

Book Report: Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Pirsig

Name:

Institution:

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This report is based on the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. It is written by Robert M. Pirsig, who has shared his thoughts and experience in philosophical and autobiographical veins. William Morrow and Company published this book in 1974 after it faced 121 denials of publication.

Summary

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance has two plots which are harmoniously intertwined throughout the whole story. The first one is the journey of the narrator, whose name is not mentioned but one understands that it is the author himself, and his son Chris. The book is in first-person with the help of which the narrator tells a story about a man who has been forcibly deprived of his memory. The name of the man is Phaedrus, and it is the code name of the narrator's reincarnation. The protagonist has Phaedrus' notes and déjà vu of short duration due to which he tries to reestablish the course of events and to understand the nature of this person. People who surround the main character do not know that he has such features. Moreover, the closest person to him, Chris, does not know that Phaedrus' story is the story of his father. During the journey, the narrator adapts certain theories of the philosopher in honor of whom he named his previous reincarnation to his new reality. A motorcycle is the main aspect of the book's philosophy as the unity of the soul with the motorcycle; the art of its maintenance is posed as a religious ritual, the aim of which is to bring peace and tranquility.

Review

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance belongs to a category of books that evoke different thoughts during a reading. Initially, it seems difficult to read because of the discussed

concepts with an implementation of philosophical approaches. The narrator talks about different topics and wanders together with his son and the reader through the maze of his thoughts. He calls this journey “chautauqua,” the lecture for people whom he considers as closest to him. It is a pure stream of consciousness without sharp transitions, and with harmonious endings and beginnings.

Stories about Phaedrus are intertwined with events that occur during the journey. They are not as fascinating as Phaedrus’ experience; they are the most ordinary occurrences that might happen during a journey: the breakdown of a motorcycle, lunch at a roadside dive, and the admiration of landscapes. Nevertheless, the author presents them harmoniously and unobtrusively that strengthens the desire to continue reading.

From my point of view, Robert M. Pirsig, with the help of this book, has tried to convey his answers to eternal questions about human existence. He tells his own story and shares his attitude to life. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* has fundamental truths like “The knowledge is more important than the grades” together with the understanding of why a person should not be afraid to leave his or her comfort zone. The most important thing about this book is that the author does not impose his point of view. He simply shares his thoughts and leaves the opportunity to support his vision of life or to refute it.

Conclusion

Before recommending this book, I want to warn the potential readers that it is difficult reading. Robert M. Pirsig has written *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in a lucid literary style; nevertheless, one might get lost in the maze of technical language and the detailed descriptions of the motorcycle. It also might be boring concerning the complicated philosophical

themes presented. Nevertheless, the book contains useful information that can be implemented in one's life.