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## Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values

by Robert M. Pirsig

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### 105 Highlights

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The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha—which is to demean oneself.

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physical discomfort is important only when the mood is wrong. Then you fasten on to whatever thing is uncomfortable and call that the cause. But if the mood is right, then physical discomfort doesn't mean much.

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I thought maybe in this endless grass and wind she would see a thing that sometimes comes when monotony and boredom are accepted. It's here, but I have no names for it.

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Good-natured, friendly, easygoing—and uninvolved.

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Caring about what you are doing is considered either unimportant or taken for granted.

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It's best to be completely scientific about the whole thing and refuse to believe in either ghosts or the laws of science. That way you're safe. That doesn't leave you very much to believe in, but that's scientific too."

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Each machine has its own, unique personality which probably could be defined as the intuitive sum total of everything you know and feel about it.

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a conflict of visions of reality.

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two realities, one of immediate artistic appearance and one of underlying scientific explanation,

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want to divide human understanding into two kinds—classical understanding and romantic understanding.

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A classical understanding sees the world primarily as underlying form itself. A romantic understanding sees it primarily in terms of immediate appearance.

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The romantic mode is primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. “Art” when it is opposed to “Science” is often romantic. It does not proceed by reason or by laws. It proceeds by feeling, intuition and esthetic conscience. In the northern European cultures the romantic mode is usually associated with femininity, but this is certainly not a necessary association.

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Although motorcycle riding is romantic, motorcycle maintenance is purely classic.

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What makes his world so hard to see clearly is not its strangeness but its usualness. Familiarity can blind you too.

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The first is that the motorcycle, so described, is almost impossible to understand unless you already know how one works. The immediate surface impressions that are essential for primary understanding are gone. Only the underlying form is left. The second is that the observer is missing. The description doesn't say that to see the piston you must remove the cylinder head. “You” aren't anywhere in the picture. Even the “operator” is a kind of personalityless robot whose performance of a function on the machine is completely mechanical. There are no real subjects in this description. Only objects exist that are independent of any observer.

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The third is that the words “good” and “bad” and all their synonyms are completely absent. No value judgments have been expressed anywhere, only facts. The fourth is that there is a knife moving here. A very deadly one; an

intellectual scalpel so swift and so sharp you sometimes don't see it moving. You get the illusion that all those parts are just there and are being named as they exist. But they can be named quite differently and organized quite differently depending on how the knife moves.

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When analytic thought, the knife, is applied to experience, something is always killed in the process.

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One lives longer in order that he may live longer.

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“If one person complains he just makes it that much harder for the others.

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But to tear down a factory or to revolt against a government or to avoid repair of a motorcycle because it is a system is to attack effects rather than causes; and as long as the attack is upon effects only, no change is possible. The true system, the real system, is our present construction of systematic thought itself, rationality itself, and if a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a systematic government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves in the succeeding government. There's so much talk about the system. And so little understanding.

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This morning I talked about hierarchies of thought—the system. Now I want to talk about methods of finding one's way through these hierarchies—logic.

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That is induction: reasoning from particular experiences to general truths.

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Solution of problems too complicated for common sense to solve is achieved by long strings of mixed inductive and deductive inferences that weave back and forth between the observed machine and the mental hierarchy of the machine found in the manuals. The correct program for this inter-weaving is formalized as scientific method.

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The real purpose of scientific method is to make sure Nature hasn't misled you into thinking you know something you don't actually know.

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Many take to science out of a joyful sense of superior intellectual power; science is their own special sport to which they look for vivid experience and the satisfaction of ambition; many others are to be found in the temple who have offered the products of their brains on this altar for purely utilitarian purposes.

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escape from everyday life, with its painful crudity and hopeless dreariness, from the fetters of one's own shifting desires.

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The daily effort comes from no deliberate intention or program, but straight from the heart.

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The formation of hypotheses is the most mysterious of all the categories of scientific method.

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Scientific truth was not dogma, good for eternity, but a temporal quantitative entity that could be studied like anything else.

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The purpose of scientific method is to select a single truth from among many hypothetical truths.

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Scientifically produced antiscience—chaos.

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To some extent the romantic condemnation of rationality stems from the very effectiveness of rationality in uplifting men from primitive conditions.

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formidable logical fortification of his position.

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The a priori concepts have their origins in human nature so that they're neither caused by the sensed object nor bring it into being, but provide a kind of screening function for what sense data we will accept.

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Phaedrus had a high regard for DeWeese because he didn't understand him.

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doctrinal differences among Hinduism and Buddhism and Taoism are not anywhere near as important as doctrinal differences among Christianity and Islam and Judaism.

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“Church of Reason,”

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You are never dedicated to something you have complete confidence in. No one is fanatically shouting that the sun is going to rise tomorrow. They know it's going to rise tomorrow. When people are fanatically dedicated to political or religious faiths or any other kinds of dogmas or goals, it's always because these dogmas or goals are in doubt.

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you have to have faith in reason because there isn't anything else. But it was a faith he didn't have himself.

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This isn't really a small town. People are moving too fast and too independently of one another.

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After you pick up skill, welding gives a tremendous feeling of power and control over the metal.

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The test of the machine is the satisfaction it gives you.

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inadequacy of old forms of thought to deal with new experiences.

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As a result we're getting more and more people in irrational areas of thought—occultism, mysticism, drug changes and the like—because they feel the inadequacy of classical reason to handle what they know are real experiences.”

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The allegory of a physical mountain for the spiritual one that stands between each soul and its goal is an easy and natural one to make.

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Mountains should be climbed with as little effort as possible and without desire.

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To live only for some future goal is shallow. It's the sides of the mountain which sustain life, not the top. Here's where things grow.

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But of course, without the top you can't have any sides. It's the top that defines the sides.

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“Quality is a characteristic of thought and statement that is recognized by a nonthinking process. Because definitions are a product of rigid, formal thinking, quality cannot be defined.”

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aspects of Quality such as unity, vividness, authority, economy, sensitivity, clarity, emphasis, flow, suspense, brilliance, precision, proportion, depth and so on;

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It made the kids at camp much more enthusiastic and cooperative when they had ego goals to fulfill, I'm sure, but ultimately that kind of motivation is destructive. Any effort that has self-glorification as its final endpoint is bound to end in disaster.

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When you try to climb a mountain to prove how big you are, you almost never make it.

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He was turning the method of rationality against itself, turning it against his own kind, in defense of an irrational concept, an undefined entity called Quality.

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“A thing exists,” he said, “if a world without it can’t function normally.”

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“Squareness may be succinctly and yet thoroughly defined as an inability to see quality before it’s been intellectually defined, that is, before it gets all chopped up into words....”

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Locke’s statement that no object, scientific or otherwise, is knowable except in terms of its qualities.

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The whole purpose of scientific method is to make valid distinctions between the false and the true in nature, to eliminate the subjective, unreal, imaginary elements from one’s work so as to obtain an objective, true picture of reality.

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“Quality is shapeless, formless, indescribable. To see shapes and forms is to intellectualize.”

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One thing about pioneers that you don’t hear mentioned is that they are invariably, by their nature, mess-makers. They go forging ahead, seeing only their noble, distant goal, and never notice any of the crud and debris they leave behind them.

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I think it’s the overwhelming presence of these irrational elements crying for assimilation that creates the present bad quality, the chaotic, disconnected spirit of the twentieth century.

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One geometry can not be more true than another; it can only be more convenient. Geometry is not true, it is advantageous.

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There is no more chance that an unselective observation of facts will produce science than there is that a monkey at a typewriter will produce the Lord’s Prayer.

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If the scientist had at his disposal infinite time, Poincaré said, it would only be necessary to say to him, “Look and notice well”; but as there isn’t time to see everything, and as it’s better not to see than to see wrongly, it’s necessary for him to make a choice.

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Poincaré made it clear that he was not speaking of romantic beauty, the beauty of appearances which strikes the senses. He meant classic beauty, which comes from the harmonious order of the parts, and which a pure intelligence can grasp, which gives structure to romantic beauty and without which life would be only vague and fleeting, a dream from which one could not distinguish one’s dreams because there would be no basis for making the distinction. It is the quest of this special classic beauty, the sense of harmony of the cosmos, which makes us choose the facts most fitting to contribute to this harmony. It is not the facts but the relation of things that results in the universal harmony that is the sole objective reality.

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produce a complete structure of thought capable of uniting the separate languages of Science and Art into one.

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Traditional scientific method has always been at the very best, 20–20 hindsight. It’s good for seeing where you’ve been. It’s good for testing the truth of what you think you know, but it can’t tell you where you ought to go, unless where you ought to go is a continuation of where you were going in the past. Creativity, originality, inventiveness, intuition, imagination—“unstuckness,” in other words—are completely outside its domain.

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The real ugliness lies in the relationship between the people who produce the technology and the things they produce, which results in a similar relationship between the people who use the technology and the things they use.

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The way to solve the conflict between human values and technological needs is not to run away from technology. That’s impossible. The way to resolve the conflict is to break down the barriers of dualistic thought that prevent a real understanding of what technology is—not an exploitation of nature, but a fusion of nature and the human spirit into a new kind of creation that transcends both.

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The result is rather typical of modern technology, an overall dullness of appearance so depressing that it must be overlaid with a veneer of “style” to make it acceptable.

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That is what caring really is, a feeling of identification with what one's doing.

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gumption

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If your values are rigid you can't really learn new facts.

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When false information makes you look good, you're likely to believe it.

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Anxiety, the next gumption trap, is sort of the opposite of ego. You're so sure you'll do everything wrong you're afraid to do anything at all.

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You should remember that it's peace of mind you're after and not just a fixed machine.

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My favorite cure for boredom is sleep. It's very easy to get to sleep when bored and very hard to get bored after a long rest.

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One solution to boredom on certain kinds of jobs such as greasing and oil changing and tuning is to turn them into a kind of ritual.

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Impatience is close to boredom but always results from one cause: an underestimation of the amount of time the job will take.

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The mechanic's feel comes from a deep inner kinesthetic feeling for the elasticity of materials.

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You want to know how to paint a perfect painting? It's easy. Make yourself perfect and then just paint naturally.

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I just forgot the biggest gumption trap of all. The funeral procession! The one everybody's in, this hyped-up, fuck-you, supermodern, ego style of life that thinks it owns this country.

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Systematic philosophy is Greek. The ancient Greeks invented it and, in so doing, put their permanent stamp on it.

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Whitehead's statement that all philosophy is nothing but "footnotes to Plato" can be well supported.

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A complex assembly is best described first in terms of its substances: its subassemblies and parts. Then, next, it is described in terms of its methods: its functions as they occur in sequence.

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a "technician," a phrase he used for a writer so deeply involved in his field that he'd lost the ability to communicate with people outside.

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He also felt that no values can be fixed but that this is no reason why values should be ignored or that values do not exist as reality.

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produce a thesis which purported to be a major breakthrough between Eastern and Western philosophy, between religious mysticism and scientific positivism,

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"mythos over logos" argument, which is well known to scholars of Greek

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The term logos, the root word of "logic," refers to the sum total of our rational understanding of the world. Mythos is the sum total of the early historic and prehistoric myths which preceded the logos.

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The mythos-over-logos argument states that our rationality is shaped by these legends, that our knowledge today is in relation to these legends as a tree is in relation to the little shrub it once was.

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The media have convinced them that what's right around them is unimportant. And that's why they're lonely.

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a prototype for the many millions of self-satisfied and truly ignorant teachers throughout history who have smugly and callously killed the creative spirit of their students with this dumb ritual of analysis, this blind, rote, eternal naming of things.

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Plato is the essential Buddha-seeker who appears again and again in each generation, moving onward and upward toward the "one."

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his questions are not real questions at all—they are just word-traps which Gorgias and his fellow rhetoricians fall into.

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Early Greek philosophy represented the first conscious search for what was imperishable in the affairs of men. Up to then what was imperishable was within the domain of the Gods, the myths. But now, as a result of the growing impartiality of the Greeks to the world around them, there was an increasing power of abstraction which permitted them to regard the old Greek mythos not as revealed truth but as imaginative creations of art. This consciousness, which had never existed anywhere before in the world, spelled a whole new level of transcendence for the Greek civilization.

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Their object was not any single absolute truth, but the improvement of men.

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"Man is the measure of all things." Yes, that's what he is saying about Quality. Man is not the source of all things, as the subjective idealists would say. Nor is he the passive observer of all things, as the objective idealists and materialists would say. The Quality which creates the world emerges as a relationship between man and his experience. He is a participant in the creation of all things. The measure of all things—it fits. And they taught rhetoric—that fits.

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“duty toward self”

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excellence.”

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Aretê implies a respect for the wholeness or oneness of life, and a consequent dislike of specialization.

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the unbelievable magnitude of what man, when he gained power to understand and rule the world in terms of dialectic truths, had lost. He had built empires of scientific capability to manipulate the phenomena of nature into enormous manifestations of his own dreams of power and wealth—but for this he had exchanged an empire of understanding of equal magnitude: an understanding of what it is to be a part of the world, and not an enemy of it.

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using emotionally persuasive language for the ulterior purpose of making the weaker argument, the case for dialectic, appear the stronger.

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The passions are characterized as the destroyer of understanding,

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The poetry and the myths are the response of a prehistoric people to the universe around them made on the basis of Quality.

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The Church of Reason, like all institutions of the System, is based not on individual strength but upon individual weakness. What’s really demanded in the Church of Reason is not ability, but inability. Then you are considered teachable.

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