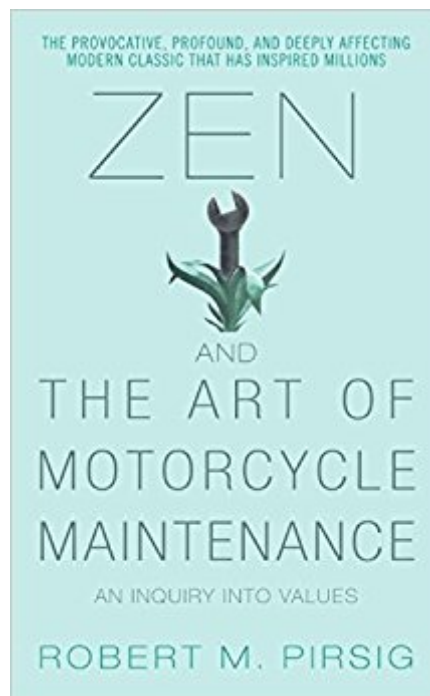




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Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values



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

Mass Market 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: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 1,628 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,985 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Philosophy](#) #10 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers](#) #11 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Mental Health > Emotions](#)

Customer Reviews

Arguably one of the most profoundly important essays ever written on the nature and significance of "quality" and definitely a necessary anodyne to the consequences of a modern world pathologically obsessed with quantity. Although set as a story of a cross-country trip on a motorcycle by a father and son, it is more nearly a journey through 2,000 years of Western philosophy. For some people, this has been a truly life-changing book. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“An unforgettable trip.” (Time) “The book is inspired, original. . . . The

analogies with Moby-Dick are patent. — (The New Yorker) — “Profoundly important...full of insights into our most perplexing contemporary dilemmas.” — (New York Times) — “It is filled with beauty. . .a finely made whole that seems to emanate from a very special grace.” — (Baltimore Sun) — “A miracle . . . sparkles like an electric dream.” — (The Village Voice)

In high school I would have told you this is my favorite book. I just re-read it 2 decades later. And I realize that I grasped about 20% of it at the time. Maybe. Something about the meandering philosophical flow captured my imagination at the time. But reading it now, as a father, I grasp the concepts underneath. I don't readily admit this but I wept at the end. Then I read the afterward and totally lost it. Beautiful, courageous work.

Looking at the reviews here, this book is loved by hundreds and reviled by a small percentage. I wonder what causes so much passion? It's wonderful that we have, among those who gave the book just one star, so many people who are so far above it intellectually -- too familiar with philosophy, too personally enlightened, perhaps -- to find any value in it. But I would like to point out to the subset of our best and brightest, those who tell everyone else not to waste their time reading it, that just because you got nothing out of the book doesn't mean no one else will. One of the complaints I see here is that there isn't much of the title's Zen nor much motorcycle maintenance, either -- and I note that the author says something about this in his introduction, so it must be true, right? -- yet I believe there is plenty of both. If the reader is expecting an introduction to Zen or a How To manual on motorcycle maintenance, those will not be found. It's not even the author sharing his enjoyment of either of the two fields with his audience. But the themes that run throughout the book explore many of the same ideas the Buddha did, and several concepts important to motorcycle maintenance that will not be found in manuals are discussed throughout the work. But the title really represents the duality that Pirsig puts under his microscope: Zen represents the hippie "go with the flow" attitude that is contrasted to the "slice and dice" schemes of technology, via motorcycle maintenance. And in the end, the title doesn't say just motorcycle maintenance; it's the "Art " that's critical, because one thing the book is aiming for is to show us that the science of technology is an art -- or at least should be an art -- and that the two ways of looking at life don't need to be in opposition, but can be quite naturally blended, to the benefit of all concerned. It might seem like the novel is caught in its time, with language about those who see things as "groovy" vs. "the squares" but the dichotomy between the two has been under discussion in various forms for centuries: romanticism vs. empiricism, passion vs. logic, science vs. religion. The same split is

found today underlying two sides of the debate over climate change. If the book is not approached as being literally about Zen and motorcycle maintenance, but as using these as stand-ins for concepts that can be much larger -- or even much smaller -- there is a lot to be gained here. Another complaint is that the protagonist is not sympathetic, but that's because this isn't a novel written from the romantic side, nor, really, the empirical side -- it's not even a novel, though it reads a lot like one -- it is a true-enough tale of relationships between two related men, and a father and a son, and a road trip that carries with it time for plenty of slow discussion of philosophy. The book takes its time putting the pieces together, and the author isn't trying to win our love -- if you can approach the book on its own terms rather than with a whole load of expectations about what it should do and how it should do it, you may get something out of it -- but to truly enjoy it, you've got to go with the flow, you know? I know I get a lot out of it every time I read it. I love road stories, and this one is paced just like a real long-distance trip, with long stretches of time to think things through interspersed with short breaks for taking care of the business of life. That what's going on in the environment, relationships, and other encounters reflects what's being thought through in the long stretches is a small bonus. The writing is clean and evocative, enjoyable. For the most part, the carefully constructed introduction to all the elements needed to understand the philosophy is gentle enough to be clear and not overly taxing, at least until the deepest parts, which can be hard to follow (and for good reason). The elements of psychological mystery captivate me each time. I first read ZAMM the year it was released, in the mid-70s, and have read it at least every five years since then, and each time I thoroughly enjoy it. The first time through, I could not follow the philosophy all the way down into the descent into madness it brought on. Five years later -- with time for the ideas to be examined through my own life -- I got it, even agreed with it. This time, this reading, is the first time I ended up doubting the validity of the greatest philosophical insights the story offers. Ironically, it's my deepening understanding of Buddhism that changed my mind. There really is a lot of Buddhism in this book, and not specifically Zen, either, but the deepest themes common to all forms of Buddhism. The questions about the wisdom of dividing the world up into a duality of the physical vs. the mental, of seeing ourselves as somehow separate from everything else, these were explored by the Buddha, too, though the framework he used to discuss these ideas was -- obviously -- nothing to do with motorcycles. In Dependent Arising he, too, considers how it comes to be that we split the world in two. "Name and form" he calls this split, and later thinkers have described what he was talking about as the same subject-object division that Pirsig is mulling over in ZAMM. The Buddha, though, says that it is "desire for existence" -- not quality -- that, to borrow Pirsig's phrase, "is the generator of everything we know". I tend to agree with the Buddha because I can see in our

lives, and through our sciences, what that desire for existence is and why it drives us to divide the world up the way we do, and exactly how it leads us into trouble. I can't say the same for Pirsig's metaphysics, but that doesn't stop me from deep enjoyment of the book. I hope to have another half-dozen five-yearly reads, if I'm lucky, and -- who knows -- maybe I will come around again to see it the way he does.

To be perfectly honest, I enjoyed the motorcycle part, but much of the philosophy was beyond me. I wonder how many others feel that way but won't admit it. I mean no disparagement to the author, who is obviously much brighter than I.

One of those books that when you finish it you're left empty and sad. I keep it on my desk now, and revisit parts of it often.

I suppose it is a well written book. But I can't but think what an ass. The main character was a real jerky towards his kid.

I bought this book as I'd heard it was a great book and I'm into motorcycles. I did not enjoy it at all. It is very disjointed and not that interesting to try and follow. I've read much better books on philosophy if that's what you are after and it doesn't really have anything exciting about motorcycles.

Really interesting read. I had wanted to read this for a while since it is on so many lists.

It was a decent book. I know a lot of people live and die by the philosophy in this book. I didn't really buy into it. I found the philosophizing arbitrary and at times self-indulgent. The author just assumes we'll take his word for what he throws at me. I did however really enjoy when he grounded his philosophy in working on a motorcycle. He didn't relate to it as much as I'd like, but when talking about the motorcycle, it made the concepts more concrete and believable. I did really enjoy the travelogue passages. It was fun riding along with him across the coast.

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