

# Of Life, Death & Salvation

## Introduction: A Short Biography of Schopenhauer

Arthur Schopenhauer was born under the sign of Pisces (like myself) on 22 February 1788 in the city of Danzig, which was part of the kingdom of Prussia at that time (Schopenhauer grew up at the *Heiligegeistgasse*, which means *Holy-Spirit-Alley* – what a name for a gifted philosopher like him). Both parents were descendants of wealthy German patrician families, but in 1805, when Schopenhauer was 17, his father committed suicide.

Schopenhauer was a student of the famous University of Göttingen in Germany, where students like Carl Friedrich Gauss, David Hilbert, the Brothers Grimm, or Heinrich Heine have studied; and for me it is one of the most interesting universities at all, because Göttingen – which is nearby where my mother came from – is such a small town, but so many German geniuses, who I greatly admire, have studied there. During his studies Schopenhauer's professor advised him to concentrate on great thinkers like Plato and Immanuel Kant, which Schopenhauer really did as he based a main thought of his work on concepts made by Kant and Plato.

In 1814, in the tender age of 26 (!), Schopenhauer already began the work on his remarkable book *The World as Will and Representation* (German: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*). He finished it as early as 1818 and published it the following year. In 1820 he became a lecturer at the University of Berlin. He scheduled his lectures to coincide with those of the mediocre philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, who nevertheless became already in his lifetime quite famous, but whom Schopenhauer described correctly as a "clumsy charlatan". However, only five students turned up to Schopenhauer's lectures, and he dropped out of academia. A late essay, *On University Philosophy*, expressed his resentment towards the work conducted in academies. Like every genius he was not recognised by his environment, especially during his early lifetime. Even his mother didn't understand him and about this we read an interesting anecdote: when Schopenhauer wrote his first book, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, his mother informed him that the book was incomprehensible and it was unlikely that anyone would ever buy a copy. In a fit of temper Arthur Schopenhauer told her that his work would be read long after the "rubbish" she wrote would have been totally forgotten. His mother was not the only woman with whom Schopenhauer struggled with – already in his beginnings Schopenhauer was known as a misogynist and in 1851 he wrote an essay about women called *Über die Weiber*, where he stated:

*„Sie sind sexus sequior, das in jedem Betracht zurückstehende, zweite Geschlecht, dessen Schwäche man demnach schonen soll, aber welchem Ehrfurcht zu bezeugen über die Maßen lächerlich ist und uns in ihren eigenen Augen herabsetzt. [...] Mit mehr Fug, als das schöne, könnte man das weibliche Geschlecht das unästhetische nennen. Weder für Musik, noch Poesie, noch bildende Künste haben sie wirklich und wahrhaftig Sinn und Empfänglichkeit; sondern bloße Aeffererei, zum Behuf ihrer Gefallsucht, ist es, wenn sie solche affektiren und vorgeben.“*

*„They are the sexus sequior, the in every aspect inferior, second sex, whose weakness one should however protect, but to witness whose reverence is ridiculous beyond measure and degrades us in their own eyes. [...] With more justification, than beauty, one could call the female sex the unaesthetic one. They have no true sense and sensibility for neither music, poetry, nor the visible arts; but it is mere foolishness, when, in their craving for admiration, they pretend so with affectation. “*

Schopenhauer lived most of his life a quiet and lonely existence, but it was full of brilliant thoughts, which he wrote down in other remarkable books like *Parerga and Paralipomena with the famous Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, or the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, which is in my opinion even more impressive than the first volume. Even though Schopenhauer wasn't a writing maniac he nevertheless made himself immortal with his handful of books, which have influenced many thinkers, including Richard Wagner, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Erwin Schrödinger, Otto Rank, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jorge Luis Borges, among others (like myself, haha)!

Schopenhauer had a robust constitution, but in 1860 his health began to deteriorate. He died of heart failure on 21 September 1860 while sitting at home on his couch with his cat. He was 72.