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.

Schopenhauer is the most readable of German philosophers. Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction gives a succinct explanation of his metaphysical system, concentrating on the original aspects of his thought, which inspired many artists and thinkers including Nietzsche, Wagner, Freud, and Wittgenstein. Schopenhauer's central notion is that of the will — a blind, irrational force that he uses to interpret both the human mind and the whole of nature. Seeing human behaviour as that of a natural organism governed by the will to life, Schopenhauer developed radical insights concerning the unconscious and sexuality which influenced both psychologists and philosophers.