Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction
Julia Annas

Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction introduces ancient debates and focuses on important and revealing features of the subject providing a sense of its freshness and liveliness, and of its wide variety of themes and styles. The tradition of ancient philosophy is a long, rich and varied one, in which a constant note is that of discussion and argument. What did ancient philosophers think about the conflict of reason and emotion within man? Are there any subjects that engaged the minds of ancient philosophers that do not concern their modern counterparts? What can we learn from the thoughts of the ancient philosophers?

Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction
Simon Critchley

Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction shows that Continental philosophy encompasses a distinct set of philosophical traditions and practices, with a compelling range of problems often ignored by the analytic tradition. It discusses the ideas and approaches of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Habermas, Foucault, and Derrida, and introduces key concepts such as existentialism, nihilism, and phenomenology by explaining their place in the Continental tradition. It discusses the reasons for the conflict between Continental and Anglo-American philosophy, and argues that philosophers should now attempt to overcome this divide.

Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction
Stephen Eric Bronner

Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction introduces and explains the central ideas and key figures of critical theory in philosophy and social and political thought.
Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction explores the concepts and themes that distinguished critical theory from its more traditional philosophical competitors. Critical theory emerged in the 1920s from the work of the Frankfurt School, the circle of German–Jewish academics who sought to diagnose and cure the ills of society. Sketches of leading representatives of this critical tradition, such as Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, as well as many of its seminal texts and empirical investigations, are presented. Concepts such as method and agency, alienation and reification, the culture industry and repressive tolerance, non-identity, and utopia are explained and discussed.

Derrida: A Very Short Introduction
Simon Glendinning

Derrida: A Very Short Introduction explores both the difficulty and significance of the work of Derrida. It explains the theory of deconstruction, presenting Derrida’s challenging ideas as a significant contribution to and a powerful reading of, our philosophical heritage. Defending Derrida against many of the charges that were levelled against him by the analytical philosophical community, this VSI nevertheless shows why his work inspires such passionate criticism. It explores his most famous and influential texts to show how and why Derrida’s work of deconstruction is inspired not by a ‘critical frenzy’, but by a loving respect for philosophy.

Descartes: A Very Short Introduction
Tom Sorell

Descartes: A Very Short Introduction explores the life and work of a man who made fundamental contributions to physics, mathematics, and optics, and reported useful observations in meteorology and physiology. Had he confined himself to the natural sciences, his achievement would have been remarkable enough. But his range was considerably wider. His famous statement Cogito, ergo sum is the first principle of his metaphysics, his theory of what has to be known for stable and exact science to be possible. This VSI shows that Descartes was, essentially, an advocate and practitioner of a new mathematical approach to physics, and that he developed his metaphysics to support his scientific programme.
A foundational moment in the history of modern European thought, the Enlightenment continues to be a reference point for philosophers, scholars, and opinion-formers. Enlightenment: A Very Short Introduction offers a concise historical introduction to the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement of eighteenth-century Europe. Discussing its intellectual achievements, it also explores how its supporters exploited new ways of communicating their ideas to a wider public, creating a new ‘public sphere’ for critical discussion of the moral, economic, and political issues facing their societies. But what is the relationship between the historical Enlightenment and the idea of ‘Enlightenment’, and can these two understandings be reconciled?

Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction

Thomas Flynn

Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction examines one of the leading philosophical movements of the twentieth century. Focusing on its seven leading figures: Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, de Beauvoir, Merleau–Ponty, and Camus, this VSI considers the key themes of the movement, which emphasized individuality, free will, and personal responsibility in the modern world. Drawing on the movement's varied relationships with the arts, humanism, and politics, it clarifies the philosophy and original meaning of ‘existentialism’ — which has tended to be obscured by misappropriation. By placing the philosophy in its political context, this VSI highlights the continuing relevance of existentialism.

Foucault: A Very Short Introduction

Gary Gutting

Foucault: A Very Short Introductions explores the highlights of Foucault's life and thoughts on literature, in particular the avant-garde scene; his philosophical and historical work; his treatment of knowledge and power in modern society; and his thoughts on sexuality. Foucault was one of those rare philosophers who became a cult figure. From aesthetics to the penal system, from madness and civilization to avant-garde literature, Foucault was happy to reject old models of thinking and replace them with versions that are still
widely debated today. A major influence on Queer Theory and gender, he also wrote on architecture, history, law, medicine, literature, politics, and of course philosophy.

**German Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction**

Andrew Bowie

German Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction discusses the idea that that German philosophy forms one of the most revealing responses to the problems of ‘modernity’, addressing questions such as the relationships between knowledge and faith, reason and emotion, and scientific, ethical, and artistic ways of seeing the world. It examines Germany's transition from a traditional feudal society to a modern, industrialized one, exploring how philosophy relates to social and historical developments. All the significant thinkers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries are examined, as well as some of the lesser-known philosophers.

**Habermas: A Very Short Introduction**

James Gordon Finlayson

Habermas: A Very Short Introduction provides an overview of Jürgen Habermas's forbiddingly complex philosophy using concrete examples. Habermas is arguably the most influential German philosopher alive today. He has influenced a variety of fields, including philosophy, political and social theory, cultural studies, sociology, and literary studies. He has commented widely on subjects such as Marxism, the importance and effectiveness of communication, the reunification of Germany, and the European Union. What are the theoretical underpinnings of Habermas's social theory? How can his social theory be applied to the fields of ethics, politics, and law? How have Habermas's social and political theories informed his writing on contemporary, political, and social problems?

**Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction**

Michael Inwood

Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction provides an invaluable guide to the complex and voluminous thought of one of the 20th century’s greatest yet most enigmatic and divisive philosophers. It focuses on Martin Heidegger’s most important work, Being and Time, to explore its major themes of existence in the world, inauthenticity, guilt, destiny, truth,
and the nature of time. These themes are then reassessed in the light of Heidegger’s multifaceted later thought, and how, despite its diversity, it hangs together as a single, coherent project. Finally, this VSI turns to Heidegger’s Nazism and anti-Semitism, to reveal its deep connection with his personality and overall view of philosophy.

Hume: A Very Short Introduction
Alfred Ayer

Hume: A Very Short Introduction considers one of the greatest of all British philosophers, acknowledged by his contemporaries as a pivotal figure of the Enlightenment. A central theme of his philosophy is the conviction that questions traditionally thought of as completely independent of the scientific realm’s questions about the mind, about morality, and about God, for example, are actually best explained using experimental methods. Hume's ‘naturalist’ approach to a wide variety of philosophical topics resulted in highly original theories about perception, self-identity, causation, morality, politics, and religion, all of which are discussed here. This VSI also gives an account of Hume's life and character, and includes quotations from Hume’s writings.

Kant: A Very Short Introduction
Roger Scruton

Kant: A Very Short Introduction tackles this exceptionally complex subject, exploring the background to Kant's work and showing why the Critique of Pure Reason has proved so enduring. Kant is arguably the most influential modern philosopher, but also one of the most difficult to understand. The depth and complexity of Kant's philosophy are such that it is only after complete immersion that the importance of its questions, and the imaginative power of its answers, can be understood. Kant aimed to draw the limits of human understanding. Ultimately, he felt compelled to transcend them.

Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction
Patrick Gardiner

Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction shows how Kierkegaard developed his views in emphatic opposition to prevailing opinions. It describes his reaction to the ethical and religious theories of Kant and Hegel, and contrasts his position with doctrines advanced by
people like Feuerbach and Marx. Kierkegaard’s seminal diagnosis of the human condition, which emphasizes the significance of individual choice, has arguably been his most striking philosophical legacy, particularly for the growth of existentialism. What did Kierkegaard conceive of as the basis of religious belief? How did he come about his views on the nature of the human condition? How has Kierkegaard influenced contemporary thought?

Leibniz: A Very Short Introduction
Maria Rosa Antognazza

Leibniz: A Very Short Introduction discusses the philosophy of the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and his desire for systematic reform and advancement of all sciences and establishment of a stable and just political order. It introduces the fundamental principles of Leibniz’s thought and his theories of truth and knowledge. Exploring Leibniz’s contributions to logic, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics, it considers how his theories sat alongside his concerns with politics, diplomacy, and a range of practical reforms. Discussing Leibniz’s theories of possible worlds, it concludes by looking at what is ultimately real in the world we experience, and Leibniz’s response to the problem of evil through his theodicy.

Locke: A Very Short Introduction
John Dunn

Locke: A Very Short Introduction unravels the meaning of John Locke’s political thought and his contribution to English ideology. One of the greatest English philosophers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he argued in his masterpiece, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, that our knowledge is founded in experience and reaches us principally through our senses; but its message has been curiously misunderstood. This VSI shows how Locke arrived at his theory of knowledge, and how his exposition of the liberal values of toleration and responsible government formed the backbone of enlightened European thought of the eighteenth century.

Medieval Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction
John Marenbon
Medieval philosophy is one of the most exciting and diversified periods in the history of thought. Introducing the coexisting strands of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish philosophy, Medieval Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction shows how these traditions all go back to the Platonic schools of late antiquity and explains the complex ways in which they are interlinked. Providing an overview of some of the main thinkers, such as Boethius, Abelard, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Maimonides, and Gersonides, and the topics, institutions, and literary forms of medieval philosophy, it discusses in detail some of the key issues in medieval thought: universals; mind, body, and mortality; foreknowledge and freedom; and society and the best life.

Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction

Michael Tanner

The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was almost wholly neglected during his sane life, but since then he has been appropriated as an icon by an astonishingly diverse spectrum of people. Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction provides an introduction to the philosopher's life and work examines the numerous ambiguities inherent in his writings. Interpretations of his thoughts range from the highly irrational to the firmly analytical. Thus Spoke Zarathustra introduced the ‘superman’ and The Twilight of the Idols developed the ‘Will to Power’ concept. These terms, together with ‘Sklavenmoral’ and ‘Herrenmoral’, became confused with the rise of nationalism in Germany.

Plato: A Very Short Introduction

Julia Annas

Plato: A Very Short Introduction explores the philosophy and argument of Plato's writings, looking at Plato as a thinker grappling with philosophical problems in a variety of ways, rather than a philosopher with a fully worked-out system. It discusses Plato's style of writing: his use of the dialogue form, his use of what we today call fiction, and his philosophical transformation of myths. It looks at his discussions of love and philosophy, his attitude to women and to homosexual love, and his claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness. It also examines his arguments for the immortality of the soul, and his ideas about the nature of the universe.

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction

Christopher Butler

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction explores the philosophy and argument of Plato's writings, looking at Plato as a thinker grappling with philosophical problems in a variety of ways, rather than a philosopher with a fully worked-out system. It discusses Plato's style of writing: his use of the dialogue form, his use of what we today call fiction, and his philosophical transformation of myths. It looks at his discussions of love and philosophy, his attitude to women and to homosexual love, and his claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness. It also examines his arguments for the immortality of the soul, and his ideas about the nature of the universe.
How can postmodernism be defined? Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction challenges and explores the key ideas of postmodernists, and their engagement with theory, literature, the visual arts, film, architecture, and music. Artists, intellectuals, critics, and social scientists are treated ‘as if they were all members of a loosely constituted and quarrelsome political party’ — a party which includes such members as Cindy Sherman, Salman Rushdie, Jacques Derrida, Walter Abish, and Richard Rorty — creating a vastly entertaining framework in which to unravel the mysteries of the ‘postmodern condition’, from the politicizing of museum culture to the cult of the politically correct.