An Appreciation of

Zen

and the Art of

Motorcycle Maintenance

James Smith

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Prologue

I first heard of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance pretty soon after stumbling through my finals at university. It was summer and we were punting. I know that there were around seven or eight of us because we were too much for one punt. We had hired, or more likely blagged, a second punt, and we kept them loosely together by someone draping an arm or a leg over the adjoining sides at any one time. This solution meant that only one person had to do the punting and also gave us a surprisingly spacious platform for talking, drinking and what not.

On this occasion the what not included a friend reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, and being so taken with the occasional phrase or passage that he would repeat it aloud. Here is one such passage, the import of which has stayed with me ever since although the actual words had long been forgotten:

I think that if we are going to reform the world, and make it a better place to live in, the way to do it is not with talk about relationships of a political nature... Programs of a political nature are important end products of social quality that can be effective only if the underlying structure of social values is right. The social values are right only if the individual values are right. The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there. Other people can talk about how to expand the destiny of mankind. I just want to talk about how to fix a motorcycle. I think that what I have to say has more lasting value.

After that summer I got on with real life and there was no time to read the book properly. In my late twenties I did turn to it but got little out of it, despite the lingering import of the above passage. I put this down my inability to persevere with anything worthwhile at the time. Ironically, it could be said that listlessness is something that the book wholly succeeds in addressing. Anyway, I picked up the book again last year as lockdown began to bite and this time it struck home.

As I read through it, I began to wonder how I would explain its importance to someone else. It seems to me that the book is something of a dichotomy. On the one hand Pirsig is a narrator, telling the story of a cross country motorcycle trip in the company of his son and two of his friends. On the other hand he is an expositor, explaining his concept of Quality. The narrative gives a context for and adds colour to the dissertation. If I tried to re-tell the former I would undoubtedly spoil it, however it seems to me a good idea to try to summarise the latter. I hope to gain new insights and get further enjoyment in doing so, and I vainly hope that my efforts will help others to appreciate this important book, too.

Let me return now to Pirsig's own words on the central concept of the book:

The Metaphysics of Quality would show how things become enormously more coherent—fabulously more coherent—when you start with an assumption that Quality is the primary empirical reality of the world...

His belief that things would become more coherent for us if we took on board his concept of Quality is, I think, one reason why the book came to be seen as some kind of instruction manual for coping with modern life, technology in particular. However, I think the book's reach is much broader. As nature hands us yet another lesson, maybe we should read it not just with a view to it having it help us cope with modern life or technology, but with ourselves and with each other, in the hope that in doing so we might learn to listen to nature once again, and to what she has to teach us, before it is too late if not for us then for those that come after us.

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Romantic versus classic understanding and railing against technology

To begin with, the author related how his friends John and Sylvia Sutherland seemed wholly at odds with technology. The road trip for them was seen as a rare opportunity to get away from it. John's denial in particular was the root cause of his refusal to take any interest in the maintenance of his motorcycle, with occasional adverse consequences. He treated it as a singular thing that should just work, he was not vested in it in any way. Similarly with the mechanics who had previously been asked to find the cause of the seizure of the author's own motorcycle. They had botched the job so badly that he referred to them as chimpanzees. They were not trying to run away from technology, however, so why had they been so thoughtless? Again, like John and Sylvia, they were unavoidably connected to technology whilst managing to have little or nothing to do with it. They were branded spectators. They did not care.

On another occasion John's handlebars were slipping, but the ends of the collars were pinching and so the tightening nuts could not be tightened any further. The author explained to him that shims would do the trick, small slithers of soft metal that could be slipped around the handlebars underneath the collars, thereby opening them up a little and allowing them to be tightened again. The suggestion of cutting the shims out of an aluminium beer can, however, was met with haughtiness. There was no way that John was going to let his prize BMW be sullied with a bit of old beer can! On reflection, this marked difference of opinion between the author and his friend was put down to the way they viewed the shims. One valued them for their utility whereas the other saw only their immediate form. John was a musician, and was described as being naturally intuitive and instinctive. He had tried to get to grips with technology but, lacking the rational mindset, had failed to do so on so many occasions that he tended to just block it out. These differing attitudes towards the shims were indicative of differing outlooks, the groover versus the square.

This distinction between squares and groovers was generalised to a dichotomy between what the author termed classic understanding and romantic understanding. To see things in terms of their underlying form is to see them from a classical point of view, whereas to see them in terms of their immediate appearance is to view them from a romantic standpoint. To think classically is to think conceptually and to proceed by reasoning and by laws, which are themselves conceptual frameworks. To think romantically is to be inspired, imaginative or intuitive and to allow feelings to predominate over facts. Motorcycle riding is romantic, whereas motorcycle maintenance is classic.

There are several points that the author noted about this dichotomy. For a start, being a conceptual framework it is by its own definition classical, therefore we cannot claim that we can stand apart from it. This results in what the author called a platform problem. Also, the classical can be found alongside the romantic and vice versa. Art proceeds along classical lines a lot of the time, for example, whilst there is a classical aesthetic even in mechanical engineering. Lastly, those strongly of one persuasion often see those of the other in an overwhelmingly negative light. To a classical person the romantic can seem frivolous or irrational, or worse, whilst in the romantic's eyes a classical person can come across as dull or even oppressive.

It seemed that the classical side of technology was what the Sutherlands were really against, rather than technology itself. "It's just a whole other thing" Sylvia once said, "the whole organized bit", "it all", etc. It could be argued, however, that the classical mindset had been employed by people since antiquity in order to lift themselves out of the boredom and suffering of their everyday lives, indeed there was a time not so long ago when struggle and tedium were the "it all" for most people. The irony was that the kind of thinking that used to constitute a means of escapism, both for its own sake and practically as the driver of progress, was the very death force that the Sutherlands were trying so hard to escape from.

If we ignore the aforementioned platform problem and turn the classical mode of thinking at least partly back in on itself, several observations result. Perhaps the most striking is that classical thinking, which can be likened to the action of a knife or an intellectual scalpel, is arbitrary. Even the concepts of classic understanding and romantic understanding are arbitrary. What it is im-

portant to focus on, therefore, are not the results of the action of this knife, but the movement of the knife itself. We all possess such a knife and its action is not merely conceptual. At its most fundamental level it works subconsciously, with our sensory and other perceptions filtered and mutated to produce the colours, shapes, emotions and so on that make up the reality that we know. Romantic understanding is directed at these parts whereas classical understanding is directed at their basis and interrelations.

Rationality, scientific method and Kant's a priori knowledge

The classical mindset, more commonly known as rationality, underlies modern science and scientific method in particular. Broadly speaking, scientific method can be broken down into three steps: firstly, formulate a hypothesis; secondly, from this hypothesis deduce a prediction or set of predictions; and lastly, conceive and perform an experiment to either verify or falsify these predictions. If the predictions of a hypothesis are verified by experiment then it is trumpeted as scientific truth. But there was a strange thing the author noticed about scientific truths. Rather than the rate of their discovery slowing over time as more science was done and our collective understanding supposedly grew, the exact opposite was happening. They were proliferating at an ever greater rate and becoming more transient to boot.

Disillusionment with scientific method led the author away from a degree in biochemistry and eventually into the army. On returning from active duty in Korea he read F. S. C. Northrop's The Meeting of East and West, the "theoretic" and "aesthetic" concepts of which shaped his own classic and romantic notions. He then returned to college to read philosophy and for a while at least his endeavours took place largely in the context of existing philosophical thought.

In fact he gives an example, namely Immanuel Kant's famous refutation of the ideas of David Hume, the Critique of Pure Reason. Hume had posited a somewhat gruesome thought experiment in which a child is born devoid of all senses, incapable of receiving any information from the outside world. If this child could somehow have been sustained and therefore lived to adulthood, Hume asked, would it have a thought in its head? Hume argued that the answer was no, because all knowledge is derived from experience, and in doing so defined himself as an empiricist. One branch of empiricism is scientific empiricism, which encompasses scientific method and insists that all hypotheses should be tested against observations of the real world, rather than resting on intuition or revelation. There was a problem with empiricism, however, namely that its logical conclusions that reality itself and the laws that govern it existed only in the mind fundamentally undermined scientific method. How could you verify a hypothesis by experiment if the results of that experiment were nothing but figments of your own imagination? Such was the power of Hume's reasoning, however, that it seemed impossible to deny these conclusions without denying empirical reasoning itself.

Kant took up the challenge and in doing so could be said to have saved scientific empiricism from falling on its own sword. He argued that there were aspects of reality that were not supplied immediately by the senses. He called these a priori. An example of a priori knowledge is the understanding that reality is continuous. If we blink, for example, we do not momentarily believe that the world has gone dark, despite the evidence of our senses. Our subconscious uses a priori knowledge to screen sensory data as it comes in, so that we never consciously believe that reality is discontinuous. Another example, at a conscious, conceptual level this time, is money. We may talk about having our money in the bank, but nowhere is there a little drawer in the bank with our money in it. We can go to a branch and withdraw it out in cash, of course, in which case we can verify its existence directly with our senses, but we rarely if ever do this. Money exists a priori most of the time. Returning to the poor child deprived of its senses, if it were to momentarily regain them and be presented with a motorcycle, it would perceive Hume's motorcycle, so to speak, devoid of any meaning or context, an amorphous mass of sensory data. We are not that child, however, and what we actually perceive is Kant's a priori motorcycle, a complex but nonetheless coherent experience reinforced by our senses, not at odds with it. To perhaps labour this point,

our a priori model of the motorcycle arises out of direct experience, but it exists apart from it. If we were to look at the motorcycle at a different time and in a different light, for example, we would not be able to discern that it was the same motorcycle without our a priori knowledge to guide us.

The Church of Reason lecture and expanding rationality

Kant's metaphysics initially thrilled the author but he soon tired of it, In fact he came to regard Kant's writing, indeed all of western philosophy, as ugly, and perceived this ugliness even in himself. He speculated that it was his time in the East that had offered him a respite from this ugliness, but now he was being imprisoned all over again. The ugliness was reason itself and there seemed to be no way to get away from it. He did manage to get away from it, however, terrestrially at least, leaving the study of western philosophy behind and spending the best part of a decade in India. The one thing of note that he took away from all that time was the Sanskrit doctrine of Tat tvam asi, literally "Thou are that", which asserts that everything we think we are and everything we think we perceive are one and the same. To realise this fully is to become enlightened. According to eastern philosophy one way to reach enlightenment is cultivate a complete lack of physical, mental and emotional activity. Meditation, in other words. Of course this practice goes against western philosophy, with its overriding emphasis on reasoning, and it is true that in all his time in India he never abandoned the doctrine of rationality. He regarded it as to his credit that he entered India a scientific empiricist and left India a scientific empiricist.

On returning from India he finally picked up a degree in journalism, took various jobs and eventually wound up in the English department of a teaching college in Montana. The state was in the throes of an ultra right-wing political movement at the time that would see the functions and purpose of the college threatened. In response to this situation and in an attempt to defend both the college and the value system it upheld, he penned and delivered what he called the "Church of Reason" lecture. He began by relating how a nearby church had been desanctified and was being used as a bar. Several people had complained about this but the priest who had been delegated to deal with the complaints had been unsympathetic. The real church, he pointed out, was not constituted in the fabric of the church building itself. Similarly with the university, which was not just a collection of buildings. The real university was the corpus of rational thought accrued over the centuries, the continuing body of reason itself. Furthermore, the needs of the church's congregation were ultimately subordinate to the priest's primary goal of serving his god. Similarly, the primary goal of lecturers and professors was to pursue truth through the process of rationality. Even teaching was subordinate to this.

What surprises about this lecture is the fact that he choose to defend scientific reason even though by this time he had already lost faith in it. One explanation given is that we may choose to defend the indefensible precisely because it is in doubt. No one shouts about the fact that the sun is going to come up tomorrow, after all. However, the more convincing explanation he gave was that he defended reason because at that time there seemed to be no alternative. Perhaps in the end his motives could never be clearly explained, but what is clear is that by that time he had rediscovered his fanatical desire to at least do something about his own loss of faith in reason.

Without doubt many at the time believed that a degree of spiritual and aesthetic suffering was an inevitable consequence of technological progress. In the author's view, however, the problem could only be solved not by abandoning reason but by expanding it somehow so that it was capable of coming up with a solution. That solution, and the recovery of his own faith in reason, lay in the unification of reason, or classical understanding, with romantic understanding. We see a precursor to this in the story he relates of a Japanese instruction manual which begins with the words "Assembly of Japanese bicycle require great peace of mind." Peace of mind is not superficial, in fact we may well gauge the success of a mechanical task by the satisfaction it gives us. As the Japanese instructions point out, however, peace of mind is not just a desirable end product, it must be present throughout. That which produces it is good maintenance, that which disturbs it is poor

maintenance. Consider the competent mechanic, absorbed in what he is doing. His thoughts are rooted entirely in what is at hand, literally the materials in his hands, which shape his thoughts and actions and vice versa, and he acts always with a view to bringing his mind back to rest. To many this would sound more like art than mechanics, but, in the author's view, this distinction was unnatural and had not always existed.

The success of Quality in teaching rhetoric

Returning to the college in Montana, the author was teaching rhetoric, an historically broad term but in this case it meant simply good writing. The teaching method was to take what was considered a good piece of writing and to identify its finer points. These were then meant to guide the students during their own efforts, which largely boiled down to mimicking a particular style. Not unsurprisingly, the whole process seemed highly unsatisfactory, after all the points that were identified were likely not ones that the original author ever had in mind. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the author was teaching from what he believed to be one of the most rational texts available on the subject, a text that viewed rhetoric as a branch of reasoning. Consequently his own deep seated qualms about reasoning inevitably came to the fore.

It is in this context that he was asked, was Quality being taught? But what was Quality? Initially he found that even after considerable reflection he could not define it. Nor, after being asked the same question as an exercise, could his students. Eventually he landed on a pseudo-definition that Quality was, roughly speaking, a characteristic of experience that was recognised by a non-thinking process and therefore could not be rigidly defined. Nonetheless, he argued that his students all instinctively knew what it was. He backed up his argument by reading aloud student essays and ranking them in order of Quality. When he put it to a vote, his students nearly all agreed with his assessments. So they were forced to admit that they knew what Quality was, But, they asked, how were they to attain it in their own writing? Now the aforementioned texts on rhetoric, interpreted in terms of Quality, came into their own. Their principles were no longer seen as rules in their own right to be adhered to or, more likely, to be rebelled against, rather they were to be seen as guidelines for attaining Quality. This new approach also kept the definitions of the principles of unity, economy, clarity and so on that characterised good writing deliberately vague, and instead their presence or otherwise was demonstrated by further reading exercises. Furthermore, if a technique that was allied to a certain principle, for example the use of an outline to improve unity or footnotes to improve authority, was used for its own sake without without an eye on attaining Quality, this was easily caught and the student received no credit for it. And so the students were finally taught how to make value judgements for themselves and in doing so learned how to write.

Thus Quality had been triumphantly identified as the mysterious, individual, internal goal of each creative person and its exploration in the context of teaching rhetoric appears to have been a runaway success. Certainly the author was keen that this achievement, what he referred to as the non-metaphysical phase of his investigations, was judged on its own merits and aside from the metaphysical investigation of Quality that followed. What motivated this subsequent phase? There was the immediate question of why this irrational approach to teaching rhetoric had succeeded when all rational attempts had failed, but likely far more significant was an inkling that this positive outcome was a potent of a potential solution to all of his previous machinations. In short, he felt that at last he was on to something.

Attempts to rationalise Quality

All of this thinking, the notions of classic understanding and romantic understanding; the recognition of the societal tension at that time that was typified by the Sutherland's attitude to technology; the action of the knife of analytic thinking, the analogous knife working at a subconscious level and their close relation to Kant's a priori reality; the latent images of eastern philosophy, most

importantly the Sanskrit Tat tvam asi, "Thou art that"; the author's own dissatisfaction with western rationality, scientific method in particular; his belief that a solution to all of this lay in expanding rationality somehow so that it is able to explain modern existence; and the tiny prospect of a solution in the work of the competent mechanic with his focus on what is at hand and his continuous goal of peace of mind; all of this was like a supersaturated solution waiting for a seed crystal.

The one sentence "I hope you are teaching Quality to your students" was said to him, and within a matter of a few months, growing so fast you could almost see it grow, came an enormous, intricate, highly structured mass of thought, formed as if by magic.

The first wave of this crystalisation of thought was a total refutation of aesthetics, the branch of philosophy that deals with beauty. In fact it is not quite so easily defined, since it seeks not only to define beauty but to delve our appreciation of it, attempting to define judgement, both visceral and conceptual, sentiment, and so on. The author, on the other hand, identified of all this with Quality and labelled aesthetics as the rational search for its definition. And since Quality could not be defined, he argued, the whole field of aesthetics was pointless. Thus in one fell swoop he did away with a branch of philosophy that had previously particularly revulsed him.

It is worth reiterating at this point that the author's ultimate goal was not to overturn reasoning but rather to somehow expand or modify it. Therefore Quality had to be analysed rationally. How could a refusal to define it be justified rationally, for example? Or how you could even claim that it existed if it could not be defined? Realists would argue that something existed if the world could not function without it and so the question that naturally arose was what would the world look like without Quality. Art would disappear, because there would be no way to discern a masterpiece from the blank wall behind it. Music would also disappear, white noise would be viewed as just as good. Similarly poetry and, most worryingly, humour would disappear, since the difference between a good joke and a bad joke is pure Quality. The list went on. Clearly life would hardly be worth living if Quality were subtracted from it. It would be positively Orwellian, in fact. Therefore, at least from a realist's point of view, Quality had to exist.

One interesting observation the author made was that reasoning itself appeared to be one of the few things that would remain largely intact if Quality were subtracted from the world. Indeed, those who espoused reasoning above all else, people just like himself, seemed to be the people he was most at odds with. And so he came full circle, labelling the absence of quality was nothing other than squareness. This diagnosis was immediately recognised as being overly simplistic, however. Previously the goal of the competent mechanic was identified as peace of mind, yet surely his goal was actually that mysterious, individual, internal goal of Quality? Peace of mind was simply a side effect. Furthermore, the principles of rhetoric such as succinctness or relevance could really only be defined at an intellectual level and yet they were undoubtedly related to Quality. And so squareness was redefined not as an inability to perceive Quality entirely, rather a predilection to see it only at an intellectual as opposed to an intuitive level. Those of a romantic persuasion were doing fine, they recognised Quality, however tangentially, valued it and left it alone. Those of a classic disposition, however, although they recognised Quality, could not leave it alone and intellectualised it for their own purposes. The antidote was to leave Quality undefined, thereby forcing them to view it as the romantic did. Thus a way appeared to begin to expand or modify rationality. It needed to be re-examined in the light of Quality.

The philosophical argument was not so easily won, however, and turgid questions from his colleagues kept on coming. Was Quality objective or subjective? If it was objective, it was reasoned, then surely a machine could be invented to detect it? Obviously this was impossible. If it was subjective, on the other hand, then surely it could stand for whatever a person liked? A dilemma. There are many ways to refute a dilemma and perhaps the best way might have been to refuse to be drawn by it. The author could simply have stated that any attempt to classify Quality as objective or subjective was an attempt to define it, and since he had already stated that it was undefinable, there was nothing more to be said on the matter. However, this retreat into what amounted to mysticism, namely the belief that truth cannot be defined and can only be achieved

by non-rational means, seemed deeply unsatisfactory. Whatever the outcome, the dilemma had to be refuted rationality.

Locke had said that no object was knowable except in terms of its qualities, which suggested a solution to the first horn of the dilemma. Quality could not be detected because Quality was essentially all that there was. This argument turned out to be flawed, however, because the qualities that Locke spoke of were those such as colour, taste and so on, not the elusive Quality that was more akin to worthiness, goodness, etc. Therefore the first horn of the dilemma remained unrefuted.

The second horn of the dilemma, on the other hand, stated by the author's interlocutors as "Quality is just what you like", seemed more amenable to refutation. It was the word "just" that was the weakness in the argument. It was pejorative, unreasonably suggestive of disobedience or nonconformity. But there was more to it than that. Doing or believing what you liked was often deemed objectionable for its own sake, never mind the effect it had on others. But who deemed it so? The author identified two groups and coined them scientific materialists and classic formalists. Scientific materialism held that what was composed of matter or energy and could be measured was real, whilst everything else was not, or at least of no consequence. Therefore for a scientific materialist to assert that "Quality is what you like" was to say that it was imaginary and therefore unimportant. The author's refutation of this assertion had nothing to do with Quality per se, rather scientific materialism itself was attacked as naïve. He gave the example of the number zero as being imagined but nonetheless scientific. Indeed all scientific concepts were by definition imagined. However, this line of reasoning could lead to the inevitable conclusion of Hume et al. that reality was all in the mind, something he could not bring himself to ever agree with. On the other hand, refuting classical formalism proved to be just as difficult. It held that what was not understood conceptually was not truly understood at all. If a so-called classical formalist uttered the phrase "Quality is what you like" then they were effectively just appealing to reason, or at least arguing that there was more to Quality than surface appeal. This was something the author could hardly disagree with. Moreover, this line of thinking brought up the inevitable question of why, if everybody was supposed to know instinctively what Quality was, was there ever any disagreement about it? The obvious answer was that some saw Quality through the lens of their immediate experience whereas others perceived it through the lens of conceptual thought. It was the familiar classic versus romantic dichotomy but now it was Quality that was being cut up.

Quality as the Tao

In the end, regardless of his pigeon-holing of his assailants or his somewhat tortuous attempts to refute them, or indeed any of these arguments, the author decided that the dilemma itself was unreasonable. Quality was not objective, it did not reside in the material world. Nor was it subjective, it did not exist purely in the mind. It was neither of mind nor matter, he concluded, but an entirely separate, third entity. Further thought led him to the belief that Quality could not be independently related to either subjectivity or objectivity, rather it was somehow tied to the relationship between the two. It was the point at which subject and object met. Thus subjects and objects were the effects of Quality, subordinate to it and not, as the dilemma had presupposed, the other way around.

It is the cutting edge of time that is the only reality, he continued. This moment of realisation before intellectualisation he called the awareness of Quality. Those of a romantic persuasion had no trouble in tuning into this ongoing moment because of their predisposition not to intellectualise things. Those of a classic persuasion, on the other hand, missed it almost entirely precisely because of their predisposition to intellectualise pretty much everything. It was not that they could not perceive Quality, however, rather that Quality for them lay in the relation of the present reality to multiple considerations, those plans and understandings that spanned both the future and the past. Thus classic Quality and romantic Quality were really just differing temporal aspects of the same thing, the long and the short, respectively. This view also provided a satisfactory answer to the hitherto thorny question of why people disagreed about Quality. Any one individual's per-

ception of it was determined at least partly by their a priori understanding of reality. And since this understanding was culturally biased to a large extent, it was perhaps not so surprising that a class of literature students agreed on the presence of Quality in a contemporary essay. If, on the other hand, they were presented with a piece of literature with which they had no familiarity, some medieval text, for example, then they would be unable to judge its Quality and would likely disagree wildly about it.

In yet another sideways attempt to define Quality, the author considered the response of an amoeba to an unfavourable environment. It would, he suggested, move away from it, and if it had sufficient cognitive ability, it would seek a priori analogues to its situation in order both to better understand and respond to it. If asked and if it could speak, it would say that the unfavourable environment lacked Quality. Quality was the never ending stimulus our environment presented us with that forced us to create the whole world in which we live. And to take what caused us to create the world and attempt to put it in that world was clearly impossible. That was why Quality could never be fully defined. By now the author had moved away from the metaphysical trinity of subjects, objects and Quality, towards an absolute monism of Quality alone, of which subjects and objects were the effects. Hegel had thought along these lines with his Absolute Mind, however his was an entirely rational concept. Quality was not like that. So did this make it mystical as opposed to metaphysical? What was the difference? It seemed that it was only a matter of how he choose to look at it.

On impulse he consulted the Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu, reading line by line, substituting his language for its own. The Quality that can be defined is not the Absolute Quality. Romantic Quality and classic Quality are in their nature the same. Quality is given names, that is subjects and objects, when it becomes manifest. Like the fountainhead of all things, yet crystal clear like water it seems to remain. Looked at but cannot be seen, listened to but cannot be heard, grasped at but cannot be touched. Unceasing, continuous. It cannot be defined. On he read, line after line, page after page. What he had been talking about all along, imperfectly, his Quality, was the Tao, the great, central generating force of all religions, all knowledge, everything. This was the last, devastating wave of crystallisation.

Before he could stop it, the sudden accumulated mass of awareness began to grow and grow into in avalanche of thought and awareness out of control; with each additional growth of the downward tearing mass loosening hundreds of times its volume, and then that mass uprooting hundreds of times its volume more, and then hundreds of times that; on and on, wider and broader, until there was nothing left to stand.

Poincaré and Quality in science

With the melodrama come and gone, the author was left to reflect on the fact that in the end he had done nothing but approximate the Tao in his own imperfect way and then, almost by accident, discover his blunder. Only poor scholarship had prevented him from seeing this earlier. And perhaps the Tao and his Quality were not quite the same thing, anyway. After all, how could you ever really assert the truth of the statement that they were? So had his efforts been completely in vain? He argued no. The assimilation of Quality into the teaching of rhetoric, for example, had transformed the subject from a dry exercise at best into a huge success. What was significant was that the brand of rhetoric he had taught he considered a branch of reasoning, and yet it had been immensely enriched by an undefinable and therefore arguably wholly irrational concept. So, in this instance at least, reasoning had been the beneficiary of Quality.

Could this success be repeated on a grander scale? Thinking big, he wondered whether three areas of human experience that had traditionally been seen as being largely disjoint, namely art, religion and science, might somehow be conjoined if their relationship to Quality could be better understood. As far as art was concerned, he claimed that its relationship to Quality had already been established during the previous analysis of rhetoric. Art is a high-Quality endeavour, he

maintained, and left it at that. As for religion, he left that for the future. Which brought him to science and which, of the three, was the area that he thought most badly needed its relationship to Quality defined. In particular, the dictum that it was value free, which he interpreted as Quality free, had to go. Science without Quality was precisely the death force that the Sutherlands and their ilk were trying so hard to run away from.

Perhaps chastened by his experience with reinventing the Tao, his analysis of the relationship between science and Quality begun with a careful study of the history of philosophy with a view to discovering whether or not these lines of thought had ever been pursued before. Eventually he came to Poincaré. Poincaré had witnessed first hand the crisis in the foundations of the physical sciences, physics in particular, that happened around the turn of the nineteenth century. Einstein's theory of relativity was not yet widely disseminated but Poincaré, having had considerable knowledge of the subject himself, would doubtless have been well aware of its ramifications. Earlier in the same century, pure mathematics had also been rocked by the discoveries of non-Euclidean geometries by Riemann and others. These geometries cast irrefutable doubt on the sanctity of mathematical truth since despite being mutually contradictory, they were nonetheless internally consistent. Faced with this situation, Poincaré had concluded that Euclid's axioms were neither a priori judgements, for example our understanding that reality unfolds continuously, nor were they what the author called experimental verities, that is, convenient facts that bore out experiment and were thus susceptible to change. Instead, Poincaré concluded that they were merely conventions that were no more than informed by experiment, if that. They could remain hypothetically true even if a subsequent experiment refuted them as approximations to reality. Or they could be discarded for no other reason than a desire to look at things from a different perspective. Euclid's fifth postulate was exactly like that. In fact it was pointless to ask which geometry was correct, it was merely a question of which happened to be the most convenient. Furthermore, Poincaré went on to suggest that not only mathematical truths but all empirical truths were like that, even seemingly inviolable truths such as space and time. They were all no more than conventions.

Poincaré's wrote: "If a phenomenon admits a complete mechanical explanation it will admit an infinity of others which will account equally well for all the peculiarities disclosed by experiment", and went on to describe the ways in which scientists arrived at empirical definitions. Perhaps more apposite, however, was his analysis of his own mathematical insights. Being loathe to eulogise them, he instead tried to rationalise them. Mathematics, he wrote, was not simply a matter of applying rules indiscriminately. The right choices must be made, not only to arrive at immediate results but to avoid the time and trouble of taking sequences of steps that lead nowhere. The principles that governed these choices were impossible to write down, however. They were felt rather than formulated, guided by what Poincaré called the subliminal self. This subliminal self looked at a large number of solutions to a problem, with the ones that broke through into consciousness being selected on the basis of a mathematical aesthetic, a feeling that all mathematicians were familiar with.

Poincaré's contemporaries could not accept that scientific and mathematical facts were preselected, however, because to them this view undermined the validity of scientific method. And since he apparently did not continue with his philosophical investigations and therefore arrived at no solution, Poincaré himself did not offer any riposte or resolution to this quandary. The author, however, knew that the accusation that subjectivity implied "whatever you like" was only valid within a dualistic, subject-object metaphysics. When Quality entered the picture as a third and overarching metaphysical entity, the selection process that Poincaré wrote about could be based directly on it. In short, Poincaré's mathematical aesthetic was none other than what the author called the awareness of Quality. Thus Quality became the guiding principle of all scientific and mathematical investigation, capping a complete structure of thought capable, in the author's eyes, of uniting science and art.

Stuckness and the solution to technological hopelessness

The dual of Quality is caring, they are the external and internal aspects of the same thing. To be aware of Quality is to care, conversely carelessness is the absence of an awareness of Quality. In relation to technology, the author framed carelessness as technological hopelessness, that affliction of the Sutherlands. In fact, his attempts to rationalise Quality up until this point had largely been in an effort to find a solution to the problem of technological hopelessness, a problem that he regarded as fundamental. In order to solve it, he figured that what remained to be done was to root the insights he had gained in the everyday, and for him there was nothing quite so everyday as motorcycle maintenance. Previously he had shown how scientific method could be applied to repair a motorcycle. Now he wanted to show how those processes could be tremendously improved by recognising of the role Quality played in them.

In order to do this he started by focusing on one particular negative aspect of motorcycle maintenance, namely the predicament of being stuck. Traditional scientific method is of little use at this point. What is needed are traits such as inventiveness, intuition and so on, traits well outside of its domain. Simply observing the facts in an objective way is unlikely to get us very far. After all, as Poincaré pointed out, an infinite number of facts arise in any given situation, and the facts we need to observe in order to become unstuck are unlikely to be the ones that immediately present themselves. Indeed, the predicament of being stuck could be defined as being unable to uncover the pertinent facts that would enable us to continue. So how do we uncover them? Both Poincaré and the author were in agreement here, there had to be some subliminal choice or filtering at work. In the author's words, the good mechanic selects facts on the basis of Quality. In fact all technological work, including motorcycle maintenance, should be carried out not within the context of some non-caring subject-object dualism, but rather within what the author termed a craftsman-like, self-involved reality. You have to care.

Seen in this context, stuckness is not the worst of all possible situations, it is actually the best possible situation to be in. When truly stuck you have what Buddhists call a beginner's mind, you are bereft of ideas. This is much better than having a head full of them. Initially the problem at hand seems unimportant, now being stuck allows it to assume its true importance. Being stuck forces you to become acutely aware of Quality, that thing that will eventually get you unstuck. In fact the state of being stuck is bound to pass eventually. You cannot hold on to it indefinitely any more than a neophyte can maintain a beginner's mind. Being stuck gradually erodes pattens of traditional reasoning, and the cause of being stuck ceases to be inviolable and becomes a continuing, direct experience. You will ask questions of it, and the exact nature of the answers becomes unimportant as long as they have Quality.

Stuckness, or rather the inability to see its true nature and utility, is the classical side of the paucity of traditional reasoning in relation to technology. The romantic side of this badness is technological ugliness, that from which the Sutherlands were fleeing. But this ugliness is not inherent in technology itself, which is simply the making of things. If this ugliness were inherent then there would be no possibility for beauty in the arts, or indeed in any of the more narrowly defined technological disciplines of today. Instead, technological ugliness is a consequence of the relationship between technology and its makers, a relationship that is always passed on to users in some form or another. When this relationship lacks Quality or, to put it another way, there is a lack of craftsmanship, technological ugliness results. At what the author termed the moment of pure Quality perception, perhaps just the moment of pure Quality, there is no distinction between subject and object. It is this oneness that is the basis of craftsmanship and it is precisely this that the author felt that modern technological work often lacked. If the makers of technology feel no particular sense of identity with it, it will have no inherent Quality. Literally, it inherits no Quality.

The author believed strongly that the way to solve the conflict between human values and technological needs was not to run away from technology. Instead the dualism of traditional reasoning that prevented a true understanding of what technology was needed to be dismantled. Technology was not the exploitation of nature, as many people believed it to be, but rather a fusion of nature

and human spirit that was capable of creating something that transcended both. When the first plane took to the air or the first man landed on the moon there was a widespread public recognition of this transcendence, however the author thought that this recognition should happen to us all in our everyday lives, albeit in a less dramatic way. In our relations with technology we should try not only to perceive what looks good, but also to grasp the underlying principles involved in order to arrive at what is good. The absence of craftsmanship is what leads to the everyday dullness of most of modern technology, a dullness that is only made worse by a cloying insistence on overlaying it with a veneer of faux style, romantic phoniness is what the author called it, in an attempt to render it more palatable. To anyone with even an inkling of an awareness of Quality, all this does is to make the whole situation even more depressing.

So the author returned to the subject of peace of mind in relation to technical work. That which produces it is good work, that which destroys it is bad work. But why is this? Because peace of mind is a pre-requisite of an awareness of Quality that has to accompany the work as it proceeds. And conversely, to perceive goodness intuitively whilst at the same time understanding the rationale behind it cultivates peace of mind. The whole thing is a virtuous circle. Peace of mind manifests itself firstly as physical or outward quietness; secondly as the absence of wandering thoughts, that is mental quietness; and lastly as what the author termed value quietness, the ability to perform life's tasks without desire. What produces this immersion is an absence of any sense of separation between subject and object, a complete identification with one's circumstances, which happens right at the cutting edge of consciousness. Outside of technological work there are many idiomatic expressions for this state of being, such as "going with the flow", "rolling with it" and so on. It is part folklore, part common sense. Within scientific and technological parlance, however, words for this absence of subject-object separation are scarce, because traditional reasoning has shut it out in favour of what the author called the formal dualistic scientific outlook. So the author believed that is was high time that we brought this state of being, this awareness of Quality which he called simply caring, back to the centre of our endeavours. If we could manage not to separate ourselves from our surroundings, if we could live or at least work without this subject-object separation, then he fervently believed that everything else would follow naturally. If we cultivate this peace of mind then right values will result, and these will produce right thoughts, which in turn will produce right actions. The way to put the world to rights was to start with our own heads and hearts and hands, and to work out from there. Others could talk up their grand ideas, he quipped, he just wanted to talk about how to fix a motorcycle.

Gumption traps and how to avoid them

If you are going to fix a motorcycle then you need an adequate supply of gumption, which the author eloquently described as the psychic gasoline that keeps the whole thing going. During the process of fixing a motorcycle, everything from dusted knuckles to broken irreplaceable parts will drain off gumption. The author called these things gumption traps. There are countless gumption traps, and they cause you to loose sight of Quality and thus to loose your enthusiasm for what you are doing. Despite being innumerable, gumption traps fall into two main categories. Those caused by external conditions, the aforementioned dusted knuckle, for example; and those that are primarily internal. The author called these setbacks and hangups, respectively.

One kind of setback is a mistake made in a long sequence of steps that goes undetected until near the end. Gumption can be salvaged, however, from the realisation that next time you will be much better prepared and therefore the process will likely go a whole lot more smoothly. Another kind of setback is the intermittent fault. Something is wrong until you try to identify it, and then it just works. Or worse, you think you might have fixed it but it reoccurs. One way to avoid gumption loss on these occasions is not to jump to conclusions. And should the problem reoccur, it is worth reflecting on the fact that you are really no worse off than you were before, in fact you are in a slightly slightly better position. The problem may still be there, but at least now you are afforded the time to study it.

Hangups can be broadly categorised into value traps, those that block affective understanding; truth traps, those that block cognitive understanding; and muscle traps, those related to motor behaviour. Of these three, value traps are the most common and of these, what the author termed value rigidity is the most pernicious. Value rigidity is an inability to reassess a problem because of an unbending adherence to previous values. We each preselect facts subconsciously on the basis of our relationship with Quality. If this is too fixed, however, then we may never become conscious of the pertinent facts and the real answer will elude us even though it might be staring us in the face. In these situations the best thing to do is to slow down and just live with the problem for a while. Most likely some new fact will present itself. It might seem trifling at first but may turn out to be more interesting than the problem itself. If this is the case then you have conquered value rigidity and will have given yourself a better chance of solving the problem. Another value trap is ego. An overly high opinion of yourself is delusional, the opposite of an awareness of Quality. The object of any job at hand responds not to any overblown personality images that your ego conjures up but rather to your real personality. If your confidence derives from ego then it will be deflated when the inevitable mistakes and mishaps occur. One way out of this trap is modestly, whether genuine or affected. If you assume that you are no good then your gumption will get a boost whenever the facts bear this out. Conversely, if the facts suggest that you are not as bad as you are making out you are then your gumption will get a boost anyway. Anxiety is the next value trap. Perhaps the best remedy for this is the realisation that even the best mess up sometimes. Plus if you make the mistakes yourself then there is a gumption boost from the knowledge that at least you have learned something. The opposite of anxiety is boredom, which is also a value trap. When bored you should just stop, go and do something different, or go to sleep. Boredom is allied with inattentiveness, which may mean that other more pressing problems are distracting you. Since these problems are diverting your attention anyway, attend to them before returning to the problem at hand. Another way to deal with the boredom of a familiar and repetitive task is ritual. There is a certain aesthetic to rituals which fosters acceptance. The final value trap is impatience, which can lead to frustration or even anger. The best cure for impatience is either to allow more time for a task or to scale it down. Both require a certain amount of value flexibility and likely the loss of some gumption, but nothing compared to the loss of gumption that occurs when impatience causes you to make the Big Mistake.

Moving on from value traps, next are truth traps. The main truth trap is the trap of classical logic, the trap that says that all questions can be settled one way or the other. There is a third way, however, which the Japanese call mu. Mu symbolises not just that the question has no answer, mu suggests we un-ask the question. Scientific method places little or no importance on experiments that return mu outcomes. However, if we gauge an experiment not by the definiteness of its outcome but rather by how much it improves our understanding of nature then mu can be just as if not more useful. It could be argued, in fact, that in the long run science grows more by its mu experiments than by its definitive ones. It is mu that inspires scientific enquiry in the first place, after all. There is nothing particularly unscientific or esoteric about mu, it is just that often we do not place enough value on it.

Lastly, there are muscle or psychomotor traps. These include inadequate tools and surroundings. It is amazing how many mistakes adequate lighting can prevent, for example. Some discomfort is almost inevitable in any physical task, but too much of it can adversely affect judgement. Pay attention to temperature in particular. Too cold and you will hurry, too hot and your patience will fray. The other major pyschomotor trap is muscle insensitivity. There is a thing called mechanic's feel, an intuitive understanding of the elasticity and softness of materials. Metals in particular have tremendous elasticity, but in a very restricted range. There are various degrees of tightness, for example, from finger tight through snug to fully tight, where all or nearly all of the elasticity is taken up. Someone with mechanic's feel knows exactly how much force to apply to reach these stages in each case. As well as elasticity, all materials possess a certain amount of softness. Consequently a competent mechanic knows to avoid handling soft surfaces whenever possible and when this is not possible, to use wooden hammers, vice jaws faced with brass and so on.

If all of these gumption traps and others can be navigated, you may ask, have you got the thing

licked? The answer is of course no. It is the way that you live that predisposes you to avoid the traps in the first place. The fixing of a motorcycle is not separate from the rest of your life and the real motorcycle is the motorcycle called yourself. If you look for options of Quality and pursue those options for their own sake, thus making an art out of what you are doing, you are likely to become a much more interesting person and much less of an object to those around you. These Quality decisions will change you and those around you, too, because Quality tends to fan out like waves. The Quality job you thought that nobody was ever going to see is seen and will make you feel a little better because of it, and you are likely to pass this feeling on to others, and in this way the Quality keeps on going.

The triumph of Truth over Good

The author now turned to the rational exploration of Quality one last time. "Quality is every part of Greek thought", he had been told. Strange then that the concept had become so downtrodden. What had happened? If Quality came under the banner of any academic discipline, it had to be philosophy, that enduring legacy of Ancient Greece. Coincidentally, he needed a Ph.D. in order to continue teaching at university, and so after a long search he applied for an interdisciplinary program in "Analysis of Ideas and Study of Methods" at the University of Chicago. He was admitted by the acting chairman of the examining committee during the chairman's absence, primarily on the back of his teaching experience. But a later interview with the chairman did not go so well. On being asked what his substantive field was, he replied that it was English composition. He was told, however, in no uncertain terms, that this was a methodological field.

He spent the summer reflecting on this dichotomy. Substance corresponds to the physical, what exists, whereas method corresponds to the functional, what happens. He recalled his earlier descriptions of a motorcycle. On the one hand it could be broken down into its constituent parts, which is a substantive description, on the other hand its individual and interrelated functions can be categorised, its methodological description. Of course if these two descriptions are muddled up then confusion can occur. However, it was clear to him that English composition, or indeed any field of knowledge, could not be labelled as being strictly one or the other. It seemed draconian and besides, his concept of Quality was outside of both. It was the whole objective versus subjective dilemma again, something his Quality had long ago outgrown.

Fearful that the chairman's pedantry would torpedo his studies before they had even begun, and finding nothing reassuring in the chairman's writing, indeed quite the opposite, the author dug instead into the backgrounds of the committee members, the chairman's in particular. What he found was a bygone academic controversy of which the chairman was the last surviving protagonist. In fact the committee was the last vestige of a revolt in education that happened at the University of Chicago in the nineteen thirties. It was led by the then president of the university, Robert Maynard Hutchins and included, aside from the chairman, the philosopher and popular author Mortimer Adler. To Adler, the work of Thomas Aquinas, who had attempted to combine Greek philosophy, Aristotle in particular, with the principles of Christianity, remained the pinnacle of Western intellectual thought. In this tradition man is considered a rational being, capable of defining and seeking the good life, and of achieving it.

Hutchins, Alder and others accepted this as a guiding principle and consequently instigated many educational reforms both at the University of Chicago and beyond, of which the Great Books program is perhaps the most famous. They rejected the notion that an empirical scientific education was of itself necessarily a good education, because they believed that empirical science was value free. Inevitably there was a clash between the reformers and those who, whilst conceding the importance of values in education, nevertheless railed against the idea that the last word on them should be left to works dating from ancient and medieval times. The author himself was sympathetic to those whose opposed the reformers. He also regarded values as unfixed and was antagonistic to the Aristotlean tradition as their definer. Nevertheless, he felt that this debate would end up being deeply enmeshed in his own future explorations of Quality. Obviously his

views were going to clash with the chairman's own slavish adherence to Aristotle but rather than avoid such a clash, he deliberately provoked it. He penned a letter to the committee in which, in somewhat megalomaniacal fashion, he stated his own belief that a division of study into substantive and methodological fields was nothing more than an outgrowth of the Aristotlean dichotomy of form and substance, a view for which he had little use, etc. The letter had the desired effect and he was told to apply to the philosophy department in order to continue his studies. This he did, and was predictably refused. However, it appeared that the chairman was unable to throw him out of the university entirely, and he therefore enrolled later that year as he had first intended.

At the time the author passionately believed that the influence of classical thinking on western thought was near total and the resultant damage untold. To understand how he arrived at this condemnation, it is necessary to understand the mythos-over-logos argument. Generally speaking, the logos is our present day rational understanding of the world, whereas the mythos is effectively everything else. The latter includes art, literature and oral traditions as well as, more broadly, our beliefs, aspirations and so on. Both vary from one culture to another, take the example of language, but in their entirety both are universal. The mythos-over-logos argument essentially states that the logos is inexorably shaped by the mythos. Furthermore, it is the ongoing mythos that we are exposed to from birth, transformed into logos but nonetheless still mythos, that stops us from reverting to cavemen. In fact, according to the author, to believe that we can simply accept or disregard the mythos as we please is not to understand what it is. There is only one kind of person who rejects the mythos, he continued, and this was the madman. To be outside of the mythos was to be insane. And yet, he knew that his Quality was outside of it. Why was this? Because Quality was to him the continuing stimulus that caused us to create our world, including the mythos. We respond to Quality, but these responses are steeped in what we already know, they must be. This is how the mythos evolves, it is the building of analogues upon analogues since time immemorial. The author knew that to fully comprehend Quality he would have to leave the mythos but, at the same time, he believed that this did not make him insane. And so his fanatical conclusion was that it was the mythos that was insane, insane if it had us believe that Quality was unreal. And in the ancient Greeks he thought he had found the villains who had long ago shaped the mythos so as to cause us to accept this as reality.

Top on the author's hit list was Aristotle. Rhetoric is an art, Aristotle began, because it can be reduced to a rational system of order. This left the author aghast. If this were so, he quipped, then General Motors produced better art than Picasso. He read on. Rhetoric can be subdivided into particular proofs and topics on the one hand and common proofs on the other. The particular proofs can be subdivided into methods of proof and kinds of proof. The methods of proof are the artificial proofs and the inartificial proofs. Of the artificial proofs there are ethical proofs, emotional proofs and logical proofs. And so on, ad nauseam. Here, the author complained, were the origins of that style of endlessly naming and classifying of things, nothing but the desiccating, lifeless voice of dualistic reason. Not only that, Aristotle placed rhetoric in a minor category in his hierarchy, a branch of practical science, and as such it was isolated from any concern with truth or good, except as devices to throw into an argument. Thus Quality, which in the author's eyes was akin to these notions, was totally divorced from rhetoric. Aristotle's seeming contempt for rhetoric, combined with his atrocious style, so completely alienated the author at the time that he could not read Aristotle without seeking ways to despise and attack him. Later on he would come to retract much of this invective, describing what he found in Aristotle as merely a dull collection of generalisations, many of which seemed impossible to justify in the light of modern knowledge. Perhaps at the end of the day he was unfair to Aristotle for the same reason that Aristotle was unfair to his predecessors. They got in the way of what he was trying to say.

The lectures at the university continued, and the next subject was dialectic. This is a conversation between two or more people, often taking the form of a cross-examination, the purpose of which is to arrive at the truth. It is the mode of discourse in the Dialogues of Plato, in fact Plato believed it to be the only way truth could be arrived at. Aristotle did not share this belief, stating that dialectic was only suitable for some purposes, such as enquiring into men's beliefs or establishing the facts about eternal, unchanging forms. To counter dialectic Aristotle proposed what he termed

physical science or method, which observed the physical facts in order to come to truths about substances which, unlike forms, undergo change. Initially, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the author had some sympathy for Plato, seeing his Quality as akin to Plato's Good. Over time he came to deny this, however, a denial that turned out to be fundamental. Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly that Plato's own view on rhetoric was dismissive. In no way did he associate it with his notion of Good, on the contrary he seemed to associate it with everything bad. An example of this is Plato's dialogue Gorgias, in which Socrates cross-examines the sophist Gorgias. Socrates artfully dissects and eventually completely undermines rhetoric. In the end he likens it to cookery, both being branches of pandering, because they appeal to the emotions rather than to true knowledge. The author was incensed by this, describing dialectic as vicious and mean, with its aim not to try to understand love, truth, beauty and so on but only to usurp them and enthrone itself. He was similarly unsettled by Plato's attack on the sophists, in particular the view that they were nothing but avaricious teachers of deception seemed extreme to him. They taught more than just rhetoric, after all, and many had been respected public figures in their day. So what, he wondered, was the real motive behind the attack? He read further back into ancient Greek history and eventually came to the conclusion that it was part of a broader struggle between what he termed the reality of the Good, represented by the rhetoricians, including the sophists, and the reality of the True, represented by the dialecticians, including Socrates, Plato and later Aristotle. This struggle was for nothing less than the future mind of man. Truth won and the Good lost, which is why today we readily accept the reality of truth yet have so much difficulty in accepting the reality of Quality.

Ancient Greek philosophy had represented the first systematic search for what was imperishable in the affairs of men. Up until then, this had been considered the preserve of the gods. The increased power of abstraction that resulted from the growing impartiality of the ancient Greeks to the world around them, however, had led to the understanding that myths did not reveal truth but were rather just the creations of their forbear's imaginations. Instead, permanence was to be found in the basic or originating principles, the study of which was called natural philosophy. Thales, considered its founder, identified the Primary or Immortal Principle as water. Later the Pythagorians called it number, making them the first to see it as something nonmaterial. Anaxagoras identified it with the mind, whilst Parmenides for the first time differentiated it from the world of appearances. Understandably for the author, the importance of the introduction of this duality and its effect upon subsequent history could not be overstated. Thus many of the pre-Socratic philosophers sought to establish a universal Immortal Principle, the existence of which they all agreed upon, only disagreeing over its definition. In the author's view the resolution of this disagreement came from an entirely new direction, namely the sophists. Protagoras, regarded as the first sophist, said that "Man is the measure of all things". What he meant by this was not that man determined the motion of the stars, but rather that truth was relative. It was as if the Immortal Principle had been taken from Parmenides' duality, leaving only worlds of appearances. For this reason, to the author Plato's hatred of the sophists now made sense. He was defending, against their relativism, the Immortal Principle that was to become the idea of Truth, Knowledge itself, and that burgeoned into the foundation of the whole of Western systematic thought.

Yet the author felt that his Quality was somehow opposed to all of this, it seemed to agree more with the sophists. That phrase, man is the measure of all things. Quality emerged in the relationship between man and the world, he was a participant in the creation of all things. In other words, man is the measure of all things. And the sophists taught rhetoric. It all seemed to fit. The one thing that didn't fit, however, was that virtue was supposed to be central to the sophists' teaching. But if virtue implied anything did it not imply an ethical absolute? Something was missing. He returned to his study of ancient Greece, reading H. D. F. Kitto's The Greeks. "What moves the Greek warrior to deeds of heroism," Kitto wrote, "is not a sense of duty as we understand it...it is rather duty towards himself. He strives after that which we translate 'virtue' but is in Greek areté, 'excellence'... It runs through Greek life." So the translation of areté as virtue was far too simplistic, even misplaced. Instead it implied a respect for the wholeness of life, an excellence which existed not in any particular specialism but in life itself. Moreover, the author became intrigued by this motive of duty towards oneself, which was one translation of the Sanskrit word

dharma, sometimes described as the One of the Hindus. And then, all of a sudden, dharma, areté and Quality for him became synonymous. The sophists were teaching Quality and the medium they had chosen was rhetoric! He had been doing it right all along!

The halos around the heads of Socrates and Plato were now gone. The author perceived that they had done exactly what they had accused the sophists of doing, that is using deception in order to make their own case appear the stronger. Plato had taken areté and encapsulated it, making the idea of Good out if it, subordinate only to Truth, but subordinate nonetheless. This is why it had initially seemed akin to Quality, because it had come from areté. Moreover, once it had been compartmentalised in this way, it was no problem for another philosopher to come along and show by dialectical methods that it should be demoted further in the true order of things. That philosopher was Aristotle, who relegated it to a relatively minor branch of knowledge called ethics. As for rhetoric, once learning itself, the child of the myths and poetry of ancient Greece, which were the response of the ancient Greeks to the universe around them made on the basis of Quality, rhetoric was relegated to the teaching of forms and mannerisms.

Forms and mannerisms...hated by the best, loved by the worst. Year after year, decade after decade of little front-row "readers", mimics with pretty smiles and neat pens, out to get their Aristotelian A's while those who possess the real areté sit silently in back of them wondering what is wrong with themselves that they cannot like this subject.

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

And the bones of the Sophists long ago turned to dust and what they said turned to dust with them and the dust was buried under the rubble of declining Athens through its fall and Macedonia through its decline and fall. Through the decline and death of ancient Rome and Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire and the modern states...buried so deep and with such ceremoniousness and such unction and such evil that only a madman centuries later could discover the clues needed to uncover them, and see with horror what had been done.

Truth won and the Good had lost, dialectic had displaced rhetoric, and we have lived with the consequences ever since. This was the thesis in which the author so fervently believed.

These revelations signalled the end of his attempts to gain a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. At one point his goal had been to keep Quality undefined, as it should be, but now he saw that he had fallen yet again into the trap of trying to define it in terms of its intellectual relation to things. He had battled the dialectitians, it was true, but in doing so he had made one statement after another about Quality and he knew now with certainty that any such efforts simply defeated its purpose. The Ph.D. had been a fool's errand to begin with. He quit the teaching job that he had taken in order to fund his studies and ended his marriage, sending his wife and children away. His whole life unravelled and he was left with nothing. He remembered a fragment from an old hymn he once heard. You've got to cross that lonesome valley, you've got to cross it by yourself.

He crosses a lonesome valley, out of the mythos, and emerges as if from a dream, seeing that his whole consciousness, the mythos, has been a dream and no one's dream but his own, a dream he must now sustain of his own efforts. Then even "he" disappears and only the dream of himself remains with himself in it. And the Quality, the areté he has fought so hard for, has sacrificed for, has never betrayed, but in all that time has never once understood, now makes itself clear to him and his soul is at rest.

Epilogue

It was a desire to get to grips with the intriguing thesis that Quality in the form of areté had been deliberately and systematically buried by Plato, Aristotle and their followers that motivated me to attempt to summarise the exposition in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. When I came to the end, however, it seemed a little abrupt, and besides, a few points remained that I thought deserved further investigation. So I decided to write this epilogue, in order to do just that. One thing I should mention at this stage is that in the process I will have to touch upon the book's story rather than just its exposition and therefore what follows is a bit of a spoiler. If you have not read the book already, therefore, I recommend that you do so before reading on here.

To continue then, I made the assertion in the prologue that the book should be seen as more than just an instruction manual for coping with modern life and technology in particular, and I felt that this needed some justification, especially since, after the numerous careful reads of the text that attempting to summarise it required, I found that the author had in fact given his own opinions on the matter. So I feel that I should relate what those are and then justify my own conclusions in their light. To begin with I will have to explain a little about the structure of the book. As well as dividing it up into parts and chapters in a conventional manner, the author also employed another loose subdivision into what he likened to chautauquas. It is probably best that you turn to the Internet or to the book itself for an explanation of what a chautauqua is, as I cannot do better than either apart from to state that in the book they span both the story and exposition, which themselves are tightly intertwined. What is the most important of these chautauquas, then? The question would hardly be worth asking were it not for the fact that the author himself gave an answer. It is the chautauqua that encompasses stuckness and the solution to technological hopelessness. The first quote in the prologue is from this chautauqua and in fact I inadvertently ended up devoting a whole section of this appreciation to it.

So where does this leave my assertion that the book's reach is broader than a coping manual? Well, obviously there is more to the book than any one of its chautauquas, even the most important one. Moreover, the author had something to say himself about the book's reach. He described it as a culture bearing book, by which he meant that it challenged cultural value assumptions and did so at a time when the culture was changing in favour of that challenge. That challenge was to the belief in America at the time that material success was everything, or nearly so. To use the author's words, the hippies were having none of it, but the alternative they were offering seemed to many to be little more than degeneracy. This is where the book came in. It offered an alternative to both sides by enriching the meaning of success, offering what the author described as a positive goal to work towards that did not confine. There is no further explanation on this front, however, and we are left to draw our own conclusions about what this kind of success is or might entail. This is really where I want to pick things up.

Success, especially in life, can be difficult to define, so a less lofty goal would be to at least find an instance of it. More to the point, find an instance of it that has been brought about by an understanding that a heightened awareness of Quality should be a primary motivator in life, as surely this is a prerequisite of the author's kind of success. If we live higher Quality lives, he contended, then those lives and the lives of those around us will be much better. If anyone could be said to have a heightened awareness of Quality then of course it is the author and therefore it is reasonable to ask, has he been successful? The considerable material success of the book is certainly an example but that is not the kind of success that he is talking about. Fortunately, however, more salient examples can be found in the pages of the book itself, most notably the success that the author had in overcoming mental illness; and, most touchingly, the success he had in mending his relationship with his son.

The nadir of the author's mental illness is the breakdown related near the end of the book, the one from which I quoted at the end of my own summary. The breakdown has elsewhere been described by the author as a "hard enlightenment", and if we are to believe his earlier thesis that Quality and the Tao were one and the same thing, although admittedly he did later step back from such a

comparison, then we have to accept that he believed that he experienced the enlightenment that, say, Buddhists aspire to. Whatever happened, the result was that he was subsequently judged as being insane, committed to a mental hospital and thereafter underwent electroconvulsive therapy, or ECT, on numerous occasions. Ernest Hemmingway was another famous ECT patient and eloquently wrote about its efficacy: "It was a brilliant cure but we lost the patient." He committed suicide shortly afterwards. The author himself claims that he lost his personality and all of his memories as a result of the treatment. Over time, however, fragments of those memories began to resurgace and with them a growing realisation of what had happened. He was inhabiting a body that used to belong to a previous self, whom he came to refer to as Phaedrus, and it terrified him.

These EYES! That is the terror of it. These gloved hands I now look at, steering the motorcycle down the road, were once his! And if you can understand the feeling that comes from that, then you can understand real fear...the fear that comes from knowing there is nowhere you can possibly run.

Allied with this growing realisation was the author's deteriorating relationship with his son, Chris, who had also been diagnosed as showing early signs of mental illness. His increasing demands on his father were darkening their relationship and, perhaps not surprisingly, he was beginning to demonstrate a growing awareness of his father's condition. He had lived through his father's breakdown and subsequent treatment, after all, but is was unclear how much he had taken in at the time or how it had affected him. Now it was becoming clear that his own problems were a consequence of these earlier events. This was the situation that confronted the author and the reason he had taken Chris along with him on the road trip in preference to his wife. If he could not to get to the bottom of the problem then he had resolved to at least come to terms with it.

It was not all bad, there were many moments of levity, but by the time they reached the west coast, the situation remained unresolved. The author's forebodings about his own fate, in particular what he felt was the renewed onset of insanity, grew more pressing, and his relationship with his son had if anything deteriorated further. The only progress seems to have been the realisation that the father Chris wanted was the author's previous incarnation, Phaedrus, not the latest one. The pathos of this situation could not escape the author.

I can imitate the father he's supposed to have, but subconsciously, at the Quality level, he sees through it and knows his real father isn't here. 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.

It was a kind of stuckness, like the subject of that earlier and most important chautauqua, the screw that would not come loose. But how to become unstuck? It was abundantly clear by this point that the parental virtues were not going to be enough on their own. Certainly the author's patience had frayed to breaking point by this stage and we are left to wonder whether his plan to pack his son off to some aunt or other had been hatched not so much to protect him but simply to be rid of him. Whatever the case, the author branding himself a hypocrite for not practising what he preached apropos of his relationship with his son does seem over played. There was most definitely a high Quality relationship between them, it was just that it had not up until that point amounted to enough to overcome their mutual problems which, given their magnitude, is hardly surprising.

The resolution of this stuckness is the crux of the whole book, but did the author allow himself a little artistic license in bringing together the narrative and the exposition at this point? Perhaps it was all just very difficult to write about.Whatever the case, it is easy to go straight past all of this without realising its significance. The situation is not helped by the fact that the narrative is coming to a close, the road trip is nearly over and this was always going to be a little deflating. It is not the arrival that matters but the getting there, after all. So then, how to become unstuck? There were two problems at hand. One was the relationship with his son; and the other the relationship, if you can call it that, with his former self. The latter's encroachment had been

perceived as the onset of insanity and it is this deep rooted perception that he manages to find a way past. He had lived outside of the mythos momentarily, if you can put it that way, perceived his Quality viscerally, and for this society had judged him to be insane. But Chris had asked, was he really? Arguably not at all. It was just a definition, just words, something that Chris had known instinctively all along.

"I knew it," he said. It keeps tugging on the line, saying my big problem may not be as big as I think it is, because the answer is right in front of me. For God's sake relieve him of his burden! Be one person again!

Thus the author found the courage to begin to reconcile himself with his former self Phaedrus, and in time the dichotomy dissipated. Moreover, in doing so he took the burden from his son and mended their relationship as a consequence. This is the kind of success he was talking about!

Although the epiphany may well have been sudden, at least as the author chose to relate it, the period of recovery that succeeded it was prolonged. How can we relate to this recovery or, indeed, even begin to understand the affliction itself? The answer is, of course, to read the book. In fact the writing of the book played a major role in the author's recovery, which we know, because on more than one occasion the author clearly states it. Thus we cannot escape the conclusion that the author's own view on life, his belief that Quality was the primary empirical reality of the world, to use his words, was what got him through. Furthermore, we cannot, by the same token, escape the fact that many of the views espoused in the book belonged originally to Phaedrus, and therefore the book is the clearest testament to the author's success in becoming whole again, not in just what it relates but in its very existence.

The writing of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance was indeed a high Quality endeavour. It was of its time, but its Quality ensures that it remains timeless and is as important as ever.