

Summer Reading: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Instructions for Summer Reading.

What follows is a series of documents that pull important quotations and ask probing questions about the main concepts and ideas explored throughout the novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert Pirsig. We use many of these concepts and ideas throughout the year – in fact, we return to this text in virtually every unit that we explore, so it is important that you are as familiar with it as possible. As you read, make sure you answer the questions that are asked in these documents and make sure that you are able to explain the quotations as they relate to what is happening in the text and (where applicable) how those ideas may be explored in the real world. The quotations DO NOT need written responses, but it may be wise to take notes – especially on the more confusing quotations. **Every question should be answered in detail and most responses require multiple direct references to the text.**

You will be submitting your responses to Turnitin.com during the first week we are back at school, and we will be using these as the basis for both an essay and a small-group discussion when we return. Therefore, it is important that you work diligently and DO NOT leave this until the last minute.

I am available throughout the summer if you have questions. My email address is mparry@behs.com.

Part I

Chapter 1

"At age eleven you don't get very impressed with red-winged blackbirds. You have to get older for that." (4)

** What's the key difference for the author between riding in a car and riding a cycle?

"We want to make good time, but for us now this is measured with emphasis on 'good' rather than 'time' and when you make that shift in emphasis the whole approach changes." (5)

"I've wondered why it took us so long to catch on. We saw it and yet we didn't see it. Or rather we were trained not to see it." (5)

"The main skill is to keep from getting lost. . . So we navigate mostly by dead reckoning and deduction from what clues we find." (6)

What was a "Chautauqua"? (7)

** How is the narrator's and John's disagreement like an argument about birth control between a Catholic and a Protestant? (11)

"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. That is what I want to talk about in this Chautauqua." (17)

Chapter 2

** What really caused the earlier cycle trip with Chris to be cut short? (21-23)

"On an air-cooled engine like this, extreme overheating can cause a 'seizure.' This machine has had one . . . in fact, three of them. I check it from time to time the same way I would check a patient who has had a heart attack, even though it seems cured." (24)

** What reasons does the narrator suggest to explain why the mechanics 'butchered' the job so badly? (25-27)

** What does our narrator do for a living? (27)

** What's the "real business of motorcycle maintenance"? (28)

Chapter 3

"You look like you'd seen a ghost." (31)

** Why doesn't the narrator believe in ghosts? What else does he not believe in? (32)

** What's the difference between European ghosts and Indian ghosts? (33)

** What do you think about gravity? (34-35)

"The law of gravity and gravity itself did not exist before Isaac Newton. No other conclusion makes sense." (35)

"Mass hypnosis. In a very orthodox form known as 'education.' . . . The rest of the time I'm feigning twentieth-century lunacy just like you are. So as not to draw attention to myself." (35)

"Laws of nature are human inventions, like ghosts. Laws of logic, of mathematics are also human inventions, like ghosts. The whole blessed thing is a human invention, including the idea that it *isn't* a human invention. The world has no existence whatsoever outside the human imagination. It's all a ghost, and in antiquity was so recognized as a ghost, the whole blessed world we live in. It's run by ghosts." (36)

** Who's Phaedrus? (37)

Chapter 4

** Why Thoreau's *Walden*? What's our narrator's criteria for picking books? How does he like to read them? (41)

“This is the hardest stuff in the world to photograph. . . . As soon as you put a border on it, it's gone.” (48)

Chapter 5

"He [John] isn't so interested in what things *mean* as in what they *are*. That's quite important, that he sees things this way. It took me a long time to see this difference and it's important for the Chautauqua that I make this difference clear." (52)

"You just sit and stare and think, and search randomly for new information, and go away and come back again, and after a while the unseen factors start to emerge." (54-55)

** What's a "shim"? How did John look at it? How did our narrator? (55)

"Some things you miss because they're so tiny you overlook them. But some things you don't see because they're so huge. We were both looking at the same thing, seeing the same thing,

talking about the same thing, thinking about the same thing, except he was looking, seeing, talking, and thinking from a completely different dimension." (55)

"You might say there's a little problem here." (57)

". . . I'm not sure of what it all means yet. . . I'm not sure of much of anything these days. Maybe that's why I talk so much." (63)

** Phaedrus again. (65)

Chapter 6

". . . it should be possible to piece together some kind of approximation of what he was talking about. . . . The purpose of the enlargement is not to argue for him, certainly not to praise him. The purpose is to bury him - forever." (69)

"The world of underlying form is an unusual object of discussion because it is actually a *mode* of discussion itself. You discuss things in terms of their immediate appearance or you discuss them in terms of their underlying form, and when you try to discuss these modes of discussion you get involved in what could be called a platform problem. You have no platform from which to discuss them other than the modes themselves." (69)

Classic vs. Romantic - two views of reality? Two ways of thinking about the world? What will Phaedrus have to say about them? (70)

"Classic" (sorry for the pun!) technical writing! A great description/analysis of motorcycles (73-74)

"There's certainly nothing strange about this description at first hearing. It sounds like something from a beginning textbook on the subject, or perhaps a first lesson in a vocational course. What is unusual about it is seen when it ceases to be a mode of discourse and becomes an object of discourse. Then certain things can be pointed to." (75)

** What isn't immediately obvious? What can you see now? (75)

** What is he talking about when he talks about the "knife"? (75-76)

Chapter 7

"We take a handful of sand from the endless landscape of awareness around us and call that handful of sand the world." (79)

** A "process of discrimination"? (79)

"Classical understanding is concerned with the piles and the basis for sorting and interrelating them. Romantic understanding is directed toward the handful of sand before the sorting begins. Both are valid ways of looking at the world although irreconcilable with each other." (80)

"To understand what he [Phaedrus] was trying to do it's necessary to see that part of the landscape, inseparable from it, which must be understood, is a figure in the middle of it, sorting sand into piles." (80)

"He was insane. And when you look directly at an insane man all you see is reflection of your own knowledge that he's insane, which is not to see him at all." (81)

** What do you think he means by "a ghost which calls itself rationality"? (82)

Phaedrus "was a knower of logic, the classical system-of-the-system, which describes the rules and procedures of systematic thought by which analytic knowledge may be structured and interrelated." (84)

** Why does he talk about photographs vs. mirrors? (85-86)

Broader Focus Questions: Part I

1. At the beginning of their trip, the narrator and John have a conversation in which the narrator refers to education as "mass hypnosis," citing as an example the fact that Newton's law of gravity is nothing more than a human invention, as are laws of logic, mathematics, and ghosts. Why does this dialogue take place at the outset of the novel, as opposed to somewhere in the middle or the end of the trip? How is Pirsig preparing the reader for the novel's future scenes?
2. In setting out the topic for his Chautauqua, Pirsig compares the current consciousness to a stream overflowing its channels, causing destruction and havoc as it searches for new ones: "*There are eras of human history in which the channels of thought have been too deeply cut and no change was possible, and nothing new ever happened, and 'best' was a matter of dogma, but that is not the situation now. Now the stream of our common consciousness seems to be obliterating its own banks, losing its central direction and purpose. . . . Some channel deepening seems called for*" (16). Can you explain this metaphor? What sorts of change is he referring to? What does he mean by "channel deepening?"
3. The narrator divides human understanding into two categories: romantic and classical. Discuss the distinction between the two. How do you fit into either of these dichotomies? Give examples that illustrate the tendencies that make you, personally, either classical or romantic.

Ongoing questions to answer:

1. Looking for Parallels

In almost every chapter, a metaphorical connection can be made between what is going on in the narrative of the motorcycle journey and in the narrative of Phaedrus's life and thoughts. Discuss the figurative implications of details like the following:

- the weather
- the landscape
- the conditions of the road
- the presence or absence of people

2. Evaluating the Questions and the Answers

An admirer of the *Dialogues* of Plato, Pirsig believes people learn by asking and answering questions. Discuss these questions:

- Why are John and Sylvia unhappy with their life? How does the motorcycle trip change them?
- Was Phaedrus insane?
- What does Chris want? Does he get it?
- Does the narrator begin to close any of these divisions in his life as the novel progresses?

-See next page-

Part II

Chapter 8

What's the narrator mean by "a short between the earphones"? (98)

"A motorcycle functions entirely in accordance with the laws of reason, and a study of the art of motorcycle maintenance is really a miniature study of the art of rationality itself. . . . Talk about rationality can get very confusing unless the things with which rationality deals are also included." (98)

"And you see that every time I made a further division, up came more boxes based on these divisions until I had a huge pyramid of boxes. Finally you see that while I was splitting the cycle up into finer and finer pieces, I was also building a structure." (101)

What sorts of hierarchical structures affect your lives? Affect your perception of reality?

"Shapes, like this tappet, are what you arrive at, what you give to the steel. Steel has no more shape than this old pile of dirt on the engine here. These shapes are all out of someone's mind. That's important to see. The steel? Hell, even the steel is from someone's mind." (103)

** What triggers his solution? (103)

** What's the "best way to learn"? **Do you agree?** (104)

Chapter 9

Lewis and Clark? Northwest Passage? Chautauqua? (106)

Inductive logic: "reasoning from particular experiences to general truths." (107)

Deductive logic: they "start with general knowledge and predict a specific observation." (107)

"In cycle maintenance things are not that involved, but when confusion starts it's a good idea to hold it down by making everything formal and exact. Sometimes just the act of writing down the problems straightens out your head as to what they really are." (108)

Chapter 10

Einstein passages? What's Pirsig's point? "Intuition? Sympathy? Strange words for the origin of scientific knowledge." (112-115)

"Nature provides only experimental data." (114)

“‘Nobody,’ he [Einstein] said, ‘who has really gone into the matter will deny that in practice the world of phenomena uniquely determines the theoretical system, in spite of the fact that there is no theoretical bridge between phenomena and their theoretical principles.’” (114)

"If the purpose of scientific method is to select from among a multitude of hypotheses, and if the number of hypotheses grows faster than the experimental method can handle, then it is clear that all hypotheses can never be tested. If all hypotheses cannot be tested, then the results of any experiment are inconclusive and the entire scientific method falls short of its goal of establishing proven knowledge." (115)

Einstein (again): "Evolution has shown that at any given moment out of all conceivable constructions a single one has always proved itself absolutely superior to the rest. . . .' Did Einstein really mean to state that truth was a function of time?" (115)

STOP – THINK – THEN, THINK AGAIN – if Einstein’s correct, what sort of implications does that have?

“. . . the whole structure of reason, handed down to us from ancient times, is no longer adequate. It begins to be seen for what it really is - emotionally hollow, esthetically meaningless and spiritually empty." (117)

"It was as if he were contemplating that serene mountain landscape Einstein has described, and suddenly between the mountains had appeared a fissure, a gap of pure nothing. And slowly, and agonizingly, to explain this gap, he had to admit that the mountains, which had seemed built for eternity, might possibly be something else . . . perhaps just figments of his own imagination." (118)

Chapter 11

"He felt that institutions such as schools, churches, governments and political organizations of every sort all tended to direct thought for ends other than truth, for the perpetuation of their own functions, and for the control of individuals in the service of these functions." (121)

"Lateral knowledge is knowledge that's from a wholly unexpected direction, from a direction that's not even understood as a direction until the knowledge forces itself upon one. Lateral truths point to the falseness of axioms and postulates underlying one's existing system of getting at truth." (121-122)

"He saw philosophy as the highest echelon of the entire hierarchy of knowledge. Among philosophers this is so widely believed it's almost a platitude, but for him it's a revelation. He discovered that the science he'd once thought of as the whole world of knowledge is only a branch of philosophy, which is far broader and far more general. The questions he had asked about infinite hypotheses hadn't been of interest to science because they weren't scientific questions. Science cannot study scientific method without getting into a bootstrap problem that

destroys the validity of its answers. The questions he'd asked were at a higher level than science goes." (125)

"another kind of high country" - "What is the truth and how do you know it when you have it? . . . How do we really *know* anything? . . . Is reality basically changing, or is it fixed and permanent? . . . When it's said that something means something, what's meant by that?" (127-128)

Who asks these kinds of questions anyway?

Progress? ". . . the sole agent for this progress is quite clearly reason itself." (128)

"Progress is our most important product." General Electric slogan

"Phaedrus read in a scientific way rather than a literary way, testing each sentence as he went along, noting doubts and questions to be resolved later. . . ." (129)

"If one accepts the premise that all knowledge comes to us through our senses, Hume says, then one must logically conclude that both 'Nature' and 'Nature's laws' are creations of our own imagination." (132)

Kant's *a priori* intuitions (e.g., time, space, continuity) (132-133)

Kant's *a priori* motorcycle (134)

"This *a priori* motorcycle has been built up in our minds over many years from enormous amounts of sense data and it is constantly changing as new sense data come in." (134)

A "Copernican revolution"? (136)

"Nothing changed as a result of this revolution, and yet everything changed." (136) A paradox?

Chapter 12

"The range of human knowledge today is so great that we're all specialists and the distance between specializations has become so great that anyone who seeks to wander freely among them almost has to forego closeness with the people around him." (138)

"The best students always *are* flunking. *Every* good teacher knows that." (141)

“‘How do you *know* all that?’ he said.

'It's *obvious*.'

'Well then, why didn't I see it?'

'You have to have some familiarity.'

'Then it's *not* obvious, is it?' “(142)

"All his letters [ones from during his time in India] show is an enormous confusion of contradictions and incongruities and divergences and exceptions to any rule he formulated about the things he observed." (143)

"He became aware that the doctrinal differences among Hinduism and Buddhism and Taoism are not anywhere near as important as doctrinal differences among Christianity and Islam and Judaism. Holy wars are not fought over them because verbalized statements about reality are never presumed to be reality itself." (143)

"Logic presumes a separation of subject from object; therefore logic is not final wisdom." (143)

Chapter 13

** Oh, oh - he's a teacher - a college professor! (146)

"The school was what could euphemistically be called a 'teaching college.'" (147)

** What was the name he called the college? (147)

"Confusion continually occurs in people who fail to see this difference, he said, and think that control of the church buildings implies control of the church. They see professors as employees of the second university who should abandon reason when told to and take orders without backtalk, the same way employees do in other corporations. . . . They see the second university, but fail to see the first." (150)

"The primary goal of the Church of Reason, Phaedrus said, is always Socrates' old goal of the truth, in its everchanging forms, as it's revealed by the process of rationality. Everything else is subordinate to that." (151)

"That's probably why he felt such a deep kinship with so many failing students in the back rows of his classrooms. The contemptuous looks on their faces reflected the same feelings he had toward the whole rational, intellectual process. The only difference was that they were contemptuous because they didn't understand it. He was contemptuous because he did." (153)

Chapter 14

** DeWeese's instructions/manual - "He's unable to comprehend things when they appear in the ugly, chopped-up, grotesque sentence style common to engineering and technical writing. Science works with chunks and bits and pieces of things with the continuity presumed, and DeWeese works only with the continuities of things with the chunks and bits and pieces presumed. What he really wants me to damn is the lack of artistic continuity, something an engineer couldn't care less about. It hangs up, really, on the classic-romantic split, like everything else about technology." (164)

** on rotisserie instructions: "What's really angering about instructions of this sort is that they imply there's only one way to put this rotisserie together - *their* way. And that

presumption wipes out all the creativity. Actually there are hundreds of ways to put the rotisserie together and when they make you follow just one way without showing you the overall problem the instructions become hard to follow in such a way as not to make mistakes. You lose the feeling for the work." (166)

"This divorce of art from technology is completely unnatural. It's just that it's gone on so long you have to be an archeologist to find out where the two separated." (167)

"What's wrong with technology is that it's not connected in any real way with matters of the spirit and of the heart. And so it does blind, ugly things quite by accident and gets hated for that." (168)

"So I guess what I'm trying to say is that the solution to the problem isn't that you abandon rationality but that you expand the nature of rationality so that it's capable of coming up with a solution." (169)

** Did Newton invent calculus? Or did he just discover it? Is there a difference? (169)

** "I'm not sure what you mean by classical reason." (171)

"Analytic reason, dialectic reason. Reason which at the University is sometimes considered to be the whole of understanding. . . . Nonrepresentative art is one of the root experiences I'm talking about. Some people still condemn it because it doesn't make "sense." But what's really wrong is not the art but the "sense," the classical reason, which can't grasp it. People keep looking for branch extensions of reason that will cover art's more recent occurrences, but the answers aren't *in* the branches, they're at the roots." (171)

** Phaedrus - an ancient Greek - a rhetorician - a 'composition major' of his time (172)

"The rhetoricians of ancient Greece were the first teachers in the history of the Western world. Plato vilified them in all his works to grind an axe of his own and since what we know about them is almost entirely from Plato they're unique in that they've stood condemned throughout history without ever having their side of the story told. The Church of Reason that I talked about was founded on their graves. It's supported today by their graves. And when you dig deep into its foundations you come across ghosts." (172)

"The trouble is that essays always have to sound like God talking for eternity, and that isn't the way it ever is. People should see that it's never anything other than just one person talking from one place in time and space and circumstance. It's never been anything else, ever, but you can't get that across in an essay." (172-173)

Chapter 15

"The subject he'd been brought here to teach was rhetoric, writing, the

second of the three R's. He was to teach some advanced courses in technical writing and some sections of freshman English." (175)

"He was thinking hard. The crushing teaching load was bad enough, but what for him was far worse was that he understood in his precise analytic way that the subject he was teaching was undoubtedly the most unprecise, unanalytic, amorphous area in the entire Church of Reason. That's why he was thinking so hard. **To a methodical, laboratory-trained mind, rhetoric is just completely hopeless. It's like a huge Sargasso Sea of stagnated logic.**" (175-176)

"But how're you to teach something that isn't premeditated? It was a seemingly impossible requirement." (176)

". . . the text was one of the most rational texts available on the subject of rhetoric and it still didn't seem right. . . . The text started with the premise that if rhetoric is to be taught at all at a University level it should be taught as a branch of reason, not as a mystic art. Therefore it emphasized a mastery of the rational foundations of communication in order to understand rhetoric. Elementary logic was introduced, elementary stimulus-response theory was brought in, and from these a progression was made to an understanding of how to develop an essay." (181-182)

"Another thing that depressed him was prescriptive rhetoric, which supposedly had been done away with but was still around. This was the old slap-on-the-fingers-if-your-modifiers-were-caught-dangling stuff. Correct spelling, correct punctuation, correct grammar. Hundreds of it'sy-bitsy rules for it'sy-bitsy people. No one could remember all that stuff and concentrate on what he was trying to write about." (182-183)

"Quality . . . you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof. There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes, it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really does exist. **What else are the grades based on?**" (184)

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance Questions: Parts 1 & 2 (some of these answers include information from Part I and will carry into the rest of the novel)

1. Discuss Pirsig's Author's Note. What does he mean when he says "much has been changed for rhetorical purposes?" Is he saying the book is fact or fiction? How does his use of a first-person narrator make this a complex question? What is the relationship between author and narrator?
2. Discuss *ZMM*'s epigraph: *And what is good, Phaedrus, And what is not good -- Need we ask anyone to tell us these things?* How does this query resemble a Buddhist *koan* -- a paradoxical or

nonsensical question that emphasizes the process of meditating on the question rather than the answer? Why do you think Pirsig chose this excerpt to introduce the book?

3. How does Pirsig introduce and develop the character of Phaedrus? Can you rely on the narrator to offer an accurate picture of Phaedrus's insanity? Do you think Phaedrus really was insane?
4. How does the discussion of Phaedrus's teaching style connect with what we are reading about education and with how you feel about education.

Ongoing focus points:

1. Looking for Parallels

In almost every chapter, a metaphorical connection can be made between what is going on in the narrative of the motorcycle journey and in the narrative of Phaedrus's life and thoughts. Discuss the figurative implications of details like the following:

- the weather
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An admirer of the *Dialogues* of Plato, Pirsig believes people learn by asking and answering questions. Discuss these questions:

- Why are John and Sylvia unhappy with their life? How does the motorcycle trip change them?
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- What does Chris want? Does he get it?
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-See next page-

Part III

Chapter 16

"Mountains like these and travelers in the mountains and events that happen to them here are found not only in Zen literature but in the tales of every major religion. 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." (187)

"I want to talk now about Phaedrus' exploration into the meaning of the term Quality, an exploration which he saw as a route through the mountains of the spirit." (188)

Why should this next sentence remind you of *The Gorgias*?

"The second phase emerged as a result of normal intellectual criticism of his lack of definition of what he was talking about." (188)

What do you suppose our narrator means by "language rigidity"? (189)

** On Phaedrus' dull student: "She couldn't think of anything to write about Bozeman because she couldn't recall anything she had heard worth repeating. She was strangely unaware that she could look and see freshly for herself, as she wrote, without primary regard for what had been said before. The narrowing down to one brick destroyed the blockage because it was so obvious she had to do some original and direct seeing." (192)

"Schools teach you to imitate. If you don't imitate what the teacher wants you get a bad grade. Here, in college, it was more sophisticated, of course; you were supposed to imitate the teacher in such a way as to convince the teacher you were not imitating, but taking the essence of the instruction and going ahead with it on your own. That got you A's. Originality on the other hand could get you anything – from A to F." (192-93)

"The idea that the majority of students attend a university for an education independent of the degree and grades is a little hypocrisy everyone is happier not to expose. Occasionally some students do arrive for an education but rote and the mechanical nature of the institution soon converts them to a less idealistic attitude." (195)

"The purpose of abolishing grades and degrees is not to punish mules or to get rid of them but to provide an environment in which that mule can turn into a free man." (196)

"He [the "hypothetical student"] would get another kind of education quite as valuable as the one he'd abandoned, in what used to be called the 'school of hard knocks.'" (196)

"So he would come back to our degreeless and gradeless school, but with a difference. He'd no longer be a grade-motivated person. He'd be a knowledge-motivated person. He would need no

external pushing to learn. His push would come from inside. He'd be a free man. He wouldn't need a lot of discipline to shape him up. In fact, if the instructors assigned him were slacking on the job he would be likely to shape *them* up by asking rude questions." (197)

"Phaedrus thought withholding grades was good, according to this notes, but he didn't give it scientific value. In a true experiment you keep constant every cause you can think of except one, and then see what the effects are of varying that one cause. In the classroom you can never do this. Student knowledge, student attitude, teacher attitude, all change from all kinds of causes which are uncontrollable and mostly unknowable. Also, the observer in this case is himself one of the causes and can never judge his effects without altering his effects. So he didn't attempt to draw any hard conclusions from all this, he just went ahead and did what he liked." (200)

"Grades really cover up failure to teach. A bad instructor can go through an entire quarter leaving absolutely nothing memorable in the minds of his class, curve out the scores on an irrelevant test, and leave the impression that some have learned and some have not. But if the grades are removed the class is forced to wonder each day what it's really learning." (200)

"He had wanted his students to become creative by deciding for themselves what was good writing instead of asking him all the time. The real purpose of withholding the grades was to force them to look within themselves, the only place they would ever get a really right answer." (201)

"When spontaneity and individuality and really good original stuff occurred in a classroom it was in spite of the instruction, not because of it." (201)

Chapter 17

“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.” (207)

Where do you think the students’ understanding of “Quality” came from? (207)

"He wasn't teaching anymore, he was indoctrinating. He had erected an imaginary entity, defined it as incapable of definition, told the students over their own protests that they knew what it was, and demonstrated this by a technique that was as confusing logically as the term itself." (207)

"Now, at last, the standard rhetoric texts came into their own. The principles expounded in them were no longer rules to rebel against, not ultimates in themselves, but just techniques, gimmicks, for producing what really counted and stood independently of the techniques - Quality. What had started out as a heresy from traditional rhetoric turned into a beautiful introduction to it." (207-208)

Have you ever asked teacher this question: “How do I *do* this?” What were the results? (208)

“By reversing a basic rule that all things which are to be taught must first be defined, he had found a way out of all this. He was pointing to no principle, no rule of good writing, no theory – but he was pointing to something, nevertheless, that was very real, whose reality they couldn’t deny.” (209)

What is “the” definition of rhetoric anyway?

Why would the narrator have forgotten the dozen or so accomplishments Chris had at the YMCA camp a couple of weeks ago? (210)

Chapter 18

“Definitions are the foundation of reason. You can’t reason without them.” (214)

"If Quality were dropped, only rationality would remain unchanged.

That was odd. Why would that be?

He didn't know, but he did know that by subtracting Quality from a picture of the world as we know it, he'd revealed a magnitude of importance of this term he hadn't known was there. The world can function without it, but life would be so dull as to be hardly worth living. In fact it wouldn't be worth living. The term worth is a Quality term. Life would just be living without any values or purpose at all." (216)

“It was a certain basic attitude about the way the world was, a presumptive vision that it ran according to laws – reason – and that man’s improvement lay chiefly through the discovery of these laws of reason and application of them toward satisfaction of his own desires. It was this faith that held everything together.” (217)

Squareness? (217)

** Why does he return to this *metaphor*, a "handful of sand"? (222)

What's it all about?

** What does a "real understanding of Quality" allow one to do? (223)

** Thoreau? Why Thoreau? And how do they read this book? (224-225)

“No books can guide us anymore.” (225)

Chapter 19

a dream - a "white-painted room" - a "glass door" - "On the other side was Chris and his brother and mother." (226)

"Well, you talked all night about it. You said at the top of the mountain we'd see everything. You said you were going to meet me there." (227)

". . . the English faculty at Bozeman, informed of their squareness, presented him with a reasonable question: 'Does this undefined "quality" of yours exist in the things we observe? . . . Or is it subjective, existing only in the observer?'" (228)

a "dilemma" ? (229)

"In addition to these three classical logical refutations there are some illogical, 'rhetorical' ones. Phaedrus, being a rhetorician, has these available too." (229)

"*One may throw sand in the bull's eyes.*" (229)

"Socrates, that ancient enemy of rhetorical argument, would have sent Phaedrus flying for this one, saying 'Yes, I accept your premise that I'm incompetent on the matter of Quality. Now please show an incompetent old man what Quality is. Otherwise, how am I to improve?'" (229-230)

"*One may attempt to sing the bull to sleep.*" (230)

"A third rhetorical alternative to the dilemma, and the best one in my opinion, was to *refuse to enter the arena.*" (230)

** Why (does he guess) he chose not to follow the 3rd alternative? (230-231)

"In today's world, ideas that are incompatible with scientific knowledge don't get off the ground." (231)

"The 'object' is an intellectual construct *deduced* from qualities." (234)

"His Quality - 'excellence,' 'worth,' 'goodness' - was not a physical property and was not measurable." (231)

"So he studied the statement carefully, in the same reflective way he always studied things before attacking them.

"Then he saw it. . . ." (232)

** ". . . 'what you like' is unimportant because it's all composed of irrational emotions within yourself." (233)

** What is scientific materialism? (233-234)

** What is classic formalism? (234)

Zero? (234)

"If subjectivity is eliminated as unimportant, he said, then the entire body of science must be eliminated with it." (234-235)

". . . Quality is neither a part of mind, nor is it a part of matter. It is a *third* entity which is independent of the two." (237)

** ". . . eventually he saw that Quality couldn't be independently related with either the subject or the object but could be found only in the relationship of the two with each other. It is the point at which subject and object meet

Quality is not a *thing*. It is an *event*." (239)

"The dilemma all the time had this unseen vile presumption in it, for which there was no logical justification, that Quality was the *effect* of subjects and objects. It was *not!*" (240)

Chapter 20

"You look at these mountains now, and they look so permanent and peaceful, but they're changing all the time and the changes aren't always peaceful." (243)

"I think metaphysics is good if it improves everyday life; otherwise forget it." (246)

Seem like a reasonable philosophy?

"The past exists only in our memories, the future only in our plans. The present is our only reality. . . . *Any* intellectually conceived object is *always* in the past and therefore unreal." (247)

** "Why does everybody see Quality differently?" (249)

** What are "analogues"? (249-250)

"It is not uncommon, he said, for Indian villagers to see ghosts. But they have a terrible time seeing the law of gravity." (250)

"In our highly complex organic state we advanced organisms respond to our environment with an invention of many marvelous analogues. We invent earth and heavens, trees, stones and oceans, gods, music, arts, language, philosophy, engineering, civilization and science. We call these analogues reality. And they *are* reality. We mesmerize our children in the name of truth into knowing that they are reality. We throw anyone who does not accept these analogues into an insane asylum." (251)

"He was from another valley seeing what was in *this* valley, not now as a story told by strangers but as part of the valley he was from. He was seeing it all. He had broken the code." (254)

Chapter 21

"To discover a metaphysical relationship of Quality and the Buddha at some mountaintop of personal experience is very spectacular. And very unimportant. If that were all this Chautauqua was about I should be dismissed. What's important is the relevance of such a discovery to all the valleys of this world, and all the dull, dreary jobs and monotonous years that await all of us in them." (256)

** He wants to unify or connect all 3 areas: Religion, Art, Science. (257)

"The dictum that Science and its offspring, technology, are 'value free,' that is, 'quality free,' has to go to." (258)

Chapter 22

** Who was Jules Henri Poincaré? (259)

"It wasn't the proof [Lobachevski's] that was alarming. It was its rational byproduct that soon overshadowed it and almost everything else in the field of mathematics. Mathematics, the cornerstone of scientific certainty, was suddenly uncertain.

"We now had *two* contradictory visions of unshakable scientific truth, true for all men of all ages, regardless of their individual preferences.

"This was the basis of the profound crisis that shattered the scientific complacency of the Gilded Age. *How do we know which one of these geometries is right?*" (262)

"Poincaré concluded that the axioms of geometry are conventions, our choice among all possible conventions is guided by experimental facts, but it remains free and is limited only by the necessity of avoiding all contradiction." (263)

"Is Euclidian geometry true or is Riemann geometry true?" (264)

** What was Poincaré's answer? (264)

** "One geometry can not be more true than another; it can only be more *convenient*. Geometry is not true, it is advantageous." (264)

"Our concepts of space and time are also definitions, selected on the basis of their convenience in handling the facts. . . . The mystery of what is space and time may be made more understandable by this explanation, but now the burden of sustaining the order of the universe rests on 'facts.' What are facts?" (264)

"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." (264)

"Mathematics, he [Poincare] said, isn't merely a question of applying rules, any more than science. It doesn't merely make the most combinations possible according to certain fixed laws. . . . The true work of the inventor consists of choosing among these combinations so as to eliminate the useless ones, or rather, to avoid the trouble of making them, and the rules that must guide the choice are extremely fine and delicate. It's almost impossible to state them precisely; they must be felt rather than formulated." (267)

"It is the quest of this special classical beauty, the sense of harmony in the cosmos, which makes us *choose the facts most fitting to contribute to this harmony.*" (268)

"Poincare's contemporaries refused to acknowledge that facts are preselected because they thought that to do so would destroy the validity of scientific method. They presumed that 'preselected facts' meant that truth is 'whatever you like' and called his ideas conventionalism. They vigorously ignored the truth that their own 'principle of objectivity' is not itself an observable fact – and therefore by their own criteria should be put in a state of suspended animation." (268-269)

Chapter 23

** A bad dream? And why the different font? (273-274)

Chapter 24

"He looks up. 'What day is it?'

I tell him. He nods and writes it down.

Then I see him write, 'Dear Mom:'

Then he stares at the paper for a while.

Then he looks up. 'What should I say?'

I start to grin. I should have him write for an hour about one side of a coin." (277)

"I tell him getting stuck is the commonest trouble of all." (277)

** How will Chris know how to "Just pick out the best things."? (278)

"The book's no good to you now." (279)

"What you're up against is the great unknown, the void of all Western thought. You need some ideas, some hypotheses. Traditional scientific method, unfortunately, has never quite gotten around to saying exactly where to pick up more of these hypotheses. 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." (280)

"As Poincare would have said, there are an infinite number of facts about the motorcycle, and the right ones don't just dance up and introduce themselves." (281)

"The difference between a good mechanic and a bad one, like the difference between a good mathematician and a bad one, is precisely this ability to *select* the good facts from the bad ones on the basis of quality. He has to *care*! This is an ability about which formal traditional scientific method has nothing to say. It's long past time to take a closer look at this qualitative preselection of facts which has seemed so scrupulously ignored by those who make so much of these facts after they are 'observed.' I think that it will be found that a formal acknowledgment of the role of Quality in the scientific process doesn't destroy the empirical vision at all. It expands it, strengthens it and brings it far closer to actual scientific practice." (281-282)

** What's the narrator's point in saying: "It's two whole ways of *looking* at the train"? (283)

"Value is the predecessor of structure. . . . Our structured reality is preselected on the basis of value, and really to understand structure reality requires an understanding of the value source from which it's derived." (284)

"Reality isn't static anymore. It's not a set of ideas you have to either fight or resign yourself to. It's made up, in part, of ideas that are expected to grow as you grown, and as we all grow, century after century." (284)

"You have to have a sense of what's good. *That* is what carries you forward." (284)

Harry Truman? " 'We'll just try them . . . and if they don't work . . . why then we'll just try something else.'" (284)

"I keep talking wild theory, but it keeps somehow coming out stuff everybody knows, folklore." (285)

"It's this understanding of Quality as revealed by stuckness which so often makes self-taught mechanics so superior to institute-trained men who have learned how to handle everything except a new situation." (286)

"What your actual solution is is unimportant as long as it has Quality. . . . There's no predicting what's on that Quality track. The solutions are all simple - after you have arrived at them. But they're simple only when you know already what they are." (287)

Chapter 25

"But technology is simply the making of things and the making of things can't by its own nature be ugly or there would be no possibility for beauty in the arts, which also include the making of

things. Actually a root word of technology, *techné*, originally meant 'art.' The ancient Greeks never separated art from manufacture in their minds, and so never developed separate words for them." (289-290)

"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." (291)

"To arrive at this Quality requires a somewhat different procedure from the 'Step 1, Step 2, Step 3' instructions that accompany dualistic technology . . ." (292-293)

"But in scientific parlance the words for this absence of subject-object duality are scarce because scientific minds have shut themselves off from consciousness of this kind of understanding in the assumption of the formal dualistic scientific outlook." (296)

"So the thing to do when working on a motorcycle, as in any other task, is to cultivate the peace of mind which does not separate one's self from one's surroundings. When that is done successfully then everything else follows naturally. Peace of mind produces right values, right values produce right thoughts. Right thoughts produce right actions and right actions produce work which will be a material reflection for others to see of the serenity at the center of it all." (297)

Can't help the sports metaphor: Is that what it means to be "in the zone"?

"Sometimes, when thinking about this, I thought that the idea that one person's mind is accessible to another's is just a conversational illusion, just a figure of speech, an assumption that makes some kind of exchange between basically alien creatures seem plausible, and that really the relationship of one person to another is ultimately unknowable. The effort of fathoming what is in another's mind creates a distortion of what is seen." (299-300)

Chapter 26

Gumption? ". . . literally 'filled with *theos*' . . ." ? (303)

** What's wasting time got to do with "our limited culture viewpoint"? (303)

** **What gives you gumption?**

"If the Chautauqua gets into the actual details of fixing one individual machine the chances are overwhelming that it won't be your make and model and the information will be not only useless but dangerous, since information that fixes one model can sometimes wreck another." (304)

" . . . there's a school of mechanical thought which says I shouldn't *be* getting into a complex assembly I don't know anything about. I should have training or leave the job to a specialist."
(306)

** What are "internal gumption traps"? (310)

"The typical situation is that the motorcycle doesn't work. The facts are there but you don't see them. You're looking right at them, but they don't yet have enough *value*. This is what Phaedrus was talking about. Quality, value, *creates* the subjects and objects of the world. The facts do not exist until value has created them. If your values are rigid you can't learn really new facts."
(310)

**** Go back and re-read about sand piles if you don't get this :)**

** What's the point of the South Indian Monkey Trap? (312)

"If you have a high evaluation of yourself then your ability to recognize new facts is weakened. Your ego isolates you from the Quality reality. . . . There's no way to {*****} your way into looking good on a mechanical repair job, except with someone who doesn't know what you're doing." (314)

Can you connect that to Plato's criticism of rhetoric?

"When you make the mistakes yourself, you at least get the benefit of some education." (316)

**** Can you define *mu*?**

"Try to find a voltage representing one or zero when the power is off! . . . What's happened is that the power-off condition is part of a context larger than the context in which the one-zero states are considered universal." (320)

"It's the way you live that predisposes you to avoid the traps and see the right facts. You want to know how to paint a perfect painting? It's easy. Make yourself perfect and then just paint naturally. That's the way all the experts do it." (324-25)

"The real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself." (325)

-See next page-

Part IV

Chapter 27

** Another bad dream? **Different font again?** (337-339)

Chapter 28

" . . . When you travel a path and note that another path breaks away to one side at, say, a 30-degree angle, and then later another path branches away to the same side at a broader angle, say 45 degrees, and another path later at 90 degrees, you begin to understand that there's some point over there that all the paths lead to and that a lot of people have found it worthwhile to go that way, and you begin to wonder out of curiosity if perhaps that isn't the way you should go too." (343)

"It was apparent that the term 'Quality' was not within any one discipline unless that discipline was philosophy. . . .Quality lay not only outside any academic discipline, it lay outside the grasp of the methods of the entire Church of Reason." (344)

"The Chairman said, 'What is your substantive field?'

"Phaedrus said, 'English composition.'

"The Chairman bellowed, 'That is a methodological field!'" (346)

"Normally when you have a new idea to present in an academic environment you're supposed to be objective and disinterested in it." (354)

** **Why is that?**

** What game did the "majority of students" taking the Great Books courses probably play? Does that game get played at Clarkson? Maybe in UNIV 190? ☺(357)

** Mythos vs. logos? (358)

"In cultures such as the Chinese, where subject-predicate relationships are not rigidly defined by grammar, one finds a corresponding absence of rigid subject-object philosophy." (359) **So what?**

"The mythos is insane." (361) **Huh?**

"And in Aristotle and the ancient Greeks he believed he had found the villains who had so shaped the mythos as to cause us to accept this insanity as reality." (361)

Chapter 29

Why do you think the narrator takes the time to tell us about the 'quality' of the welding? (365)

** What's the key difference between "primary America" and "secondary America" for Pirsig? (366-367)

"Quality destroys objectivity every time." (367)

** How can the narrator think that's good?

"Reason was to be subordinate, logically, to Quality, and he was sure he would find the cause of its not being so back among the ancient Greeks, whose mythos had endowed our culture with the tendency underlying all the evil of our technology, the tendency *to do what is 'reasonable' even when it isn't any good*. That was the root of the whole thing. Right there. I said a long time ago that he was in pursuit of the ghost of reason. This is what I meant. Reason and Quality had become separated and in conflict with each other and Quality had been forced under and reason made supreme somewhere back then." (368)

"*Rhetoric is an art*, Aristotle began, *because it can be reduced to a rational system of order*." (369)

"Remember the description of the motorcycle given way back in South Dakota? The one which carefully enumerated all the motorcycle parts and functions? Recognize the similarity? Here, Phaedrus was convinced, was the originator of that style of discourse. For page after page Aristotle went on like this. Like some third-rate technical instructor, naming everything, showing the relationships among the things named, cleverly inventing an occasional new relationship among the things named, and then waiting for the bell so he can get on to repeat the lecture for the next class." (369-370)

"Did Aristotle really think his students would be better rhetoricians for having learned all these endless names and relationships?" (370)

" 'We are here to learn what *Aristotle* thinks! . . . When we wish to learn what you think we will assign a course in the subject.'" (371)

"Dialectic, eh?" (374)

"*Dialectic* generally means 'of the nature of the dialogue,' which is a conversation between two persons. Nowadays it means logical argumentation. It involves a technique of cross-examination, by which

truth is arrived at. It's the mode of discourse of Socrates in the *Dialogues* of Plato. Plato believed the dialectic was the sole method by which the truth was arrived at. The only one.

"That's why it's a fulcrum word." (375)

"Phaedrus wasn't insulted that dialectic had been brought down to the level of rhetoric. He was outraged that rhetoric had been brought down to the level of dialectic." (375-376)

"I think it was Coleridge who said everyone is either a Platonist or an Aristotelian." (377)

**** Which are you? Or are you a Sophist?**

"The first of the Platonic *Dialogues* assigned is the *Gorgias*, and Phaedrus has a sense of having arrived. This at last is where he wants to be." (377)

"Socrates is not using dialectic to understand rhetoric, he is using it to destroy it, or at least to bring it into disrepute, and so his questions are not real questions at all - they are just word-traps which Gorgias and his fellow rhetoricians fall into." (378)

". . . early humanists. They were teachers, but what they sought to teach was not principles, but beliefs of men. Their object was not any single absolute truth, but the improvement of men. All principles, all truths, are relative, they said. 'Man is the measure of all things.' These were the famous teachers of 'wisdom,' the Sophists of ancient Greece." (383)

"To Phaedrus, this backlight from the conflict between the Sophists and the Cosmologists adds an entirely new dimension to the *Dialogues* of Plato. Socrates is not just expounding noble ideas in a vacuum. He is in the middle of a war between those who think truth is absolute and those who think truth is relative. He is fighting that war with everything he has. The Sophists are the enemy." (383)

"The results of Socrates' martyrdom and Plato's unexcelled prose that followed are nothing less than the whole world of Western man as we know it." (383-384)

" '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 things. The *measure* of all things - it fits. And they taught rhetoric - that fits." (384)

**** Confused? Go back to the sand piles?**

**** Rhetoric is the art of "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas." (D.C. Bryant, 1953)**

"The one thing that doesn't fit what he says and what Plato said about the Sophists is their profession of teaching *virtue*. All accounts indicate this was absolutely central to their teaching, but how are you going to teach virtue if you teach the relativity of all ethical ideas?" (384)

"*Aretê* implies a respect for the wholeness or oneness of life, and a consequent dislike of specialization." (387)

** Thoreau again? What's he got to do with this? What's been lost? (387)

"The halo around the heads of Plato and Socrates is now gone." (388)

**** Why?**

"*Aretê* is dead and science, logic and the University as we know it today have been given their founding charter: to find and invent an endless proliferation of forms about the substantive elements of the world and call these forms knowledge, and transmit these forms to future generations as 'the system.'" (390)

"And rhetoric. Poor rhetoric, once 'learning' itself, now becomes reduced to the teaching of mannerisms and forms, Aristotelian forms, for writing, as if these mattered. Five spelling errors, Phaedrus remembered, *or* one error of sentence completeness, *or* three misplaced modifiers, *or* . . . it went on and on. And any of these was sufficient to inform a student that he did not know rhetoric. After all, that's what rhetoric is, isn't it? Of course, there's 'empty rhetoric,' that is, rhetoric that has emotional appeal without proper subservience to dialectical truth, but we don't want any of *that*, do we? That would make us like those liars and cheats and defilers of ancient Greece, the Sophists - remember *them*? We'll learn the Truth in our other academic courses, and then learn a little rhetoric so that we can write it nicely and impress our bosses

who will advance us to higher positions." (390)

Chapter 30

"Rhetoric, 1; Dialect, 0." (399)

"Of course it's an analogy. Everything is an analogy. But the dialecticians don't know that." (399)

** Remember "analogues"?

" 'You mean my *personal* opinion?' Phaedrus asks.

" 'No . . . let us say, Aristotle's opinion.' . . .

" 'As best I know, Aristotle's opinion is that dialectic comes before everything else.'" (400-401)

"Rhetoric, 2; Dialectic, 0." (401)

"He [the chairman] shouldn't have cut it off, Phaedrus thinks to himself. Were he a real Truth-seeker and not a propagandist for a particular point of view he would not. He might learn something." (401)

"Phaedrus would have asked, What evidence do we have that the dialectical question-and-answer method of arriving at truth comes before anything else? We have none whatsoever. And when the statement is isolated and itself subject to scrutiny it becomes patently ridiculous. Here is this dialectic, like Newton's law of gravity, just sitting by itself in the middle of nowhere, giving birth to the universe, hey? It's asinine." (401)

Chapter 31

Your turn – you write some notes. What is important here?

Chapter 32

" 'Is it hard?

" 'Not if you have the right attitudes. It's having the right attitudes that's hard.'" (422-423)

"Trials never end, of course. Unhappiness and misfortune are bound to

occur as long as people live, but there is a feeling now, that was not here before, and is not just on the surface of things, but penetrates all the way through: We've won it. It's going to get better now. You can sort of tell these things.'" (423)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) At the beginning of their trip, the narrator reports a conversation between himself and one of his traveling companions, John, in which the latter objects to the narrator's characterization of education as "mass hypnosis". Pressing his point further, the narrator puts forth an idealistic and disembodied view of human knowledge in which (e.g.) Newton's law of gravity is "nothing more than a human invention – like laws of logic, mathematics, and ghosts". What do you think (how do you feel?) about this argument? As you proceed with your reading, think about this (the above) episode from time to time. Why does this dialogue take place at the outset of the book, as opposed to somewhere in the middle or near the end of the trip? How is Pirsig preparing the reader for the book's future scenes? (*Has your answer changed at all from Part I?*)
- 2) In setting out the topic for his Chautauqua, the narrator introduces one of several strikingly strong visual-spatial/temporal metaphors that punctuate his narrative. He compares the then-current (circa 1970s) consciousness of his (our) culture to a stream that has gotten out of control and is overflowing its channels, causing destruction and havoc ... "There are eras of human history (he writes) in which the channels of thought were too deeply cut and no change was possible, and nothing new ever happened, and 'best' was a matter of dogma, but that is not the situation now. Now the stream of our common consciousness seems to be obliterating its own banks, losing its central direction and purpose . . . Some channel deepening seems to be called for" (p. 8).

Now, in 2020, we are reading these words in what some see as a culturally transformative moment. What is the present state of "our common consciousness"? Are we at a decisive turning point? Amid the fallout from national and international economic collapse, escalating violence, facing the specter of drastic climatological alteration and extreme local, regional, and global impacts, and the current political climate, it certainly seems arguable that we are living in a watershed moment. Can you relate to and explain this metaphor of the 'watershed moment'? What sorts of change is he referring to? What does he mean by "channel deepening"? Is the image compelling? Do you find merit (value) in his analysis?

- 3) As a writer of technical manuals, the narrator decries what he sees as extreme alienation in contemporary society. At one point, he focuses on the question of "what or who a person is" and "what a person does". He argues (among other things) that in our ideas about what it means to be a specifically human being are seriously confused and that in this state of affairs lie some clues to "what the hell has gone wrong with the twentieth century" (and 21st century). How does this concept strike you? Can you point to any

contemporary situations in which the concept of “person” has become seriously problematical? How does this issue relate to Pirsig’s classical/romantic dichotomy?

- 4) Despite his disclaimers, the title and theme of Pirsig’s book seem to reflect the author’s interest in Zen Buddhism (an ancient religious tradition that is notable, among other things, for its celebration of the oneness of the universe and all of life). Here we aim to bring the matter of who we are and what we do still closer to home: How do you feel about the quality of the relationship between who you are and what you do? Is “the person that you are” at one with the personal and social (e.g. academic/professional career) path that you are following? Explain why or why not. If not, what prevents you from feeling totally identified with what you are training to do for a living? Would you feel more or less satisfied, be a better or worse student/worker, if you did feel that connection more completely? How would you characterize your present “frame of mind” (optimistic or pessimistic)?
- 5) Repeatedly, Pirsig has his narrator dividing up human understanding and breaking it down into two categories: “romantic” and “classical”. Discuss the distinction between the two as you see it. How do you relate to this dichotomy? Are these best understood as attributes of persons or modes of response to situations? Give examples of any tendencies that make you think of yourself as either a classical or romantic person. Is there any sensible alternative to thinking about people in such either/or terms?
- 6) Who (what?) is “Phaedrus”? How does Pirsig have his narrator introduce and develop his character? Is he to be understood as the former or the latter’s former self (alter ego)? How do you know? Can we trust the narrator to offer a credibly valid and accurate picture of “Phaedrus” and his “insanity”? Does it matter either way? Why or why not?
- 7) What do you think of the narrator's description of his past and present relationship with his son Chris? Does Chris seem to you to be a particularly troubled boy? Or is he just a typical kid impatient with his father's behavior? Who do you think was a better father to Chris – Phaedrus or the narrator?
- 8) Discuss *ZMM*'s epigraph: *And what is good, Phaedrus, And what is not good -- Need we ask anyone to tell us these things?* How does this query resemble a Buddhist *koan* -- a paradoxical or nonsensical question that emphasizes the process of meditating on the question rather than the answer? Why do you think Pirsig chose this excerpt to introduce the book? (*Revisit your answer from Part I*)
- 9) How does the discussion of Phaedrus’s teaching style connect with what we read about education and with how you feel about education?
- 10) Why do you think the narrator refuses to complete the trek up the mountain, despite Chris's disappointment that they won't be reaching the top? Is the threat of a rock slide

real? Is he afraid to "meet" Phaedrus? Is he making a statement about ego relative to Zen philosophy? What is happening in the Chautauqua at this point in the book?

- 11) Pirsig introduces several philosophical concepts throughout the novel. Discuss what he means in exploring these concepts and how they relate to Pirsig's methods as well as to contemporary life. You may wish to consider subjectivity and objectivity, Quality, gumption, mythos and logos, mu, the Western dualistic mindset, and awareness.
- 12) Discuss the climactic scene -- a confrontation between Chris and the narrator that takes place on a foggy cliff overlooking the ocean. Where is Phaedrus? What does this scene reveal about all three characters? How does this scene change your interpretations of the events that have lead up to it? What is the significance of Chris and his father removing their helmets for the remainder of the journey?
- 13) An admirer of the *Dialogues* of Plato, Pirsig believes people learn by asking and answering questions. Discuss these questions:
 - Why are John and Sylvia unhappy with their life? How does the motorcycle trip change them?
 - Was Phaedrus insane?
 - What does Chris want? Does he get it?
 - Are there any divisions remaining in the narrator's life at the end of the novel?
- 14) Read "Why Every Entrepreneur Should Read 'Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance'" (Forbes Magazine, Dec. 16, 2012) (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/mahendraramsinghani/2012/12/16/why-every-entrepreneur-should-read-zen-and-the-art-of-motorcycle-maintenance/#3282583b3a01>). How do you feel about the claims the author makes? Can you connect with what he is saying?

Now it is your turn:

Create five topics of conversation that you would like to address from your reading of the novel. Present each of these in a multi-part question form. Provide answer focus points as well.

15)

16)

17)

18)

19)

-See next page-

20) The Final Question: “What is in mind is a sort of Chautauqua...that's the only name I can think of for it...like the traveling tent-show Chautauquas that used to move across America, this America, the one that we are now in, an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer. The Chautauquas were pushed aside by faster-paced radio, movies and TV, and it seems to me the change was not entirely an improvement. Perhaps because of these changes the stream of national consciousness moves faster now, and is broader, but it seems to run less deep. The old channels cannot contain it and in its search for new ones there seems to be growing havoc and destruction along its banks. In this Chautauqua I would like not to cut any new channels of consciousness but simply dig deeper into old ones that have become silted in with the debris of thoughts grown stale and platitudes too often repeated. "What's new?" is an interesting and broadening eternal question, but one which, if pursued exclusively, results only in an endless parade of trivia and fashion, the silt of tomorrow. I would like, instead, to be concerned with the question "What is best?," a question which cuts deeply rather than broadly, a question whose answers tend to move the silt downstream. There are eras of human history in which the channels of thought have been too deeply cut and no change was possible, and nothing new ever happened, and "best" was a matter of dogma, but that is not the situation now. Now the stream of our common consciousness seems to be obliterating its own banks, losing its central direction and purpose, flooding the lowlands, disconnecting and isolating the highlands and to no particular purpose other than the wasteful fulfillment of its own internal momentum. Some channel deepening seems called for” (7-8). Where do you think some channel deepening is necessary? Think long and hard on this one, as you will be pursuing it in more depth. Each member of the group needs to come to a consensus on this. Explain what and why and where you think this deepening may lead.

*Some questions originally from MIT Open Course Ware

