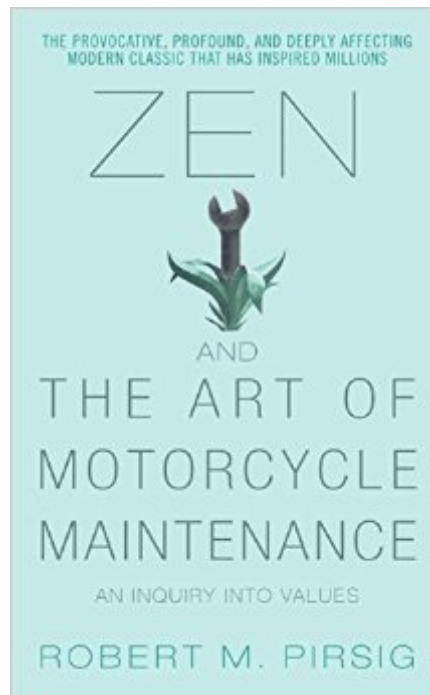


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Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values



Synopsis

One of the most important and influential books written in the past half-century, Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is a powerful, moving, and penetrating examination of how we live . . . and a breathtaking meditation on how to live better. Here is the book that transformed a generation: an unforgettable narration of a summer motorcycle trip across America's Northwest, undertaken by a father and his young son. A story of love and fear -- of growth, discovery, and acceptance -- that becomes a profound personal and philosophical odyssey into life's fundamental questions, this uniquely exhilarating modern classic is both touching and transcendent, resonant with the myriad confusions of existence . . . and the small, essential triumphs that propel us forward.

Book Information

Paperback: 540 pages

Publisher: HarperTorch; 1st edition (April 25, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060589469

ISBN-13: 978-0060589462

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 1.1 x 6.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,441 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

I'm compelled to write this review after browsing the others, because something has to be said about a book that isn't being pointed out for someone who is interested in the book for the first time. At this point, this book can be found on the front table in your local bookstore. Other philosophy books can be found in the philosophy section either collecting dust, or being perused by someone intensely interested in philosophy who is well versed in debates that have gone on for centuries. I have listened to the author, Robert Pirsig, being interviewed, and it seems that he did, in fact, intend for this book and its premise of "Quality" to be the great, all encompassing philosophy, presented in a straightforward, readable manner. However, despite Pirsig's intention, that is not quite why this

book has become so famous. This book is famous because it fills a perfect niche in that it introduces some very complicated philosophical questions in a form that the common reader will find interesting. Pirsig is attempting to create a practical philosophy and sets the book against the background of actual experience to make the questions he ponders real for the reader. With that in mind, if you are not clamoring for a debate with someone else who is knowledgeable on the ins and outs of Kierkegaard and Spinoza and are simply looking for a readable book that makes a real attempt of answering the big questions in life, this book is for you. What I find interesting, and somewhat disturbing, is that many choose to deride this book because it doesn't agree with their notions of philosophy, but fail to grasp that the people who are most likely to read this book won't even be at the table to understand their objections to it unless they read it. Probably no book has ever been more successful in interesting people in philosophy in the first place. So why are people who are interested in the subject eager to send them away because it disagrees with something they read in some banal tome? Bottom line, if you ran across this book at your local bookshop or had it recommended to you by a friend, you must read it. It is an awesomely thought inspiring book and asks questions you never thought to ask or at least didn't know how to put your finger on. It's both a good novel and a great introduction to philosophy for people who have an interest in greater questions but not all the time to pursue them. I don't think you should worry about the fact that someone with a Masters Degree in Philosophy, or an equivalent knowledge, is bothered by the book. Also, I wouldn't be thrown by the title. The book isn't trying to sell you a newsletter or convert you to any church (despite the use of the phrase "The Church of Reason") and is only using a bit of Zen philosophy as a grounding for its premise. Pirsig's premise does have a tendency to never be overtly stated, but I believe that he does this because he doesn't want it overly simplified in the way I'm about to do it. Pirsig's premise is that we live in a world of both the "Classical" and "Romantic" or, as I'll simplify it, "function" and "form", respectively. Pirsig sees the problems in our world as the result of an overemphasis on form, when function is more essential. However, pure "function" has problems of its own. For example, our bodily organs carry out the function of allowing us to live, but one doesn't really desire for our skin to be translucent so we can watch these functions. In fact, we would have a revulsion to such a thing. Therefore, we have a combination of both of "form" and "function"; our organs work very well without our having to see them. This is the desirable state. This desirable state is called "Quality". Good "function" seems to bring about its own desirable "form". May the decorative towel be damned. That's grossly oversimplified, but there it is. Finally, one shouldn't be thrown off Pirsig's premise by the fact that, quite frankly, he tends to be an impatient father and not very easy to get along with. While reading the book, it becomes apparent

that Pirsig is sharing this with us because he is oblivious to it himself. He makes it obvious that he doesn't understand why no one is pondering the philosophical implications of repairing a motorcycle or why his young son isn't arriving at all of the conclusions he is, despite the fact his son is eleven. He seems to be trapped in the context of his own view of the world. So, if you want to wade your way through all of the pontificating, please take the time to read "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance". If you really, really like it, you'll have to read Pirsig's other book "Lila: An Inquiry Into Morals". Though "Lila" takes a narrative approach that's a bit less readable than "Zen and...", it gives a more comprehensive view of Pirsig's philosophy. Read both. Then you can debate with the philosophy majors.

In my (1/e)*100 years on this planet, during which I devoured at least ten times as many books, I have read only two more than once - "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" is one of them. In this monumental 1974 work, Robert Pirsig has achieved what few others have managed before him and, to the best of my knowledge, nobody else has accomplished since: a perfect unification of philosophy, adventure and mystery. His "Chautauqua," or traveling tale, takes the reader on a profound tour of ancient Greek philosophy, the steppes of Montana, and even a little bit of Zen Buddhism, with endless surprises and much original if not truly inspired thought along the way. Through his self-portrayal by means of the unforgettable and eerily enigmatic character Phaedrus, Mr. Pirsig shares his far-reaching search for the meaning of life, and himself. His fundamental concern is with the following seemingly simple but in effect infinitely complex question: "How can one distinguish "good" from "bad?" The question is posed and addressed in many different forms throughout the book, and in the process the concepts of truth, value and quality are dissected, reassembled, and again dissected and reassembled many times. Mr. Pirsig has an uncanny sense of timing, and he never allows the heavier passages to labor on too long. This is avoided by craftily interspersing his philosophical discourse amongst very down-to-earth and charming observations made during a motorcycle trip that takes the narrator and his seemingly troubled son Chris from the American Prairies to the Pacific, and forms the prevalent background for the entire "Chautauqua." "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" is a totally unique creation. Not being one to lend himself easily to corny clichés, I nevertheless believe that this is one book that definitely could dramatically change your life, whether or not you believe in Zen or have ever sat on a motorcycle. If you love somebody, buy them this book

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