Is its occurrence inevitable, or is it avoidable? Can the condition of alienation be corrected or overcome? By what means might this condition be overcome? Assuming that alienation can be overcome, what would non-alienated existence look like? Different accounts of alienation supply quite different answers to these questions.

In its traditional Christian-theological version, for example, alienation refers to man's estrangement from God. Brought about and maintained by sin, such separation results in human unhappiness and a longing for oneness with God. Although undesirable, this condition is, for human beings, an inevitable one. It can, however, be overcome by begging God's forgiveness and accepting Christ as one's saviour. What such non-alienated existence would look like, no one can say with any certainty, since no human is capable of attaining such bliss or oneness in this life. There are, of course, many sectarian variations upon these themes.

In its numerous non-theological versions alienation refers to man's estrangement from himself, from other human beings, and/or from certain human potentials. Two of the more important and influential accounts are offered by HEGEL and MARX.

According to Hegel's account, consciousness or spirit (*Geist*) develops into ever-higher forms



through successive separations or 'alienations'. Human history is nothing less than the story of spirit's self-development through separation or self-estrangement. This spiritual odyssey, unfolding through time and largely independent of individual intentions or purposes, can in some respects be compared with the spiritual or psychological development of individual human beings. An infant, for example, is incapable of distinguishing itself from its mother. Gradually, and without conscious intent, the infant becomes aware of itself as a separate creature with wants and needs distinguishable from those of its parents. This transition from infancy to childhood is the first of several 'alienations' through which the individual develops his or her own distinctive personality. As with individual biography, so too with human history: the human species develops its distinctive characteristics through successive self-estrangements, each expressed, encapsulated, and articulated (by those few who are philosophers) in sequential stages of historical development. The history of philosophy is therefore, for Hegel, an account of these articulations, which can in effect be read as interim reports on the progress of the spirit's self-unfolding in human history. Repeatedly separating itself from its earlier manifestations, spirit constantly outgrows itself in ways that it did not, and indeed could not, foresee. Such separation or alienation is, according to Hegel, a necessary feature of history and human progress.

Marx also views alienation in historical terms. According to him, alienation (*Entfremdung*) assumes different forms and meanings in different historical epochs. In capitalist society members of the working class are alienated in four interrelated senses. First, the labourer is estranged from the product of his labour – because he is forced to sell his labour-power he does not own what he produces; his product accordingly assumes an 'alien' aspect. Second, since the labourer cannot recognize his labour as an expression or embodiment of his human power of creative transformation, he is estranged from the process of production, i.e. from the activity of labouring itself. Third, the labourer in capitalist society is estranged from those powers or

potentialities that are distinct to his 'species-being', particularly that of freely creating and enjoying beautiful things. And fourth, the capitalist system of production, with its competitive ethos and its division of labour, estranges each labourer from his fellows. Marx answers the previously posed questions in this way: The proletarian is estranged from his product, from the process of production itself, from his full human potential, and from his fellow workers. This four-fold estrangement is brought about by the conditions of capitalist production. The result is that the labourer becomes a deformed shell of a human being. This condition can be overcome only by the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. Finally free to express and embody their many-sided human potentialities, unalienated men and women would cease to lead fragmented lives, discovering fulfilment in their labour and wholeness in their existence.

Although especially evident in his early writings, this 'humanist' aspect of Marx's thinking was not altogether absent from his later work. Not published until 1932, nor translated into English until the late 1950s, Marx's early writings – the so-called Paris Manuscripts of 1844 – had a profound effect on many European and Anglo-American thinkers in the period following the second world war. Marx's account of alienation appeared to them to be a weapon well suited to anyone critical of capitalism but equally disillusioned with communism as it had developed in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. The concept of alienation accordingly became a cornerstone of 'critical' or 'humanist' Marxism in the West.

The theme of alienation, if not often the word, figures prominently in the literary and philosophical reflections of post-war writers such as Jean-Paul SARTRE, Albert CAMUS, and others often referred to (rightly or wrongly) as 'existentialists' (see EXISTENTIALISM). For many existentialists estrangement – from others and even from oneself – is not a condition confined to the present day but is an ineliminable feature of human existence. Every human being lives and dies alone, a stranger to himself no less than to others. The theme of alienation or estrangement looms large in Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* (1945), in Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), and in Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*