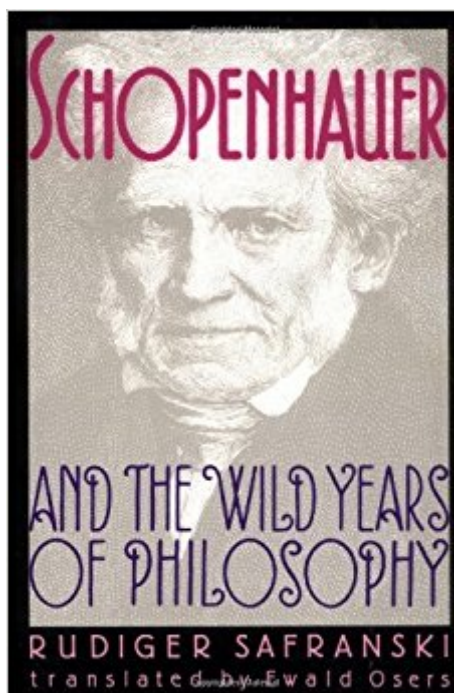


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Schopenhauer And The Wild Years Of Philosophy



Synopsis

This richly detailed biography of a key figure in nineteenth-century philosophy pays equal attention to the life and to the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. Rüdiger Safranski places this visionary skeptic in the context of his philosophical predecessors and contemporaries Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel--and explores the sources of his profound alienation from their "secularized religion of reason." He also provides a narrative of Schopenhauer's personal and family life that reads like a Romantic novel: the struggle to break free from a domineering father, the attempt to come to terms with his mother's literary and social success (she was a well-known writer and a member of Goethe's Weimar circle), the loneliness and despair when his major philosophical work, *The World as Will and Representation*, was ignored by the academy. Along the way Safranski portrays the rich culture of Goethe's Weimar, Hegel's Berlin, and other centers of German literary and intellectual life. When Schopenhauer first proposed his philosophy of "weeping and gnashing of teeth," during the heady "wild years" of Romantic idealism, it found few followers. After the disillusionments and failures of 1848, his work was rediscovered by philosophers and literary figures. Writers from Nietzsche to Samuel Beckett have responded to Schopenhauer's refusal to seek salvation through history. The first biography of Schopenhauer to appear in English in this century, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy* succeeds in bringing to life an intriguing figure in philosophy and the intellectual battles of his time, whose consequences still shape our world.

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Customer Reviews

Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a contemporary of the great German philosophers Kant, Fichte,

and Hegel, who broke from the ideological traditions of his day to espouse a unique doctrine of pessimism and individualism. His writings represent an almost Romantic counterpoint to the abstract system-building that culminated in the work of Hegel. Safranski's comprehensive biography of this complex and fascinating man unfolds within a richly detailed portrayal of German literary and intellectual life in the 19th century. This lively blend of biography and historical narrative makes it an excellent choice for interested general readers as well as serious students of philosophy. This book is sure to become a standard work on Schopenhauer and is highly recommended.-Raymond Frey, Bergen Community Coll., Paramus, N.J. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This biography succeeds admirably in placing Schopenhauer and his work in the varied milieux appropriate to them. The intellectual scene in Europe changed greatly during Schopenhauer's working lifetime, and Safranski is excellent at conveying the atmosphere of the different places and periods...The considerable learning which enables Safranski to put all this together is quite unobtrusive. The style throughout is brisk and keeps the reader's attention...It is a book the literate public will read with enjoyment. (J. B. Schneewind, Johns Hopkins University)An impeccably documented and evenhanded biography of the brilliant, bad-tempered philosopher...Mr. Safranski's book is delightful...with lively social histories of Danzig, Hamburg, Weimar, Dresden and Frankfurt; and lengthy, relevant excursions into the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Hegel and the Romantics, among others. (Diane Weber Washington Times)[This book] will be the Schopenhauer biography of our time. (Die Ziet)Safranski's intelligent, informative, and comprehensive biography is the most complete and detailed account of the pained and paradoxical life of Arthur Schopenhauer. This [is a] sensitive, incisive, and in-depth study...Safranski's polished work is a biographer's biography, highly recommended to anyone interested in a stark and edifying vision of human existence and the man whose passionate and paradoxical life contradicted the oriental serenity he prescribed. (Choice)This biography by Ralf Safranski is marvelously full of detail and texture. He is completely at home in that fragmented world of German literary sub-culture. (Noel Malcolm Spectator)Safranski's comprehensive biography of this complex and fascinating man unfolds within a richly detailed portrayal of German literary and intellectual life in the nineteenth century. This lively blend of biography and historical narrative makes it an excellent choice for interested general readers as well as serious students of philosophy. This book is sure to become a standard work on Schopenhauer. (Raymond Frey Library Journal)

This is an exciting book. Often I found it rather exhilarating to read. (I don't agree with the reviewer who found it "plodding," unless in re. its lingering on topics peripheral to Schopenhauer's philosophy, though I find these very enlightening and a major strength of the book.) Safranski provides a wonderful synthesis of the intellectual, psychological, sociological, cultural and historical contexts of Schopenhauer's thought, as well as a fine exegesis of his philosophy. I had read Magee and Gardiner on Schopenhauer, as well as "The Fourfold Root...." (and P&P, as well as Kant's first Critique), so perhaps one needs some acquaintance with Schopenhauer to appreciate Safranski's remarkable eclecticism in portraying this brilliant thinker and his philosophy from so many perspectives. Safranski's prose is often vivid and it occasionally soars beyond, perhaps, conventional academic form -- at least in the translation from German -- but that seems to me to reflect the same boldness that characterizes Schopenhauer's mature editions. I'm not a professional philosopher and I recommend this book as such; it's quite accessible to the interested layman.

the author gives a lively image of the life of this philosopher whose work is a guideline for present times

Wifey wanted this book really bad so I ordered it to hide some woodworking parts for me within the shipment. I now fully appreciate how Schopenhauer became a part of my life. A very useful philosopher.

You guys are hilarious - those that have already reviewed this book. Thanks for your sense of Humor. I am intrigued because Schopenhauer - along with Rousseau - have always been two of my least admired philosophers. My favorite has been Hegel mostly because what Hegel and Peter Berger (who just passed away) did for me in my college days. I would have been as depressed as Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard had it not been for Hegel. And my sense was that Schopenhauer had been rude to Hegel and misunderstood Kant. Both philosophical sins. Rudy's book dived deep enough into Arthur's life that I began to get a sense of where he was coming from and why he was so rude. I thought it was great how his mother's description of his faults in preparation for his coming to stay in Weimar describe characteristics of his that are exactly what I disliked about him. Perfect. I also found Rudy's explanation of the importance of Rousseau helpful in Between Plato and Kant. It clearly is wonderful having someone immersed in German culture and philosophical history doing this. Because of his expertise he explains beautifully the various philosophies in their complex interwoven aspects. You get a dose of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Adorno and many

others we normally do not hear about. The impact of his philosophy on music, on Nietzsche and Wagner are more familiar but Rudy fills much of this in with more insight. In all, this is a wonderful book to immerse yourself in if you want to get to know Schopenhauer better. And reading Schopenhauer without such background is not as rich. But I still dislike the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

There are several excellent books available that describe and analyze the life and works of Schopenhauer. One is 'Schopenhauer' by Patrick Gardiner, another is 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' by Bryan Magee; the Very Short Introduction by Christopher Janaway is also very good. To those must be added this book by Rudiger Safranski, although it is a significantly different treatment. Gardiner, Magee, and Janaway are all Brits and write largely from that philosophical tradition, while Safranski, a German, is steeped in Continental philosophy and writes from that perspective. That means a perspective heavily informed, as he tells us, by Heidegger, Sartre, and Foucault, among others. It means that the prose will often be highly dramatic, with words like 'being' and 'self' appearing in caps, as 'Being' and 'Self.' If your patience for that sort of thing is limited, you may experience a rising sense of irritation by somewhere in the second half of Safranski's book. But Schopenhauer was, after all, a European metaphysician, wasn't he? The book shows great scholarship, with many fascinating details about Schopenhauer's life and times; it also contains sections of analysis that are breathtakingly well written and insightful. Safranski is extremely good on Kant; his identification of Kantian ideas presaged in Rousseau was something I've not seen elsewhere, for one example. He sometimes uses "will to live" as a synonym for "will," which makes it sound close to the Nietzschean notion of the "will to power." But the reader should know that for Schopenhauer will also had a much broader meaning, encompassing even the most basic natural forces, like magnetism or the force involved in a stone falling toward the earth. And Schopenhauer's metaphysics had three tiers, the will and its objectification in individual objects, plus an intermediary level corresponding to Plato's Ideas. That intermediate level does not seem to be mentioned anywhere by Safranski, even though it is both a very problematic aspect of Schopenhauer's system and plays an important role in his theory of the visual arts. In Safranski's treatment of Schopenhauer's ideas about human freedom, the philosopher's doctrine of character is not adequately developed, although it is critical for his ethical theory. Finally, Schopenhauer carefully analyzed the nature of concepts, and he spent a lot of time railing against the use of concepts that are not grounded empirically in perception, thus rejecting the floating idealisms of Fichte, Schelling, and especially Hegel. Schopenhauer's theory of concepts is not adequately explicated by Safranski;

the term 'concept' does not even appear in the index. Safranski's book probably has maximum value as a supplement to Gardiner or Magee. It is not as complete or systematic as those in its presentation, but it contains a lot of additional insights and factual material that make it well worth reading. And, of course, none of these are substitutes for reading Schopenhauer himself, as he was a superb writer who constantly strives to be clearly understood.

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