

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance Study Guide

**Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert
M. Pirsig**

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Contents

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2, 3 and 4.....	6
Chapter 5 and 6.....	8
Chapter 7.....	10
Chapter 8, 9, and 10.....	12
Chapter 11.....	14
Chapter 12.....	16
Chapter 13 and 14.....	18
Chapter 15.....	20
Chapter 16 and 17.....	22
Chapter 18.....	24
Chapter 19 and 20.....	26
Chapter 21, 22 and 23.....	28
Chapter 24.....	30
Chapter 25 and 26.....	31
Chapter 27 and 28.....	33
Chapter 29.....	35
Chapter 30.....	37
Chapter 31, 32 and 33.....	39
Characters.....	41
Objects/Places.....	43
Themes.....	45



Style.....47

Quotes.....49

Topics for Discussion.....51



Plot Summary

The novel, published in 1974, uses a long motorcycle trip to frame a prolonged exploration of the world of ideas, about life and how best to live it. It references perspectives from Western and Eastern Civilizations as it explores the central question of the how to pursue technology so that human life is enriched rather than degraded. Narrated in the first person, it incorporates a parallel presentation of trip details and an ongoing retrospective concerning dramatic events from the Narrator's past, creating rich symbolism and including numerous analogies reinforcing the overall theme of coming to terms with the mysteries of why we exist and how best to live.

The physical journey starts from Minneapolis, Minnesota and concludes near San Francisco, CA. Initially, the Narrator and his son, Chris, ride on one cycle, and a couple, the Sutherlands, ride on another. The Narrator represents someone who is relatively comfortable with technology, and the Sutherlands represent people who feel oppressed by it, but who, at the same time, are dependent on it; conflicted. They travel together northwest to Bozeman, Montana; an important location related to the Narrator's college teaching career and dramatic past. At that point, the Sutherlands return home, and the narrator and his son continue on alone after undertaking a hiking expedition in the mountains outside Bozeman. The hiking expedition includes significant explorations of the inner world of spiritual development and of the Narrator's difficult relationship with his son.

During all this traveling, the Narrator weaves together observations about life, the story of the struggles of a shadowy character called Phaedrus, and the day-to-day details of the trip. There is something of a mystery surrounding Phaedrus' connection to the Narrator. As the book unfolds, this mystery is resolved, and readers learn that Phaedrus is the name he gives to himself to represent his life before he had a nervous breakdown and underwent a radical psychiatric procedure called Annihilation ECS. The story of Phaedrus is a story within the overall story. The Narrator's difficult relationship with his son is another situation driving the book. Finally, a summing search for spiritual meaning in a technological age provides a channel uniting all these distinct currents.

The book resolves the various tensions introduced and exhaustively explored in its 406 pages divided into 32 chapters and organized into four parts corresponding to watershed moments in the ongoing interplay. At book's end, the Narrator embraces his past and assumes an integrated personality capable of facing life and his role as a father with optimism. On the philosophical level, the book concludes with a clear vision of how to spiritualize and integrate a scientific outlook with a more humanistic or Romantic outlook in the service of right living.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel, published in 1974, uses a long motorcycle trip to frame a prolonged exploration of the world of ideas about life and how best to live it. It references perspectives from Western and Eastern Civilizations as it explores the central question of the how to pursue technology so that human life is enriched rather than degraded. Narrated in the first person, it incorporates a parallel presentation of trip details and an ongoing retrospective concerning dramatic events from the Narrator's past, creating rich symbolism and including numerous analogies reinforcing the overall theme of coming to terms with the mysteries of why we exist and how best to live.

The book starts with the Narrator and his son, Chris, on one motorcycle and John Sutherland and his wife Sylvia on another riding northeast on a back road from Minneapolis toward the Dakotas, with Bozeman, Montana being their eventual goal. The Narrator remarks that traveling by motorcycle is unique in that it puts you in the scene rather than as a passive observer of the scene. The back road route establishes an indefinite time frame, a sense of 'hereness' and 'nowness' distinct from the endless day-to-day shallowness characteristic of the main highway routes. It's easier to notice sensations on such roads. The Narrator shares that he will be using the trip to develop a Chautauqua, a traveling tent-talk formerly common in America and intended to edify and entertain its audience. He is inspired to do this to get to the bottom of the disharmony that he has noted between his approach to motorcycle maintenance and the negative attitude John displays toward it. An incident showing John trying to get his cycle started by employing pointless and even counterproductive techniques illustrates the narrator's profound Chautauqua theme. Technology, far from being the death force it represents for John and Sylvia, is actually a manifestation of the Buddha, or Godhead. To ignore technology, therefore, is to ignore a significant dimension of what it is to be a functional human being.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter establishes who the Narrator is and the general format of how the book will proceed. Namely, it will be a travel account punctuated by philosophical discourses. It introduces the two principal characters, the narrator and his son, and two other important ones, John Sutherland and his wife, Sylvia, and provides an introductory sketch of the topical landscape that will be explored.



Chapter 2, 3 and 4

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 Summary

Traveling through the Central Plains into the Great Plains, the Narrator notices gathering storm clouds. This prompts a digression in which the Narrator tells about a trip with Chris to Canada during a warm front that resulted in a heavy rainstorm. They got soaked as the narrator forgot to dig a trench around the tent. They had cycle problems on that trip, and the Narrator illustrated the poor level of motorcycle-maintenance capability that he had at that time by relating that he aborted the trip, because he mistook being out of gas for a serious problem. He uses this story as a warning against making foolish, quick assumptions. Coming back to current trip time, the narrator shares that John informs him that they had missed a turn. They decide to continue on and to adjust their route accordingly. The Narrator notices that the engine is running hot, and that prompts another digression. This time, he describes taking his cycle to a shop as it was seizing up on him. The mechanics, whom he described as uncaring and incompetent, botched the job. Not only did they not fix the problem, they sheared a pin to boot. Their work was sloppy, they were in too much of a hurry, and they were listening to music instead of thinking. The narrator shares that writing and editing technical manuals is his current profession. The author summarizes what he learned from that bad shop experience as being that caring about what you are doing is essential to doing it right. The chapter ends with the group at Red River Valley.

Chapter 3 finds them at Breckenridge with the storm almost upon them, so they speed up to 95 mph to outrun it. Thunder and lightning intensify the threat. The Narrator alludes to having a memory of having been on this same road before, but curiously refers to the memory using 'he' instead of 'I.' This curious element continues when he is able to find a motel by intuition rather than signs in a nearby town. As they prepare to retire for the night, Chris introduces the topic of ghost stories. The narrator uses the topic to expound on scientific skepticism. When Chris informs them that he heard from Native American friends that ghosts were real, the narrator distinguishes between European and Indian ghosts and elaborates by exploring his theory of contextual thought. His point is that for Native Americans, ghosts are real because of the particular beliefs and practices that make up their world view. In the same way, believing in the laws of physics and logic amounts to believing in scientific ghosts in the sense that these laws are simply ways of thinking determined by a particular culture. He illustrates his intended point by exploring the discovery of gravity, arriving at the conclusion that all belief systems are equivalent in the sense that all are mental constructs. He asserts the primacy of mind and says that ghosts are everywhere. The chapter ends with the Narrator telling us that all his philosophical thoughts and musing are stolen from someone named Phaedrus, a kind of ghost with whom he had a deep connection.

In Chapter 4, the Narrator wakes early the next morning and goes over a list of things to take along on a motorcycle trip. It is a cold morning. After waking the rest of the party, the Narrator checks and adjusts his cycle, and then they are off. During the ride, the



narrator presents his personality theory of motorcycles and asserts that this is the real object of motorcycle maintenance. Depending on the quality of care given or the lack thereof, the cycle becomes a long-lasting friend or a cripple. When they get to Ellendale, they are freezing. They eat breakfast, after which John and Sylvia declare that they will not leave until it gets warmer. The Narrator thinks that their inability to deal with discomfort is inconsistent with their attitude toward technology. Heaters and air-conditioners, for instance, are products of technology. However, he realizes that taunting them for this would not be in any way productive. As they loiter in the restaurant, John changes into warm layers of clothes and clowns around as 'Chickenman.' Later, they ride on through prairie terrain and empty landscapes, toying with the idea of camping out that night.

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

This chapter develops a context for appreciating what the Narrator means when he speaks of the importance of motorcycle maintenance. It hints at what will later become one of the main points of the book: the critical importance of a caring and attentive attitude toward one's activities. Being ignorant, irresponsible and inattentive resulted in unpleasant outcomes for him in both of the digressions.

Chapter 3 introduces important dimensions of the Narrator's way of thinking. He is an extremely philosophical person. The ideas he presents concerning the nature of beliefs and the relative status of belief systems require the closest attention, and even then they are slippery. The chapter introduces the mystery of Phaedrus and his connection to the Narrator and creates the impression that Phaedrus will figure prominently in the rest of the book.

Chapter 4 grounds certain airy ideas in practical contexts. For instance, by presenting the list of things useful for taking along on a motorcycle trip, the narrator is illustrating the value of careful attentiveness. The general emphasis on the need for a caring attitude is particularized in respect to the category of motorcycles, too. Additionally, the mixed-up and contradictory attitudes exhibited by the Sutherlands regarding technology establish more dynamic tension begging for resolution, adding to the interest level of the narrative. By their irresponsible attitudes toward technology, they position themselves as passive victims. Really, they have no one to blame



Chapter 5 and 6

Chapter 5 and 6 Summary

Continuing, they approach the high plains. They stop for fuel at Hague and inquire about places to cross the Missouri River between Bismarck and Mobridge, only to learn that no such places exist. They decide to head south the 90 miles to Mobridge on a bad road. They rest at Herried, where the Narrator senses a change having to do with the thoughtless use of space in the town, calling it a Western town and intending no compliment thereby. At Mobridge, they cross the river and start out through reservation land. During this part of the ride, the Narrator describes John's way of seeing things as they are as opposed to what they mean and asserts that this is an important Chautauqua point. To illustrate this point, he relates how he had once tried to use a part of a beer can to repair John's bike, only to have John balk on the basis that such a tool had no place in repairing a BMW bike. This incident marked the end of the narrator's efforts to try to interest John in motorcycle maintenance. The Narrator goes on to characterize John as a drummer, not a thinker; someone who depended on grooving and who was representative of an artistic vision of life as opposed to scientific explanations of life. After this, the narrator notes a slumping of spirits. While they snack in some store, a drunken woman tries to get them to take her for a ride, but they resist that. They ride on and reach Lemmon, very tired. They camp outside of town, but have a struggle getting the camp set up in the fading light. Dinner is strained, and Chris, in particular, is in a sulky mood. This leads to an exchange with Sylvia that causes Chris to leave the camp. In his absence, the adults discuss his behavior. The Narrator tells them that Chris has been diagnosed with impending mental illness and that he has been resisting taking Chris for related treatment as he doesn't consider the caregivers to be 'kin.' The Narrator alludes to a ghost poem by Goethe that in many ways parallels the situation between him and Chris and ends with the child's death, startling Sylvia. Later, the narrator rebuffs Chris' attempt to engage him in conversation and feels guilty, because he hears Chris sobbing. Nonetheless, he justifies his coldness by ascribing it to his ignorance about what it was that Chris really needed. The chapter ends with the Narrator describing that night's restless dreams involving crazy Phaedrus calling to Chris.

In Chapter 6, they wake to a scorching day in the morning. The Narrator explores Phaedrus' world and shares that Phaedrus is a ghost as he was never given a proper burial. Chris continues in his sulky behavior manifesting as a refusal to eat. The Narrator encounters a problem adjusting his cycle chain and relates the problem to the Phaedrus situation, announcing a change of approach in his Chautauqua, a change involving a more personal lens concerning Phaedrus' wrestlings with the dichotomy of Classical and Romantic understanding. He starts by identifying Northern Europe as the source of the gender separation of masculine Classical and feminine Romantic traditions, with no attempt at unification. This wrestling ended up with Phaedrus being arrested and removed from his life roles. The travelers reach US 12 and stop for gas. The road becomes crowded and junky. The Narrator presents an analytical view of



motorcycles and equates Phaedrus with having been a poor surgeon attempting to use analytical thinking to unite the Classic and Romantic split.

Chapter 5 and 6 Analysis

This chapter establishes the mind set of the Sutherlands as representative of a totally Romantic viewpoint out of balance with what the narrator sees as an adequate approach to living, especially with reference to giving technology due attention. It also provides important information regarding Chris' troubled mental state and the vague response to it by the Narrator. This relationship serves important thematic purposes; Chris represents the next generation, or the future, and the Narrator is not dealing well with him. Goethe's poem captures something of how much is at stake for the Narrator and for Chris on this trip. There is need for some significant healing. The fact that Sylvia is startled when the poem ends with the child's death indicates that she is concerned with the Narrator's pessimistic mindset in this regard. The chapter lets readers in on how at sea the Narrator is with his parenting role, and by extension, with the future. His dream of Phaedrus calling to Chris provides more evidence that Phaedrus is intimately connected to the Narrator and his family in some mysterious way, and it suggests that Phaedrus is seeking to influence the future, too.

Chapter 6 continues to explore the connections among Chris, the Narrator, and Phaedrus. The narrator seems to have very specific information about the details of Phaedrus' life and thinking, suggesting a very personal connection. He also announces an intention to provide Phaedrus a proper burial, suggesting that there is something unresolved at play. The basic conflicts in Phaedrus' understanding seem quite similar to the thoughts that the Narrator entertains with respect to the split between Classic and Romantic understanding, which further leads readers to ponder the basis of their connection. By this point in the book, it seems quite clear that Phaedrus and the Narrator are, in plain language, one and the same. Whatever remains unresolved for Phaedrus remains unresolved for the Narrator. His remark at chapter's end suggests that he is intent on solving the spiritual problem that Phaedrus somehow botched.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 finds them heading toward Bowman on a hot day. They encounter an old stockman who used to have a cycle and converse with him. The Narrator is impressed with his demeanor. Riding on through the heat, the Narrator speaks of practicing mind control to counter the heat. He introduces a discussion of Phaedrus' knife. Using a handful of sand analogy, the Narrator attempts to describe the process involved in analytical thought, stressing the importance of the agent who is sorting the sand into piles. The Narrator observes that analysis kills, but simultaneously creates, resulting in a balance of death and birth continuously moving along. They pass through Marmarth and on into Montana. The Narrator shares that Phaedrus went insane and that in order to understand him correctly, it would be necessary to see what he saw. Phaedrus was pursuing the ghost of rationality to arrive at an understanding of life's purpose deeper than simply to live longer. The travelers arrive at Baker, and the heat is affecting the Narrator's cycle. He advises John to reduce speed to 50 mph, annoying both John and Sylvia. They complain, and the Narrator offers some thoughts about stamina. As they head off again into the inferno, he muses that he hadn't intended his remarks as a rebuke, but simply to point out that they were intensifying their suffering because of their focusing on the discomfort. He returns to the topic of Phaedrus and informs us the Phaedrus has an IQ of 170 and a tendency to examine things in laser beam fashion, leaving the job of general illumination to the narrator. This laser beam mentality made him a loner and a fanatic in his quest for the ghost of rationality. The Narrator remembers Phaedrus spending three days in the mountains without food, deeply immersed in thought, and having an encounter with a wolf that he mistook for a dog. The Narrator speaks of that wolf as representative of the animal courage necessary to overcome the shell of rationality. Then the Narrator digresses to a drunken memory related to Phaedrus' commitment to an insane asylum and presents some sketchy information referencing a radical procedure intended to give Phaedrus a new personality: Annihilation ECS. The Narrator has some vivid flashbacks inducing fear. The travelers enter a canyon and stop at a roadside rest area. The Narrator drinks some alkaline water. John and Sylvia are angry and mock the narrator about stamina. Resuming the ride, they climb into different terrain that eventually becomes meadows, and the sky promises welcome rain. It comes as they reach the summit and see a valley away and below them. The Narrator feels like a pioneer looking into the Promised Land. The chapter, and Part 1 of the book, comes to a close.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter includes enough clues to enable careful readers to infer with some confidence that Phaedrus is who the Narrator was before undergoing the Annihilation ECS. It gives important information about Phaedrus' mental aptitudes and his basic personality type—a courageous lone wolf. He was brilliant and had a tendency to focus



intently on analytical particulars. The Narrator uses the sand analogy to impress upon readers that such a focus can get out of hand, in that there is a lot of sand out there and that to focus on a few small piles distorts one's general vision. The chapter also explains why the Narrator accesses much of his information through vivid flashbacks. He has undergone a procedure intended to blot out whatever obsession resulted in his mental breakdown, and the procedure, though successful for the most part in doing that, seems to be wearing off and allowing those obsessions to resurface as flashbacks. Additionally, the chapter develops another of the Narrator's current principles about what is needed in order to live life correctly, namely, mental stamina. One aspect of mental stamina involves being able to shift focus off whatever it is that is causing discomfort. In this case, that meant not dwelling on the oppressive heat, something the Sutherlands struggle with. The chapter's end indicates that a period of stressful struggle is ending, or at least, that better times are in sight.



Chapter 8, 9, and 10

Chapter 8, 9, and 10 Summary

Chapter 8 opens with them in Miles City, Montana at eight in the morning. They had arrived exhausted the previous day. The Narrator speaks of motorcycle maintenance being a completely rational enterprise. As he examines his dirty spark plugs, he feels as if he's in church performing a religious rite. He discusses the need for precision instruments to use for working on cycle parts and for working on concepts. This leads him to the idea of hierarchies and how they comprise systems and our present construction of systematic thought. He finds a loose fourth tappet and adjusts it. Then he speaks of Phaedrus' nearly photographic memory and its organizational style. Continuing his thoughts related to the environment at the school where Phaedrus had taught, he covers the list of 50 radical professors targeted by the school's president for dismissal. The chapter ends with the Narrator realizing that Phaedrus must have passed through this section of the journey at night, accounting for his lack of memory of the surroundings earlier in the day.

In Chapter 9, the Narrator discusses more aspects of the ghost of rationality as they travel along Yellowstone Valley. He examines inductive and deductive logic and how both are employed in the scientific method. He describes it as a huge bulldozer capable of accomplishing very impressive work with regard to objective scientific questions. He speaks of the need to keep a lab notebook to deal with the complexity involved in employing the scientific method. He goes on to review the stages of the method, identifying the critical roles of careful observation and precise thinking. An oncoming car pulling a trailer almost collides with the Narrator's cycle. After that, they eat junk food at a nearby town, and Sylvia shares that she thought the narrator had been hit.

In Chapter 10, the valley narrows as they proceed, and the Narrator returns to the discussion of Phaedrus' pursuit of the ghost of rationality. He presents an excerpt for one of Einstein's speeches and then some information concerning Phaedrus' college career, which started when he was only fifteen. He notes that Einstein had spoken of intuition and sympathetic understanding. Then he discusses how Phaedrus had concluded that hypotheses increased upon investigation using the scientific method, a phenomenon threatening the validity of the method itself. Somehow, this led Phaedrus to a consideration of Truth as a function of time. He saw the futility of pursuing external truth, confronted that, and resolved the situation. However, he flunked out of college at seventeen. The travelers reach Laurel and see mountains in the distance.

Chapter 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

This chapter illustrates the Narrator's caring and attentive approach to motorcycle maintenance. To the Narrator, caring for his motorcycle is a sacred activity related to his spiritual well-being. Furthermore, it elucidates important aspects of scientific thought. It



equates the hierarchies found in scientific thought with the precision instruments needed for effective motorcycle maintenance. Additionally, it creates more contexts regarding Phaedrus' experiences as a professor in Bozeman. It seems that there may have been some sort of confrontation with the status quo there. The fact that the Narrator notes the reason why he hadn't felt any inkling that Phaedrus had been on a recent section of road as being that Phaedrus had passed through at night indicates that the Narrator continues to monitor very carefully what is going on in his consciousness with regard to the influence of Phaedrus.

Chapter 9 digs into the details of the scientific method and establishes that the Narrator is very conversant with it and considers it a very powerful tool. The near miss provides an element of drama and intensity to the journey and conveys a sense of the vulnerability of all living creatures, including highly intelligent ones like the narrator. This juxtaposition of the seeming invulnerability of the scientific method and the moment-to-moment vulnerability of living creatures introduces an antidote to feeling too complacent because of having objective knowledge. No matter how knowledgeable you may be, you can still die at any moment.

Chapter 10 introduces some of the narrator's main concerns regarding correctly understanding the uses and limits of scientific thinking. It cannot solve the basic riddle of life. Indeed, it tends to create more uncertainty the more it is pursued. It provides more information regarding how Phaedrus had approached life, particularly with reference to his early education. It is clear that he was concerned with solving things that simply do not even distantly cloud the mental horizon of most people. His thinking was on a par with that of geniuses like Einstein. The mountains in view at chapter's end indicate that there will be more exploration of the world of high ideas coming.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The narrator awakes invigorated by the mountain air. They plan to go south through Yellowstone Park, using the Red Lodge route to get to Bozeman. The Narrator shares that Phaedrus was very familiar with this road, having used it to access backpacking areas in the Absaroka Range. The Narrator then presents the independent nature of Phaedrus' thoughts and his way of drifting while exploring lateral truth. He speaks of Phaedrus' army career, which took him to Korea and of a vivid memory involving a wall shining across a misty harbor that was somehow symbolic of a turning point. Phaedrus' letters from Korea indicated an explosion of enthusiasm for noting descriptive details. Another memory from the period involved a nod-yes answer-no confusion stemming from a session he had with some Koreans. Still another memory dealt with the empty compartment of the troop ship where he had read a treatise on Oriental philosophy. From that reading, Phaedrus developed an understanding of the theoretic/esthetic split of what was really one world. The Narrator characterized the Classic/Romantic split as resulting in two separate worlds. Phaedrus, influenced by his reading of F. S. C. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West* and especially by the idea of an undifferentiated aesthetic continuum spanning theoretics, returned to the university to study philosophy.

The travelers reach Red Lodge and preview their impending journey over one of the highest paved roads in the world. They embark and encounter a plethora of switchbacks. The Narrator states that philosophy occupies the highest echelon of the hierarchy of knowledge. When they reach the 11,000-foot summit, the Narrator adjusts the cycle's carburetor. Then they start down through beautiful terrain. The Narrator shares that analytical thought has led to technological domination. Then, mentioning that Phaedrus' school work suffered as a result of his preoccupation with this or that idea, the Narrator continues to chronicle the various philosophical positions that Phaedrus studied and grappled with, including Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the empiricism of David Hume, and the implications of Kant's reasoning related to Aristotle's ideas. Phaedrus' own attempts to unite Classic and Romantic understanding paralleled Kant's work in many respects, but, eventually, Phaedrus was repelled by the ugliness of the reasoning pervading the whole discursive terrain, especially when compared to Oriental freedom regarding that same terrain.

Chapter 11 Analysis

In this chapter, many particulars regarding Phaedrus' background become known. Readers learn that he read widely in both Eastern and Western philosophy and that he in many ways thought along the lines of Kant. However, it ultimately reveals that Phaedrus was not satisfied with his understanding of life and yearned for more clarity. The chapter includes an important symbol in the wall across the misty harbor in Korea.



Somehow, the beauty of this technological artifact spoke to something yearning to be discovered within him. The physical terrain featuring an 11,000-foot summit and sections replete with switchbacks reinforce the complex and challenging intellectual topics covered in the chapter. The thinkers mentioned in this chapter certainly occupy high intellectual terrain through which few paved roads have ever been created. The switchbacks represent the demanding mental focus needed to track the salient features of the discussions concerning the very nature of thought itself. Finally, the chapter reveals that the Narrator was attracted by something in Oriental philosophy that seemed to transcend the tortuous mental constructions characteristic of Western thinkers.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

They arrive at Cooke City in a good mood. However, the Narrator discusses how specialization has led to problems with human closeness and how his own emotional remoteness negatively affects his son. He presents a story told to Phaedrus by DeWeese, an abstract painter and former colleague at Bozeman, involving an operative during World War II who, because of a remarkable physical resemblance, had attempted to impersonate a German officer to gain vital intelligence. The operative was anxious the first time that he was in the presence of that officer's circle, and the Narrator speaks of how his relationship with Phaedrus is in many ways the same, especially with regard to being again in the presence of DeWeese. The travelers enter Yellowstone Park, and the Narrator mentions how Phaedrus had despised the park atmosphere for its artificiality. Then he digresses to discuss the ten years that Phaedrus spent at Benares Hindu University studying the doctrinal differences among Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism and remarked that Phaedrus had concluded these differences were not nearly as important as those among Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, noting especially that the differences among Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism had not led to holy wars.

The Narrator speaks of Phaedrus' admiration for the Upanishadic phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* asserting transcendence of the split between the seer and the seen. He mentions that Phaedrus had some trouble with the method intended to produce direct experience in that regard, namely, meditation. He shares that Phaedrus had not been able to accept the illusoriness of the phenomenal world to the extent of considering the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan as having no ultimate reality. He identifies this as the reason that Phaedrus returned to the Midwest, earned a journalism degree, married, lived in Nevada and Mexico, worked as an industrial advertising and science writer, had two children, bought a farm, and gave up chasing the ghost of rationality. The Narrator characterized this as a capitulation on Phaedrus' part resulting in a comfortable surface level of life, but masking an inner restlessness. The travelers leave the park at Gardiner, where they spend the night in cozy cabins built by an elderly man with evidence of care that makes a very favorable impression on the narrator.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The Narrator's discussion concerning his upcoming visit with DeWeese includes details that further establish that Phaedrus was who he was before the Annihilation ECS. The German operative story provides an insight into his conflicted mental state with regard to interacting with people who knew him before his operation. This chapter reveals another formative period in Phaedrus' life, namely, his ten years in India. This period provided another fact having a bearing on his struggle with the ghost of rationality, namely, the fact that Oriental spiritual traditions considered doctrinal differences among



themselves to be of slight importance as such doctrinal differences were based on words and concepts, not reality. Reality could not be reduced to words. The concept of Tat Tvam Asi encapsulating the sense of completeness and unity for which Phaedrus was so ardently striving provides a further push in the direction of unifying the split of consciousness into subject and object. However, the chapter also chronicles a temporary retreat by Phaedrus, because he was unable to reach a resolution to his spiritual angst. He gave up and busied himself with a conventional life.



Chapter 13 and 14

Chapter 13 and 14 Summary

As they near Bozeman, the Narrator experiences nervousness and a feeling of being haunted in a way similar to what an archeologist opening tombs might feel. He even thinks of turning back. He brings up memories of Phaedrus throwing up from tension. He goes on to develop Phaedrus' concept of the university as a Church of Reason, and speaks of the political tension present on campus during Phaedrus teaching days. He shares that Phaedrus had delivered a speech in defense of academic freedom in which Phaedrus had distinguished between professors viewed as employees of a corporation and professors viewed as keepers of the flame of truth. He characterizes Phaedrus' behavior as good in many ways, but as flawed by its fanatical intensity. He observes that the fanaticism masks a basic lack of faith in the very reason Phaedrus professed to be defending, likening him to a Jesuit defending the Catholic Church against the Reformation. As the travelers reach the main highway and head west, the Narrator regains his enthusiasm for visiting Bozeman.

Chapter 14 finds them arriving in Bozeman, which the Narrator characterizes as an anomalous town somewhat devoid of character. They travel on to the DeWeese's, who live at the edge of the forest at the foot of the mountains just outside of Bozeman. DeWeese greets and entertains them well. John is in his element, namely, making pleasant conversation. The narrator admits to being inept at the same. However, John's disrespectful familiarity with the narrator annoys DeWeese. Later, the Narrator, in the midst of a pensive reverie about Phaedrus, says aloud, "He saw too much." He realizes that this comment is completely without a context and feels that he is presenting himself as unstable. Still later, as he is helping Chris settle in, he is startled to hear of Chris' report of a conversation that he can't remember, and he attributes it to Chris' dreaming. Returning to talk with DeWeese, he explores the changes that have taken place at the school since he left. John redeems himself with DeWeese by complimenting the Narrator. The conversation evolves to include the Sutherlands and DeWeese's wife and takes a turn that allows the Narrator to expound on peace of mind being a critical factor in the success or failure of all endeavors. The chapter ends with the Narrator planning a trip into the mountains with Chris.

Chapter 13 and 14 Analysis

This chapter provides detailed information about Phaedrus' teaching career at Bozeman and about his struggles to be authentic in that role. It shows him to be a restless spirit trying to bury some deep insecurity beneath his involvement in championing academic freedom. However, his own concept of the university as the Church of Reason is suspect to his deeper intuitions. He understands that anything outside of objectively verifiable, reason-based content is not well understood or supported by the university concept. It illustrates the intensity of Phaedrus' restlessness and unresolved spiritual



perspective. The Narrator's discomfort with confronting his own difficult past reaches near climactic levels as he reviews in his mind many of the intense moments involved with that period of his life. Lastly, it illustrates his stamina through his regained enthusiasm at chapter's end. He is ready to confront his past with courage.

Chapter 14 explores the dynamics between several important characters. It reveals that DeWeese had held Phaedrus in high regard and that DeWeese was in many respects a person who had achieved something of the psychological stance being championed by the Narrator. The episode with Chris's report of an unremembered conversation suggests that the Narrator is experiencing some psychic movement with regard to his ongoing struggle to come to terms with his past and that the psychic movement is alarming him. It provides a forum for the Narrator to expound on the importance of peace of mind. It marks the final stage of the book's dealings with the Sutherlands and introduces the next major adventure in store for the Narrator and Chris, namely, the mountain climb.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

They enjoy two days at the DeWeese's with John and Sylvia, and then John and a worried Sylvia leave to return home. Her worry reinforces the idea that the Narrator is evincing some signs of being in the midst of an internal struggle. She worries because of that and about the fact that the Narrator is traveling with his young son and may not be in a state of mind to properly care for him. The Narrator takes his cycle for repairs and spends some related downtime walking around town. He ends up at the school, with Phaedrus memories dominating. The Narrator shares that Phaedrus experienced discomfort with the routine of teaching rhetoric. They enter the very building where Phaedrus taught. It is deserted, and Chris wants to leave. The Narrator sends him outside to wait for him, and then visits the classroom where he used to hold forth, experiencing pleasant memories associated with being in his own element and well received. A young woman who looks in and, seeming to recognize him, engages him in some exploratory questioning interrupts him. She is most probably a former student. When she learns that he is no longer teaching, she leaves flustered. On his own way out, the Narrator comes upon his old office. He's struck by the painting that he had put there as it represented for him the Church of Reason. A flood of memories pours over him. This is the very spot where his madness began. He remembers a teacher, Sarah, who had to travel through his office to get to hers, singing some song about Quality. He identifies this moment as the starting point for his obsessive investigation of the term, an investigation that took over his life and resulted in a nervous breakdown.

This memory is followed by his reflections concerning super-saturated solutions, and these reflections seem analogous to information overload. This memory seems to suggest that beyond a certain point, thinking can lead to distorted perceptions and counter-productive behaviors. Close on the heels of that, he remembers his conflicted state regarding how to teach rhetoric and sitting in his office until 3 AM thinking about the meaning of Quality. Defining Quality seemed necessary to Phaedrus, because he was teaching in the Church of Reason, and rationality required that all components worthy of discussion be definable. Yet, try as he might, he could not define Quality in any reasonable way. In fact, what he meant by Quality, some sort of resonant creative excellence implicit in the artifacts by which it was exemplified, seemed to be destroyed by definition. He shares that the next day, due to being too tired to engage in lecturing, he assigned his classes to write a paper on Quality. The chapter and Part II of the book end with his remarks on how difficult this assignment was for the students to pin down.

Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter situates the Narrator smack dab in the middle of his former self's surrounding of intense drama. It explains in detail how he experimented with teaching methods in order to create genuine inquiry into truth, and it conveys something of how



much he had invested in the process; the roots of his mania. The basic idea of the chapter is that the Narrator as Phaedrus had reached some kind of threshold in terms of his ability to sustain a role that did not speak to his inner integrity; he was impelled forward into the struggle to redefine his role so that he could live with his own conscience. The chapter establishes the intensity of his state of mind regarding the concept of Quality and its pivotal importance in infusing life with purpose and meaning. Furthermore, it frames the enigma presented by this elusive concept: although Quality seemed to Phaedrus to be obviously present and detectable in many aspects of life, it was impossible for him to capture what exactly it was in words: it defied definition, and, as such, seemed an irrational something beyond the scope of rational investigation. This was a big problem for Phaedrus because, at least on the surface of his personality, he was committed to rationality and was functioning as a teacher in an institution devoted to rationality. At the same time, something deep inside of him seemed to be responding to forces outside the pale of rationality and definition.



Chapter 16 and 17

Chapter 16 and 17 Summary

The chapter begins with the Narrator and Chris starting on their hike into the mountains outside the DeWeese's. The Narrator mentions the conventional use of mountain climbing to represent spiritual quests, suggesting thereby that the climb he will be describing has spiritual import. He then begins an exposition of Phaedrus' exploration of the concept of Quality. Phase 1 had no rigid definition of Quality and persisted for most of his teaching days. He presented this as a productive period. Phase 2 featured a rigid definition for Quality, destroyed his life, and led to electrodes being implanted in his head. Examining Phase 1 in more detail, the Narrator reveals that it included creative experimentation with teaching methods intended to stimulate genuine engagement of the students in the pursuit of Quality work and thought. Receptivity and attentiveness were the hallmarks of this phase. The Narrator describes how foreign and threatening this genuine atmosphere was for most students. In their schooling experience, learning involved memorizing truths handed down to them. Now they were being asked to struggle with concepts and material according to their own lights, to think for themselves. They were being asked to establish intrinsic measures for their products and to proceed according to those measures. After these remarks, he shares that he has a plan to reach the snow summit in three days. Returning to his exploration of the past, he provides more exposition of the results of his teaching experiments, including a section dealing with his demonstration paper covering what he saw as natural and desirable consequences of implementing his vision of non-graded classes. Namely, it explored the likelihood that some fit students would connect with the curriculum in Quality ways, while those who for whatever reason were not so fit would simply drop away and find an environment more suited to their natures. Returning to his hiking plan, he mentions that he had planned for an escape route in case Chris had proved unable to proceed after two days. Then he notes that the trail disappears; this fact suggests that the spiritual territory beyond this point in the climb is uncharted and will require constant attentiveness. The chapter ends with his remarks concerning Phaedrus' frustration with being unable to resolve his conflict between wanting to provide his students with some goal structure and his intention to avoid imposing conformity on them as a result.

As Chapter 17 begins, Chris struggles on the hike. While they rest, the Narrator tells him a story about encountering a moose while camping with his mother and cuts him some cheese slices. When they resume hiking, the Narrator cautions Chris to pace himself and offers some remarks regarding how best to climb mountains. Then he returns to the topic of the paper that Phaedrus had assigned his students, "What is Quality in Thought and Statement?" He speaks of Phaedrus impressing on his students that he was trying to instigate a genuine search for truth. This ended with Phaedrus defining Quality as something recognized by a non-thinking process and, therefore, not subject to definition, but nonetheless recognizable as artifact. From there, Phaedrus confronted the question of how to get to it. This led to a genuine study of rhetorical



principles and options under the controlling umbrella of each student's unique creative style. Again referencing the hike, the Narrator notes that Chris is resisting his advice about pacing himself, a bad omen. The Narrator attributes Chris' approach to an egotistic competitive ethos derived from his experiences at a YMCA camp. This reminds the Narrator of Phaedrus' experience of a failed pilgrimage to Mt. Kailas in India due to his similarly flawed, egoistic approach centered on distant and external goals.

Chapter 16 and 17 Analysis

This chapter establishes parallels between the physical mountain climb with Chris and Phaedrus' story, both personal and intense topics for the Narrator. It proceeds with more details of how Phaedrus operated at Bozeman: non-graded assignments and an investigation in Quality being the main issues. In general, the chapter creates an atmosphere of intensity and challenge. Both on the physical level of the hike and on the personal and interpersonal levels of his Phaedrus past and his Narrator present, the Narrator is dealing with and describing challenging issues not commonly dealt with. The fact that the trail disappears conveys the idea that he will have to be fully engaged in the present moment in order to get where he wants to go on the mountain. In his coming to terms with his past and with his relationship with his son; there is nothing for him to depend on. He must struggle.

Chapter 17 moves the parallels along and features considerable elaboration on his exploration of Quality. He notes details of what he had previously described as the productive period of that exploration. He makes many observations related to assuming a proper attitude toward mountain climbing, using Chris' somewhat dysfunctional approach and his attempts to correct Chris to reinforce his points. He identifies egotism as the main source of problems with climbing, and, since the climb represents spiritual seeking, this suggests that egotism is the main source of problems there, too. He implies that egotism blinds one to Quality, in essence destroying it. In this chapter, his relationship with Chris shares center stage. In some ways, when he describes the difficulties Chris is experiencing on the hike, he is at the same time making points about the defects in Phaedrus' efforts to solve his spiritual problems regarding his teaching role and Quality, especially with regard to the destructive influence of egotism.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The chapter begins with the Narrator rejoining an examination of Phaedrus' dealings with Quality. By not defining it, Phaedrus had removed it from any intellectual field of study. Esthetics, on the other hand, which Phaedrus had resisted, provided him with an impetus to study philosophy rather than the narrower field of rhetoric. Returning to the hike circumstances, the Narrator notes that Chris falls down and angers the Narrator by asserting that he no longer cares about the hike at all. It is no longer any fun. Returning to the Quality investigation, the Narrator traces how Phaedrus used Realism to justify Quality. This involved Phaedrus' discovery that if Quality were removed from consideration in all sensory and realistic contexts of life, only pure rationality would remain unchanged. All other modalities of experience, and especially those connected with any enriching or soulful aspects would be negated. Phaedrus considered that a curious circumstance worthy of further thought.

The Narrator elaborates the chain of thought-crystallization that Phaedrus experienced. First, he realized that absence of quality resulted in pure squareness utterly lacking mystery, wonder, and any element of soul awareness. Next, he realized that soul and Quality must be the same. Finally, he realized that intellectual pride was the barrier to accepting Quality's pivotal role in leading a fulfilling life. Again referencing the hike, the Narrator notes that Chris, who has fallen far behind, falls and hurts his ankle, resulting in the Narrator's being annoyed. He conveys his annoyance by his suggestion that he do all the pack lugging relay-style; and, though Chris goes along with the plan, the Narrator feels bad to have thus shamed him. The tension continues, resulting in lateral drift of the relationship, meaning that there was a lot happening on sub-conscious levels, but whatever that was, it was not resulting in material that the conscious mind could access or communicate about. Finally, the Narrator breaks through by suggesting a plan of re-adjusting the loads in the packs so that Chris can participate in the burdens. They proceed and encounter an especially steep section. The Narrator makes some summary remarks concerning his and Phaedrus' divergence regarding their dealings with Quality. He intends to stay with undefined Quality, trusting that to be the stance that will result in good outcomes, whereas Phaedrus, stuck in egotism, continued chasing the ghost of rationality to the end and was freed only when his Quality-blind personality disintegrated. The Narrator remarks that real understanding consists of capturing the system to fulfill one's destiny. Capturing the system relates to understanding how to gain the attentive receptivity through which Quality messages about how to live and respond to situations could be intuited. He means to contrast this with Phaedrus' defective approach intent simply on defining the system to prove that it could be done: a product of intellectual pride.

As they continue to climb, the Narrator adjusts his pace to counter Chris' too cocky attitude, resulting in soon pitching camp for the night. It rains, and this time they have prepared so that they do not get soaked. The Narrator attempts to read out passages



from Thoreau, but notices that they don't fit the current paradigm. They enjoy a meal of bullion and pork and beans. Chris questions his dad about why he is always so absorbed in thought, and then they fade to sleep.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter continues to explore significant aspects of the parallel journeys. The Narrator takes some pains to distinguish his current mindset from that of Phaedrus. He establishes thereby that a life in tune with Quality (which he clearly supposes his to be) is not accessible through an egotistic mindset (which he has come to recognize was Phaedrus' downfall). The technique of describing Chris' progress on the hike to illustrate the defects in Phaedrus' attempts to come to terms with his life role continues. Both are depicted as being under the sway of unproductive egotism. On the positive side, the Narrator provides information supporting the notions that adjustments and constant vigilance are requisite to success in both mountain climbing and personal culture. These adjustments amount to being receptive of and responsive to the signals regarding the external circumstances and internal states having a bearing on establishing a sustainable pace instead of rigidly persisting in an egotistic crusade oblivious to maintaining a balanced and sustainable pace. In this chapter, the narrative has reached a rich and intense synthesis of many thematic strands developed earlier in the book. The basic resolution to the Quality dilemma has been pretty clearly suggested.



Chapter 19 and 20

Chapter 19 and 20 Summary

The Narrator dreams of a white painted room with a glass door with him on one side and his family on the other. Family faces reveal varying levels of distress. Chris beckons him to open the door, but the Narrator turns away instead. It is a recurrent and disturbing dream. When he awakes, he hears from Chris that they had been talking until almost three in the morning. This perplexes him, and he begins to wonder if Chris is dreaming or if he is starting to lose his mind to the ghost of Phaedrus. They resume the hike before breakfasting as the Narrator had neglected to plan for a water source. He rejoins the discussion of Phaedrus and Quality, the metaphysical stage. This involved Phaedrus surrendering to the egoistic impulse to continue trying to solve the dilemma of whether Quality existed in things or was an entirely subjective phenomenon, leading him through an abstruse maze of reasoning to the conclusion that Quality pre-existed all subject-object experiences and was constantly being dimly revealed through them. This represented a resolution and a breakthrough for him. The hike provides a vista of blue sky, and the Narrator and Chris race to the summit.

In Chapter 20, the Narrator, after napping awhile, awakes to ponder whether he told Chris in a dream that he would see him, or that he would meet him, at the top of the mountain. He hears some falling rock and shares that he is disturbed by Chris' account of the events of the previous night. They snack, and Chris brings up the topic of the Narrator's preoccupation with thoughts. This leads the conversation back to the previous night, and Chris observes that the Narrator had spoken like Phaedrus. The Narrator again hears falling rocks, and they talk about the dangerous powerful forces all around them on the mountain, including a reference to some event that had buried nineteen people alive. The Narrator, disturbed by the uncertainty surrounding the events of the previous night and the falling rocks, decides to abort the summit mission and head back down. He is spooked and feels lucky to be alive. Heading down, he proposes that he will diverge from Phaedrus and develop his own ideas, ideas more consistent with Zen in the valleys rather than revelations on the mountaintops. He finds himself galloping down; Chris follows, obviously somewhat disappointed. He summarizes the final stage of Phaedrus' crystallization. Phaedrus had expected his metaphysical explorations to free him from his spiritual malaise; instead, his insights led him to the brink of insanity and beyond into total personality disintegration under an avalanche of awareness. His personality structure was not grounded enough in Quality living to withstand the implications of what he had come to understand about it, so it had to crumble in order for a new personality to grow from the ruins.

Chapter 19 and 20 Analysis

This chapter foreshadows the struggle that the Narrator will later face head on, namely, incorporating his Phaedrus past into his current personality. He is deeply distrustful of



the Phaedrus element; the basis of this distrust seems clearly to be the overwhelming and unmanageable power that Phaedrus' approach had unleashed. Nonetheless, the chapter articulates a degree of success that Phaedrus achieved in his struggle to explain spirituality rationally. He was able to satisfy his intellect about many things that had previously puzzled him. The underlying point, however, remains that intellectual understanding is not the same thing as peace of mind. The methods that Phaedrus had used to get to intellectual resolution had created serious imbalances in his overall energy systems, and that basic fact pointed to trouble. The chapter presents is a parallel success on the hike; they have reached a tentative summit. Though they are not at the top, they have arrived at a place from which they can see many things that have previously been obscured by trees and surrounding hills.

Chapter 20 illustrates that the Narrator has learned to be more cautious in his approach to life. He heeds warnings and values survival, something that Phaedrus had not done. The rockfalls he hears on the mountain represent warnings, and going down the mountain to escape from the danger zone represents heeding the warnings. He is anxious to get back down to safer surroundings, both physically and psychologically. Phaedrus had climbed on up and been destroyed by an avalanche of awareness. He had found a kind of peace, but at a tremendous cost. The Narrator asserts that it makes more sense to him to pursue spiritual understanding in less dramatic, everyday contexts and in ways that promoted relationships and sustainable living.



Chapter 21, 22 and 23

Chapter 21, 22 and 23 Summary

Farther down the mountain, they stop for a snack. Chris observes that the Narrator is not very brave. He agrees, but says that he's smart. They rest, and Chris offers to carry more of the load. The Narrator remarks that metaphysical thinking is a barrier to spiritual understanding and that assimilating irrational aspects of experience is much needed in the 20th century. They must bushwhack their way through some thick brush for a while. The narrator asserts that Quality can unite religion and science and that Quality and Godhead can be similarly grounded in the roots of the word 'good.' He insists that value-free science is an evil that has to go. They hike out of the mountains and hitch a ride into Bozeman, spending the night in a hotel.

Chapter 22 begins the following day with them taking leave of the DeWeese's. Then, the Narrator describes the similarities between Phaedrus and Jules Henri Poincare, "the most eminent scientific man of his generation." From there, he discusses various developments in theoretical mathematics that destroyed the notion of absolute mathematical certainty. They travel through Three Forks and Butte before crossing over the Continental Divide. They pass through Anaconda, Phillipsburg, and Maxville before coming to rest at Hall. The Narrator traces how Poincare's ideas regarding the nature of consciousness and discoveries that Poincare made resembled those of Phaedrus, noting that Poincare had stopped short of Phaedrus' assertion that Quality transcended the subject/object split. They arrive in Missoula, continue southwest to Lolo Pass, and there converse with a motorcycle couple who seemed to have been quite experienced in traveling. They camped for the night on a logging road. The Narrator rebuffs an attempt at conversation by Chris, creating a rift that results in them going to sleep without further interaction. Chapter 23 features a dreamscape involving a sarcophagus, a shadow figure, the bottom of the ocean, and walking alone through the ruins of a city.

Chapter 21, 22 and 23 Analysis

The chapter continues to elaborate on the reasons why the Narrator descended and provides some summative comments regarding what the Narrator has learned from his journey to this point. Metaphysical thinking can be dangerous to spiritual health, just as climbing near rockslides and avalanche areas jeopardizes physical survival. Better to live thoughtfully according to clear notions of what is good. Better to function in surrounding relatively free from physical danger. Quality should inform every aspect of living, including science. Quality and intellectual pride are mutually exclusive, and Quality will destroy intellectual pride one way or another. Value-free science, being extremely powerful and based on intellectual pride, is a very great threat to life and, as such, needs to be abandoned.



Chapter 22 begins a more detailed exposition of Phaedrus' final disintegration. It references important developments in theoretical mathematics and scientific thought that tended to destroy the foundations of absolute certainty that had characterized the thinking about those categories. This introduction of uncertainty was in tune with the Phaedrus' thought patterns and showed that there was no basis for the intellectual pride that had characterized the attitude of those espousing value-free scientific viewpoints. This was a deeply unsettling development for those who had depended on that certainty to the exclusion of developing any other life foundations. The chapter also initiates the final leg of the Narrator and Chris' journey to something undefined, yet clearly driving them onward. Tension between the Narrator and Chris indicates that there are unresolved tensions still at play.

The dream in Chapter 23 introduces several symbols related to the ongoing tension among the Narrator, Phaedrus, and Chris. The Narrator has alluded to himself indirectly as an archaeologist opening a tomb, and a sarcophagus is found in tombs. Inside the sarcophagus, Phaedrus is biding his time before springing again to life. The shadow figure is unidentifiable, but clearly related intimately with the Narrator. The bottom of the ocean and the ruins of a city reference vast and deep matters and first and last things. Overall, this dream is suggestive of the mysterious mix of influences swirling around in the Narrator's conscience as he continues to grapple with coming to terms with his life and responsibilities.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The Narrator awakes from last chapter's dream and does some exercises, all the while repeating the word 'good.' He remarks that "caring and quality are internal and external aspects of the same thing." Then he links Phaedrus' pursuit of a technological meaning of Quality to his attempt to resolve the problem of technological hopelessness and follows that up with a summary of the philosophical terrain covered so far, ending by asserting his preference for down-to-Earth contexts over mountaintop contexts. This means that the Narrator has learned to value a balanced approach in his pursuit of spiritual meaning, an approach that pertains to and nurtures his everyday involvements and relationships. They eat breakfast, during which Chris attempts to write to his mom. At first he is stuck, but then brainstorms for three pages. This occasions remarks from the Narrator concerning what to do about stuckness, using what to do about a sheared screw as an example.

Later, they stop at a rest stop and Chris takes a hike. The Narrator presents his notion that facts used to form hypotheses should be selected based on careful attentiveness rather than objective disinterest. He presents some ideas about Classic and Romantic Quality through an analogy of a 120-box car train. Being stuck presents an opportunity to cultivate a beginner's mind, an egoless acceptance of stuckness leading to productive, solution-based thoughts. Meanwhile, they pass through surroundings having industrial buildings softened by random spontaneity, the effects of weathering and use. They pass through Grangeville, Idaho and proceed down a canyon road descending thousands of feet in hairpin turns.

Chapter 24 Analysis

This chapter deals with how to get unstuck. It uses a concrete example, the sheared screw, to represent any kind of stuckness, including abstract and psychological varieties. The basic message is that an attentive receptivity is to be cultivated. This practice is uncomfortable at first, but with practice and with successful experiences of what this attentive receptivity brings, it becomes an accepted and welcome modality leading to useful results. Chris' experience with letter writing reinforces the basic concept. The train analogy provides a simple aid to conceptualizing the Narrator's summative ideas regarding synthesizing Classic and Romantic understanding so that both support a Quality life.



Chapter 25 and 26

Chapter 25 and 26 Summary

The Narrator notes the ugliness of technological artifacts produced by technicians using traditional reason. These artifacts do not flow from a Quality process. Both the products and the technicians involved are degraded by this kind of value-free process. They arrive in White Bird and then follow the Salmon River in heavy, fast-moving traffic. The Narrator informs us that technology originally meant art, and that the ugliness of modern technology stems from the uncaring attitude of the producers of such. Opposed to this, the Narrator presents an example of Quality technology: the wall in Korea; he attributes it to the state of mind of its producers. He then elaborates on the importance of self-culture for establishing any kind of Quality in life. They arrive in Riggins and onward through a forested road to Dew Meadows, Tamarack, and then down into dry sandy country. The Narrator promises to take up things that help and hinder Quality in tomorrow's Chautauqua. He notes feeling lonely and isolated due to the landscape. They stop at an abandoned schoolyard where he changes oil, plans for dinner, and decides where to camp. They eat at Cambridge and camp at Brownlee Campground. Anticipating reaching Oregon tomorrow, the Narrator ends the chapter musing about interpersonal communications, using his experiences with his son to illustrate his points.

Chapter 26 begins with the next morning being cold. The Narrator expresses appreciation for the Quality of his cycle and then wakes his son, reciting the opening quatrain of *The Rubaiyat*. They ride down the canyon through dry desert air and cross a dam before arriving in high, semi-desert country. This is Oregon, and it reminds the Narrator of Rajasthan in India. For some reason, the *Rubaiyat* continues to rumble through his head. Chris has an episode of diarrhea, so they clean up by a stream. The Narrator remarks that instead of the weakening ideas suggested by the *Rubaiyat*, modern people were most in need of gumption and suggested that fishing trips were good for developing it. He identifies it as needed in repairing motorcycles. He likens it to psychic gasoline and stresses that it must be guarded from gumption traps. They near Baker. The Narrator speaks of Gumptionology 101 and suggests various techniques for coping with challenges to gumption. They pass through Baker and then through a forested mountain pass before arriving again in desert surroundings. The Narrator covers the various setbacks that threaten gumption and suggests what to do about them. They get fuel in Unity. The author summarizes gumption traps and assigns them to three categories: value traps, truth traps, and muscle traps.

Chapter 25 and 26 Analysis

This chapter begins to weave together many thematic strands into what will be the resolution of the major tensions introduced in the book. Beginning with the fact that technology originally meant something far different and more positive than into what it has degenerated, the chapter confronts some of the losses resultant from humanity's



distorted and unbalanced approach to life, particularly with reference to loneliness and poor interpersonal communications. By presenting these bad results, he establishes the need for a revolution in humanity's approach to technology.

Chapter 26 suggests many proactive attitudes and behaviors to embrace in order to live a rich and satisfying life. It is in some ways an antidote for depression and escapism. The Rubaiyat expresses many sentiments that lead one away from a belief in the value of rigorous struggle, and the Narrator thinks that indulging in such sentiments makes it difficult to face the challenges of life effectively. Without strength of mind, life becomes more and more difficult. Embracing attitudes conducive to developing mental stamina, therefore, is an important habit to develop. The way they deal with Chris' diarrhea illustrates the point. Instead of wasting mental energy fussing about it, the Narrator proceeds with simple, practical steps for getting cleaned up and back on the journey.



Chapter 27 and 28

Chapter 27 and 28 Summary

The Narrator continues his exposition of gumption problems. He opens with value rigidity. They eat in Prairie City, and Chris spends some time writing his letter to his mom while the Narrator ponders his dream about the door between him and Chris. Ego traps are next in line for the narrator's remarks, followed by anxiety, boredom, and impatience. They arrive in Dayville and fuel up at a station where they are attended to by the owner of a station across the street from the one they're using. They establish an acquaintance and end up spending some time napping there, during which the Narrator observes the now-retired station attendant and the one who had helped them conversing while rocking away in rocking chairs. He is impressed with their ability to have a quality conversation. They resume their journey, and the Narrator speaks of truth traps. At Mitchell, they get a milkshake and experience a waning of energy, leading the narrator to discuss psychomotor traps. The Narrator summarizes these topics as being intended to stimulate right living. Through right living, gumption traps are eliminated. At Prineville Junction, they experience a sense of nothingness. There is a general lack of Quality consciousness evident everywhere that the Narrator attributes to West Coast consciousness, a kind of random surliness and provincial ownership gone wild. A rude driver harasses them as they proceed on Highway 97 to Bend. They eat there in an adequate, but impersonal, restaurant and camp on extremely dusty ground. They had traveled 325 miles and quickly slept, marking the chapter's end and the end of Part III of the book.

In Chapter 28, the Narrator recounts a dream in which he is calling the shadow lurking by the door to show itself while Chris peers through the door with a pleading expression on his face. This situation escalates until the Narrator lunges at the figure and attempts to strangle it, catching a glimpse of its face. The dream ends when Chris wakes him up. Chris is crying, shook up as he thought that the Narrator had threatened to kill him in the dream. The Narrator, shaken by what he had seen in the dream, tries to comfort Chris by saying it was all a nightmare. The Narrator reveals to readers that it was his own face that he had seen, and he thinks that indicates that Phaedrus is waking up to take over his consciousness again. This makes him very apprehensive about the future. Phaedrus in control means madness for him and danger for Chris.

Chapter 27 and 28 Analysis

The chapter continues to present advice on right living by exploring several more categories of wrong thinking, and it also presents details of their physical journey that show the results of thoughtless and/or wrong-headed living. The sense of unfinished business between the Narrator and Chris and between the Narrator and his past continues to percolate, creating unrest and an expectation that these matters are building up to some sort of climax.



Chapter 28 brings the Narrator's anxiety regarding being possessed by Phaedrus to a boiling point. He fears for his sanity and is very unsettled about how to deal with Chris. The control that the Narrator exerted over his past and that provided the basis for his Chautauqua plan is slipping away, and the Narrator's spiritual unrest is about to break out in unpredictable ways. Instead of resulting in a proper burial for Phaedrus, the Chautauqua journey seems to have revitalized him.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The chapter starts with a flashback in which we find Phaedrus in a very disoriented state driving around Bozeman with Chris looking for the bunk bedders. They flounder for hours before arriving home to a furious wife and mother. The Narrator reveals his plan to head toward San Francisco, put Chris on a bus home, and check into a hospital. He later decides to skip that last step because of its futility. In the meantime, he plans to keep going and hope for improvement. Before they take off, he exercises and tunes his cycle.

At this point, he decides to tell the rest of Phaedrus' story. This involves an exploration of Greek philosophy through the Analysis of Ideas and Study of Methods program at the University of Chicago. Before delving into many details, they head off, stopping in La Pine for breakfast. Chris questions the Narrator about the purpose for the trip, and he answers that it is simply a vacation. Chris is not satisfied with that, but lets it go. The Narrator realizes that his lying is destructive to his relationship with Chris and decides to be more forthcoming. He starts by planning to tell Chris that the trip is the highest Quality thing that he can think of to do right now, but realizes that Chris would not be able to appreciate what that meant. He intends to speak plainly to him in the near future.

The Narrator returns to the topic of Phaedrus at the University of Chicago. He presents a detailed account of the initial stages of that involvement and its considerable vagaries and difficulties. They arrive at Crater Lake, where the Narrator observes that it would seem more authentic if there were some beer cans littering the park. Chris struggles with the purpose of their visit, causing a scene noticed by nearby tourists. The Narrator discusses the dynamics at the University of Chicago that influenced Phaedrus' experience there. He then explains in considerable detail the course of events that led to Phaedrus being identified by some key professors as a person likely to prove troublesome. They rejoin Highway 97 and travel to Klamath Falls, stopping at a roadside greasy spoon for burgers and beer. The Narrator remarks that it reminds him of Chicago in that long-ago summer. He turns again to that discussion and reveals more details of his struggles there. They turn west from Klamath Falls and head toward Medford, stopping among the Douglas Firs, where Chris takes a walk while the Narrator muses about the concept of mythos and its relation to questions of sanity and insanity.

They travel over the summit and head into the Rogue Valley, a country that pleases the Narrator. The Narrator remarks that the mythos might actually be the insane dimension, rather than Phaedrus. They pass through Medford and head toward Grants Pass on Highway 5. There, the cycle's chain guard gets caught in the chain and torn up. They will have to lie up until it gets fixed. They find a motel and unwind.



Chapter 29 Analysis

This chapter gives more details of Phaedrus' story and more details of their trip toward San Francisco. There are complexities and good and bad things mixed together in both contexts. In general, there is tension and uncertainty in both arenas. However, the Narrator's consideration that the mythos might be insane instead of Phaedrus seems to indicate a shift in the Narrator's stance with regard to Phaedrus. It's a shift in the direction of acceptance rather than fear. If Phaedrus' realizations led him to love life more deeply and to value Quality over materialism, then what was there to fear? This gleam of hope is a significant foreshadowing of the book's happy outcome.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The next morning, the Narrator checks out their beat up gear and makes a list of things to acquire and replace. He wakes Chris to help him with the laundry and leaves him to attend to that while he goes in search of a chain guard. Finding none, he locates a welding shop, but no one is there. He returns to get Chris, and they eat breakfast. There, they encounter a waitress who eyes them with a lonely look that catches the Narrator's attention. After this, they go to the welding shop again. The owner, after requiring the Narrator to do some initial cleaning up of the grease-covered, mangled guard, skillfully welds it to a serviceable state, greatly impressing the Narrator. They resume traveling and reach California. There is heavy traffic and the day is very cold. The faces reflect urban loneliness; the Narrator notes the irony of loneliness in crowded places contrasted with the friendliness in rural areas. He expounds on the need to replace sterile objectivity with an ethos of Quality.

Meanwhile, it begins to rain gently. The Narrator shares that Phaedrus found Aristotle to be dull and primitive and suggests that his ideas about Aristotle needed to be aired in a published format. Aristotle's statement that "Rhetoric is an art, because it can be reduced to a rational system of order" left Phaedrus aghast, and the Narrator noted the similarity between the ensuing listing of that order and the motorcycle parts list presented earlier in the book. The main impression Aristotle created for Phaedrus was one of smugness, a crushing mouthpiece for the dualistic reason that he saw as killing creativity. The Narrator proceeds to give an account of various dramatic classroom showdowns involving Phaedrus and two professors who were deeply entrenched in their championing of Aristotle and their view of reality as inspired by certain pivotal Greek philosophers. They arrive at Crescent City and have an overpriced meal in a deserted restaurant before moving on. Returning to the story of Phaedrus and Chicago, the Narrator chronicles how the discovery of the concept of *Arête* provided Phaedrus with the key to solving his struggles with the excesses of the Western dualistic tradition.

Chapter 30 Analysis

This chapter summarizes many of the book's thematic investigations. It continues to elucidate the details of Phaedrus' story and the current trip. The Western dualistic tradition gets bad press and many absurd aspects of modern American life get similar treatment. This suggests a connection between the two. Its foundations have colored modern American life in the Western dualistic tradition, a tradition based on misinterpretations of the real intent of Ancient Greek philosophy. The pivotal mistake centered on the concept of *Arête*, reduced by the Western dualistic tradition into a narrow denotation of 'virtue' in the sense of adhering to surface societal conventions, a rigid dwarf version of its real meaning as Quality. Once Phaedrus discovered the original meaning of *Arête* and was able to trace how certain famous Greek philosophers



had distorted that meaning to serve their own political agendas, he felt that he had found the source of the subsequent degradation of Western Civilization continuing to these modern times. The Narrator's struggle with his uncertain future continues and is illustrated by the bleak weather, the relatively unsatisfying meals, and strained exchanges between himself and Chris.



Chapter 31, 32 and 33

Chapter 31, 32 and 33 Summary

They dine in Arcata, and resume the journey to San Francisco. Back in time at Chicago, the Platonic dialogue of "Phaedrus" was assigned to the class. This provided Phaedrus with an opportunity to challenge and perplex the professor in charge to such an extent that Phaedrus felt completely victorious in his quest to resolve his metaphysical dilemmas. However, he is overwhelmed by his new understanding and proceeds by stages into complete personality disintegration. Back on the road to San Francisco, it is dark and rainy. The Narrator pulls off to find lodging and after considerable difficulty locates a run-down motel. There, Chris again confronts him about not having a decent explanation of what they're up to and is reduced to fetal rocking. The Narrator realizes that Chris misses Phaedrus.

As Chapter 32 begins, the Narrator notices slugs on the ground everywhere. They embark and breakfast in Weott. At Leggett, they throw Cracker Jacks to some ducks. Later, on a cliff overlooking the ocean, Chris wanders so close to the edge that the Narrator pulls him back. This is followed by a waiting contest, with Chris holding out for going back and reaching warmer weather. The Narrator prevails and they proceed south toward San Francisco. The Narrator realizes that he is not in a Quality state. Rather, he is a man divided against himself. He tells Chris of his plan to put him on a bus, causing Chris to argue. They drive off and find a place to talk about the future. Chris becomes contemptuous. Then the Narrator reveals to Chris that he had been insane and is close to being so again. He adds that Chris himself is troubled to some extent by mental problems because of Phaedrus' influence during critical years of his upbringing. Chris is in fetal agony as a bus approaches. Suddenly, the Narrator changes his mind and tries to comfort Chris. Chris quizzes him about the glass door, and, finally, the Narrator realizes that the memory is grounded in the reality of the hospital scene at the time of his mental breakdown. This realization provides deep catharsis.

The final chapter finds Chris riding on the motorcycle helmetless and standing on the pegs of his dad's cycle. He can finally see the surroundings instead of his dad's back. There is elation and a major infusion of optimism for both the Narrator and Chris.

Chapter 31, 32 and 33 Analysis

This chapter includes the climax of the Phaedrus story and some low energy moments in the Narrator's physical journey and in his relationship with Chris. Phaedrus has gone insane, and the Narrator's current life is troubled and uncertain. This low energy parallels the dramatic breakdown experienced by Phaedrus. This is the event that the Narrator had earlier spoken of as being in need of a proper burial. At this point in the book, there has certainly not been any such proper burial. There is a sense of defeat on all matters: Phaedrus is unburied, his own sanity seems threatened, and his relationship



with Chris is mired in confusion and pain. However, just as there had been a gleam of hope earlier in the fact that the Narrator entertained the idea that it was the mythos rather than Phaedrus that was insane, there was another such gleam in this chapter provided by the Narrator's realization that Chris missed Phaedrus. If Chris missed him, then Phaedrus couldn't be someone to fear.

Chapter 31 marks a summative resolution to the book's main tensions. The Narrator achieves some clarity and strength regarding integrating his past with his present and makes a breakthrough with regard to his relationship with Chris. His fear of going insane abates, and he connects with Chris after almost losing him. By accepting the basic sanity of what Phaedrus had discovered about the insanity of the materialistic mythos, the Narrator is able to again embrace that part of his past minus its egotistic excesses, and, by doing so, he is able to live without the struggle of denying an important dimension of himself. This recovered integrity allows him to connect again with his son in a much more direct and nurturing way.

The last chapter simply punctuates the book with an optimistic tone. The Narrator has found his dharma. He is leading his life with caring attention to Quality, and that Quality is informing his relationship with his son.



Characters

The Narrator

The Narrator is a middle-aged man who has led an unusual life. He is brilliant, has studied Eastern and Western philosophy and spirituality, and is grounded in scientific thinking and technological understanding, too. He has served in the armed forces, been a university professor, and writes technical documents for a living. He is preoccupied with thinking, and that trait reveals something unresolved in his personality. It has prevented him from connecting to his life roles as fully as one might wish, particularly with respect to his role as a father. He has developed a unique perspective toward motorcycle maintenance, and riding cycles is one of his main hobbies. He embarks on this journey as a quest for some resolution to his ongoing life angst.

Phaedrus

This is the Narrator at an earlier stage of his life. Phaedrus was so driven to resolve the split between Classic and Romantic understanding that he sacrificed his sanity in pursuit of its resolution. He was a conscientious and idealistic man appalled by the ugliness of modern technological society and sought ways to bring it in line with his concept of Quality. His investigations into high ideas took him physically to India and mentally deep into the world of ancient Greece. He was able to discover in ancient Greece what he took to be the point at which Western Civilization took a wrong turn, but he lost his bearing on the high peaks of metaphysical thought, precipitating a serious mental breakdown. His identity ended through a procedure known as Annihilation ECS. However, by book's end, he is somewhat reincarnated as the narrator re-embraces those of his parts in tune with right living.

Chris

The Narrator's son Chris is about eleven-years-old and exhibits some personality quirks suggesting that mental illness is in his future. He is given to stomach aches that seem psychosomatic. He is somewhat moody, especially with regard to his relationship with his dad. In this sense, he can be seen as representative of the damage done to the young by parents who are not themselves spiritually grounded, and, by book's end, his prognosis seems much brighter after the narrator comes to grips with his own past and achieves a more solid personality integration.

John Sutherland

John is a friend of the Narrator. He is a drummer, a Romantic with a conflicted attitude toward technology. He is in the book to provide a foil for the narrator's ideas about one unproductive stance with regard to technology. He represents an escapist mentality. He



rides motorcycles, but has no interest in learning how to maintain one, and this baffles the narrator. He is a friendly person and good in his own element. Yet, he carries tension from having to confront the menace of technology from a basically ignorant and reactive perspective.

Sylvia Sutherland

John's wife is depicted as sharing his general perspective. Nonetheless, the narrator notes that she seems to intuit deep interpersonal moments going on among people. She is especially attuned to the tension between the Narrator and his son.

DeWeese

An abstract painter who taught with the Narrator at Bozeman during his Phaedrus stage. DeWeese is a Romantic, but he seems somewhat open to understanding Classic influences, too. His home outside of Bozeman is cozy and well-kept, and he is a gracious host. He presents a picture of someone pursuing right living.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Study of Methods

He represents a smug intellectual who has swallowed whole the Western dualistic tradition and employs a teaching style intended to perpetuate conformity. He is depicted as unduly proud of himself and as pompous almost to the point of absurdity. He wrangles with Phaedrus.

The Professor of Philosophy

Another representative of the excesses of the Western dualistic tradition. A mean man given to humiliating others.

Aristotle

The Greek philosopher most often reviled by Phaedrus and, in turn, by the Narrator. More or less representative of the wrong turn taken by Western Civilization.

Lao-Tse

Taoist mystic and author of the Tao Te Ching, a famous treatise on the nature of reality. The Narrator as Phaedrus inserted the word "Quality" into that composition in place of Tao and found that it fit perfectly and provided a complete resolution to his metaphysical dilemma(s).



Objects/Places

Motorcycle

The technological artifact used to frame many of the Narrator's spiritual and philosophical discussions. Also the vehicle for their physical journey.

Screws

Representative of the details of life that require caring attentiveness. The Narrator used them to illustrate his ideas concerning dealing with stuckness.

The Wall Across the Misty Harbor in Korea

Representative of a Quality technological product stemming from the peace of mind of its creators.

The Beer Can Shim

Representative of the beauty of underlying form as opposed to surface ugliness. The Narrator and John Sutherland had an important exchange involving it.

Mountains

Representative of the world of rarefied ideas and intense experience: beautiful, but inherently dangerous.

Valleys

Representative of everyday environments through which spiritual understanding can be developed through caring attentiveness to right living.

Precision Tools

Representative of the particular habits of mind that result in apprehending and aligning oneself with Quality, Dharma or Arête. Also, the tools needed to deal with the minute adjustments and fragile components of motorcycle maintenance.



The Cracked Round Table at the University of Chicago

Representative of the polarizing and creativity-stifling atmosphere engendered by the Western dualistic tradition. It's there, it's ugly, and nobody seems to know how to, or care about, fixing it.

Backroads

Representative of environments and attitudes that elicit Quality thoughts and emotions and connections among people.

Crystals

Representative of powerful ideas that grow into massive structures and result in comprehensive paradigm shifts.

Sand

Representative of the overwhelming totality of possible cognitions and sensations. We somehow select a handful to deal with and spend our time sorting that into various categories. The Narrator described how Phaedrus used sand to illustrate his metaphysical explorations.

The Glass Door of the Dream

Representative of the transparent barrier between he and Chris. Late in the book, the Narrator realizes that this dream door is based on a real one at a hospital during his mental breakdown period.



Themes

The Necessity of Reconciling the Classic/Romantic Split:

This theme is reinforced at frequent intervals throughout the book in various direct and indirect ways. The Narrator directly deals with it often in his Chautauquas. It was the basis for the ghost of rationality that so plagued Phaedrus. The Narrator asserted that unless the split was healed, civilization was bound to continue in a downward spiral into more technological ugliness and increasingly brutal warfare. Objectivity gone wild, especially as represented by value-free scientific perspectives, would continue to move the world to ugliness and discord. Naive rejections of technology would not be viable, either. Blind action and reaction resultant from a lack of receptivity to the guiding urgings of Quality need to be replaced by right living cultivated through caring attentiveness.

The Importance of Spiritualizing Everyday Life:

The Narrator develops this theme in several ways. His Chautauquas directly speak of the unpleasant consequences of work done by people who are in thoughtless, uncaring states of mind. He speaks at length about everyday principles of right living in his prolonged explication of gumption traps. He traces the critical connection between peace of mind and beautiful products and relationships. He compares and contrasts people who have and who do not have this peace of mind throughout his observations in the various locales of the physical journey. He compares and contrasts himself to his former self as Phaedrus to illustrate the importance of establishing a vigilance concerning adhering to the principles of right living. This theme quite clearly is reflected in the book's title. Meditation, or Zen, is clearly intended to address spirituality; and motorcycle maintenance is most definitely representative of daily life. The message intended by the juxtaposition is to devote caring attentiveness, a meditative attitude, to the details of daily living so that Quality can express itself through your actions and relationships.

A Genuine Search for Truth:

This theme is developed directly through the exposition regarding Phaedrus' own early educational career, his teaching experiments at Bozeman, his approach to his studies at the University of Chicago, and his passionate pursuit of the ghost of rationality that led to his mental breakdown. The clearest exposition of this theme occurs in the prolonged exploration of the evolution of his teaching methods at Bozeman. He abolished grades and did everything that he could to engage and empower his students so that genuine creativity and passion would result. Furthermore, his ten years studying Oriental philosophy and spiritual traditions in India suggest an uncommon devotion to finding out what is what. He is shown to be disturbed by, and very uncomfortable with, playing the

game or going through the motions. Finally, the scope of what he considers and attempts to integrate into his worldview—Western and Eastern philosophy, religion, and spirituality; scientific methodology; and theoretical mathematics—indicates a mind intent on a comprehensive integration addressing first and last things.



Style

Point of View

The book is written using first-person narration, but the Narrator has a split personality and speaks of himself in the third person as "Phaedrus" when referencing the period in his life before he underwent a radical psychotherapy called Annihilation ECS. The book is, in part, about him coming to terms with that part of his life and reintegrating his personality to achieve a unified personality capable of dealing with his life roles in a more genuine way. The narration itself fluctuates among descriptions of current events on a cross-country motorcycle trip, descriptions of Phaedrus' life and ideas, and philosophical Chautauquas abounding in digressions. There are also dreamscapes suggestive of inner turmoil.

Setting

The cross country motorcycle trip begins in Minneapolis, Minnesota and features many stops before ending on the California coast near San Francisco. There are campgrounds, motels, restaurants, various towns, and a wide spectrum of physical landscapes. Particularly important stops include the school in Bozeman, Montana; the DeWeese's just outside of Bozeman; and the mountains just outside of Bozeman. The Phaedrus episodes include settings in India, Korea, Bozeman, and Chicago. Some of the story involves dreamscapes. Lastly, the world of high ideas is another prominent setting.

Language and Meaning

The language is relatively accessible in terms of its sentence structure and general vocabulary level. However, there is frequent reference to difficult and abstruse philosophical material from both Western and Eastern civilizations. In places, the closet attention is required to follow the gist of the narrative. A passing familiarity with Oriental spiritual traditions is presupposed.

Structure

The book's four parts are divided into 32 chapters. They are framed by a cross-country motorcycle trip involving, primarily, the Narrator and his son Chris, but which also included a couple, The Sutherlands, for the first half. Within that trip, the Narrator presents a series of philosophical talks called Chautauquas. Within the Chautauquas, he presents detailed information about "Phaedrus," himself before Annihilation ECS. There are digressions and dreamscapes to keep track of, too. The details of the physical trip in current time often reflect and reinforce the philosophical dimensions of the narrative. All in all, the book's structure traces the resolution of three important

problems. There is the split between Classic and Romantic perspectives, known as the Western dualistic tradition. Next, there is the Narrator's unrest stemming from having had a mental breakdown and having undergone a consequent radical procedure known as Annihilation ECS. Finally, there is the distant relationship between the Narrator and his troubled son.



Quotes

What is in mind is a sort of Chautauqua—that's the only name I can think of for it—like the traveling ten-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 Narrator, p. 7

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. This personality constantly changes, usually for the worse, but sometimes surprisingly for the better, and it is this personality that is the real object of motorcycle maintenance. The Narrator, p. 42

I told Chris the other night that Phaedrus spent his entire life pursuing a ghost. That was true. The ghost he pursued was the ghost that underlies all of technology, all of modern science, all of Western thought. It was the ghost of rationality itself. The Narrator, p. 78

But there it was, the whole history of science, a clear story of continuously new and changing explanations of old facts. The time spans of permanence seemed completely random, he could see no order in them. Some scientific truths seemed to last for centuries, others for less than a year. Scientific truth was not dogma, good for eternity, but a temporal quantitative entity that could be studied like anything else. The Narrator, p. 108

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. The Narrator, p. 136

She came trotting by with her watering pot between those two doors, going from the corridor to her office, and she said, "I hope you are teaching Quality to your students." This in a la-de-da, singsong voice of a lady in her final year before retirement about to water her plants. That was the moment it all started. That was the seed crystal. The Narrator, p. 175

Mountains should be climbed with as little effort as possible and without desire. The reality of your own nature should determine the speed. If you become restless, speed up. If you become winded, slow down. You climb the mountain in an equilibrium between restlessness and exhaustion. Then, when you're no longer thing ahead, each footstep isn't just a means to an end but a unique event in itself. The Narrator, p. 198

"The sun of quality," he wrote, "does not revolve around the subjects and objects of our existence. It does not just passively illuminate them. It is not subordinate to them in any way. It has created them. They are subordinate to it!" Phaedrus, quoted by the Narrator, p. 234.



He read on. Line after line. Page after page. Not a discrepancy. What he had been talking about all the time as Quality was her the Tao, the great central generating force of all religions, Oriental and Occidental, past and present, all knowledge, everything. The Narrator, p. 248

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. The Narrator, p. 284

The real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself. The machine that appears to be "out there" and the person that appears to be "in here" are not two separate things. They grow toward Quality or fall away from Quality together. The Narrator, p.319

The mythos. The mythos is insane. That's what he believed. The mythos that says the forms of this world are real but the Quality of this world is unreal, that is insane! The Narrator, p. 346

Quality! Virtue! Dharma! That is what the Sophists were teaching! Not ethical relativism. Not pristine "virtue." But *arête*. Excellence. Dharma! Before the Church of Reason. Before substance. Before form. Before mind and matter. Before dialectic itself. Quality had been absolute. The Narrator, p. 371

In all this Chautauqua talk there's been more than a touch of hypocrisy. Advice is given again and again to eliminate subject-object duality, when the biggest duality of all, the duality between me and him, remains unfaced. A mind divided against itself. The Narrator, p. 395

We're related to each other in ways we never fully understand, maybe hardly understand at all. He was always the real reason for coming out of the hospital. To have let him grow up alone would have been really wrong. In the dream too he was the one who was always trying to open the door. I haven't been carrying him at all. He's been carrying me! The Narrator, referring to his son, p. 403-404

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. The Narrator, p. 406



Topics for Discussion

The book's title suggests that Zen and motorcycle maintenance are connected in important ways. Identify and discuss two important connections between these categories.

The Narrator asserts that peace of mind is a prerequisite for producing anything of Quality. What reasoning, illustrations, and/or examples does he provide to support that assertion?

By the middle of the book, readers understand that Phaedrus is the Narrator's name for himself before he underwent Annihilation ECS. Identify two ways that the Narrator and Phaedrus are alike and two ways in which they differ.

By book's end, the Narrator seems to reclaim something of his identity as Phaedrus. What does he reclaim, and what does he not reclaim?

The Narrator presented a detailed discussion of gumption traps. Summarize that discussion, and then explain what gumption has to do with peace of mind.

The Narrator distinguishes between searching for meaning on the mountain peaks and searching for it in the valleys and indicated a preference for the valley method. What justifications does he offer for his preference?

Phaedrus, meaning wolf, names the Narrator before Annihilation ECS and names a character from The Dialogues of Plato. In what ways is this name apt for the Narrator before Annihilation ECS? Does it apply to him at book's end?

The Narrator deals extensively with ancient Greek philosophy and indicates that Phaedrus found in it the point at which Western Civilization took a wrong turn. Explain what Phaedrus thought to be that wrong turn.

Explain why Phaedrus was so excited by the Greek concept of *arête*.

The Narrator spoke often of his difficult relationship with Chris and of Chris' mental and emotional problems. At book's end, some catharsis and healing is evident in both. What has happened to precipitate these changes?