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**Quality and inspiration.**  
**A study of the diversification of rhetoric of quality in relation to different conceptual domains in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* by Robert M. Pirsig**

Abstract

This article discusses the basic types of concepts of quality occurring in Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. These terms refer to the different conceptual domains, creating diversified types of rhetoric. All kinds of rhetoric refer to the discovery and awakening of individuality. The quality of education at university or on a motorbike must extend to all possible levels of the Great Chain of Being, it can not only be addressed with abstractedness. Conceptual diversification means diversifying rhetoric and style, which possibly corresponds to different levels of quality for Pirsig. In this sense, his proposals of a metaphysics of quality is part of a current dispute about the crisis within the humanities and the need to give it meaning, practicality and socially responsible utility. A metaphysics of quality uses the rhetoric of conceptual schemata which include: road, inclusion and container.

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### Perceptual Quality

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*<sup>1</sup> by Robert M. Pirsig is a penetrating and thorough analysis of how we live and how to live better. The book describes a journey on a motorcycle from Minnesota to Northern California by a father and his young son Chris. The trip is punctuated by numerous philosophical discussions on topics including epistemology, ethical emotivism and the philosophy of science. It is a personal and philosophical odyssey into life's fundamental questions; it is both touching and transcendent, resonant with the myriad confusions of existence.

The apotheosis of madness and the discussion that goes with it, the rebellion against the official world of university education, the renaissance of individualism, the choice of novels for promoting philosophy, the attempt to reconcile the cultural elements of East and West are examples of the wide range of topics that tie the works of Robert Pirsig to romanticism. One American literary critic, George Steiner, likened Pirsig's book to *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. Neo-romantic connotations are fairly easily found in many places in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* [hereafter: Z&A], because this novel comments upon the relationship between romanticism and classicism, and also because it is a road novel. This road — which is aesthetically romantic — runs through American prairies and mountains, and generally these landscapes represent one of the novel's most important conceptual domains<sup>2</sup>.

A quality reference appears in the one of the first fragments of Z&A. The narrator describes riding on the motorcycle and refers to the infinity of the landscape, as observed from the vehicle: then, after the acceptance of the monotony and boredom — “comes the unnamed” (Pirsig 2010: 32) — an experience which in other parts of the book is associated with the raging storm or with the spirits of haunted tales. He writes: “...maybe in this expanse of grass and the wind he sees something, which sometimes comes along with the acceptance of monotony and boredom. I know what it is, but I do not have a name for it” (Pirsig 2010: 32). This extract crowns the description of the superiority of the motorcycle

<sup>1</sup> R. M. Pirsig (2010), *Zen i sztuka obsługi motocykla*, trans. from the English by T. Bieroń, Rebis, Poznań. The translated version which I use along with the original version of e-book: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. An Inquiry into Values*, Harper Collins E-books, 2009, first published in 1974 in USA.

<sup>2</sup> G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1988), *Metafory w naszym życiu*, trans. by T. P. Krzeszowski, PIW, Warsaw. See: M. Johnson (2013), *Znaczenie ciała. Estetyka rozumienia ludzkiego*, trans. by J. Pluciennik, WUŁ [in print], based on *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2007), University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

over car travel. The car cuts us off from reality, the journey is identical with isolation from the world and the people, the isolation bringing passive observation. A person traveling by car reminds the narrator of a typical passive TV viewer (Pirsig 2010: 18); on the other hand, the car is the essence of an individualist and comfortable American lifestyle. A motorcycle in this context is a sign of a partial and limited contestation of individualist style. A motorcycle was also an ancillary element of contestation in the classic American road movie, *Easy Rider* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper. This style is essentially in place throughout the whole road genre, where the action takes place during the journey, which is one of escape and then finally culminating in a race of heroes.

The aforementioned fragment of Z&A with the — “unnamed” quality of the landscape easily steers us to similar romantic road journeys in Polish literature, for example, *Stepy akermiańskie* by Adam Mickiewicz. In other places in Pirsig’s novel, we find the prairie landscape referred to simply as “huge, overpowering” (in Polish translation the only suitable word is “olbrzymia” or “giant”), which is the equivalent of “overwhelming” and occurs frequently in the discourse of the sublime<sup>3</sup> (Pirsig 2010: 40).

In discussions of *Stepy akermiańskie*, sea metaphors used in relation to travelling by land are very important. Also, much has been written about the great metaphor in the erstwhile textbooks of poetics. However, as the classic monograph on Waclaw Kubacki rightly argues that, in *Sonety krymskie* a change in aesthetics is revealed from classic to romantic aesthetics, aesthetics of beauty to the aesthetics of the sublime. This is also very noticeable in the sonnet *Stepy akermiańskie*<sup>4</sup>. In this section you need to pay attention to the other elements present in relation to the subject of the sonnet and to the technique. At the level of primary education it is not noticed that this eastern perception of subject-object relations is reinforced by reference to quality. Perceptual quality is the component that connects the aesthetics of Mickiewicz with the metaphysics of Pirsig, but also with the contemporary discourse about the quality of education.

In the metaphor evoked by the verse “I drifted on a dry expanse of the ocean” we can accentuate the comparison of travel by land to the sea voyage, and consequently a land vehicle to a ship, as a result we also understand the common point being expressed by this conceptual amalgam<sup>5</sup>: drifted represents a flowing and fluid movement. Fluidity is reason for the debatable. We cannot assume that this fluidity is the result of technical progress, it is more about the feeling a traveler experiences resulting from the monotony of traveling. The aforementioned metaphoric of liquidity has similarities with the appearance in contexts of travel and motorization metaphors of smoothness, then is a direct reference to the presence of quality in the discussions about contemporary technique.

Smoothness is perceptually associated with aerodynamics and in Pirsig’s novel. There exist such descriptions with fascination for speed, it confirms the diagnosis that speed might be a stimulus to the sublime. Also Milan Kundera in his short novel *Slowness* emphasized that “speed is a form of ecstasy which the technical revolution gave, it is like a gift for a man”

<sup>3</sup> See: P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (1989), Clarendon Press, Oxford, where the English word overwhelming serves as the main term in the definiens of the sublime. J. Pluciennik (2002), *Retoryka wzniosłości w dziele literackim*, Universitas, Cracow.

<sup>4</sup> W. Kubacki (1949), *Pierwiosnek polskiego romantyzmu*, M. Kot, Cracow, pp. 127, 131; W. Kubacki (1977), *Z Mickiewiczem na Krymie*, PIW, Warszawa, pp. 45, 47, 55, 65, 69.

<sup>5</sup> See: compendium primarily G. Fauconnier, M. Turner (2002), *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blendings and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*, Basic Books, New York.

(Kundera 1997: 5). Man leaning over a motorcycle can focus only on the second, he catches particles, collects and he wants to cut off from time and from the past. Man in movement is snatched from the continuity of time, he is outside of time, and in other words, he is in a state of ecstasy. A culture based on quantitative accumulation is easy to summarise metaphorically in the Kantian notion of the mathematical sublime<sup>6</sup>. Increases are best seen in the graphs of algebraic functions, in which the modeling is based on the horizontal and vertical axes<sup>7</sup>. The more then the higher and much therefore means high. That is why it is so popular to travel up a mountain for revelation, enlightenment and education. Mountain always retains its original form and this is connected with the deepest of essences. The top means good, the bottom means bad (see: Lakoff, Johnson 1988). Such metaphorisation is the most popular in Western European — American culture.

We begin to think in these terms in early childhood, when collecting various “interesting” objects and its becoming a habit. Similarly, the technological advances have accustomed us to the positive valorisation of acceleration, quantitative accumulation in the domain of speed. Based on a similar principle of the mathematical sublime and its metaphorical summary — we can say that very often, the faster the better<sup>8</sup>. Pirsig in this context confirms this conceptualization and at the same time argues with it. Milan Kundera notes another interesting thing in existential mathematics, we can say that “the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the strength of the memory, and the degree of speed is directly proportional to the forces of oblivion” (Kundera 1997: 26). It should be emphasized that the mathematical sublime based on growth and accumulation may bear a sign of qualitative valence: the mathematical sublime can connect with other sensory qualities too. The speed of vehicles, and technological creations is often associated with smoothness and fluidity. These are sensual qualities which make reference to the extremely deeply archaic sense of touch. A few comments on the sense of touch appears in the aforementioned Czech novelist’s works, who emphasizes that “in contrast to the motorcyclist, a runner is always present in his body, must still think about the calluses on feet, he feels his weight, his age and he is self conscious and the time of his life [...]” (Kundera 1997: 5).

One of the most well-known and frequently cited twentieth-century pieces on this topic is a short essay about the new model Citroen DS-19 by Roland Barthes<sup>9</sup>. Barthes treats the various phenomena of popular culture in terms of contemporary myth; in the case of the new Citroen model, the situation is nearly the same. To demonstrate the mythological nature of a subject of daily use, in the first verses of his essay Barthes compares the place of the invention of a car in the twentieth century in the semiotic landscape to the place of a Gothic cathedral in the Middle Ages (in the footsteps of Barthes — essayistic description of modern mythology — later this also appears in the works of Umberto Eco<sup>10</sup>). The basis of this

<sup>6</sup> I. Kant (2004), *Krytyka władzy sądzienia*, trans. J. Galecki, PWN, Warsaw.

<sup>7</sup> G. Lakoff and E. Nunez (2000), *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being*, Basic Books, New York; K. Holmqvist, J. Pluciennik (2008), *Infinity in Language: Conceptualization of the Experience of the Sublime*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle.

<sup>8</sup> See: J. Pluciennik (2002), *Figury nienyobrażalnego. Notatki z poetyki wzniosłości z historii literatury polskiej*, Universitas, Cracow.

<sup>9</sup> It was formed when Pirsig was young, in 1956, work was published in: *Mitologich*, before in: Roland Barthes (1970), *Mit i znak*, trans. W. Błońska and others J. Błoński, PIW, Warsaw, pp.78–80.

<sup>10</sup> For example U.Eco (2012), *Po drugiej stronie lustra i inne eseje: znak, reprezentacja, iluzja, obraz*, trans. Joanna Wajs, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warsaw.

comparison is to show that both creations become magic subjects and arise during creative inspiration (“the creative fever by unknown artists”) and are used, if not practically, then at least in glances held throughout the nation.

The main area of quality which appear in Barthes’ essay are smoothness and lightness, which arise from the practical aim of trying to achieve the highest speed. The value of the quality of smoothness connects Barthes essay with the perceptual qualities present in *Stepy akermuńskie*. In the verse, “I drifted onto the dry expanse of the ocean”, we can see an example of metaphysics of quality: the smoothness of movement (relocation) journey by using a technical invention — a vehicle is not in this case a merit of technical excellence (“divinity”, “magic”) of the technical creation, but it is the result of the quality of driving techniques and the quality of the environment and the quality of the landscape.

However, as a result, due to the occurrence of quality, especially the dynamics of quality in the Pirsig book, as well as in Barthes essay and the Mickiewicz work; the subject participating in the scene loses its distinguishability and the object of contemplation “melts”, thus reaching closeness to the mythical metaphysics of the East (“Tat tvam asi” — sanskrit “You’re the one”)<sup>11</sup>. It is very characteristic of Pirsig that his relationship to technique is expressed with respect to the motorcycle; the object that differs in position from the car in American culture. The comparison present already in the title of Pirsig’s novel — *Zen and motorcycle* — brings to mind the thought of a deliberate dazzling of the peculiar paradoxicality of putting together the metaphysical, “Eastern” (Zen, Buddhism, meditation) and the “Western” technical and trivial (vehicle).

However, this paradoxical comparison is very well justified genologically, because it can be said, that the title, if we remember the content of the novel, introduces the dichotomy of the two genological structures: one associated with the operating instructions and the maintenance of the machine, the other with communication and metaphysical techniques of inspiration and revelation. Likewise in the prototype of the book *Zen in the Art of Archery*<sup>12</sup> by Eugen Herrigel, but the use of Zen philosophy in that book, was associated with focusing on the physical activity of the human body, not a man in any vehicle. This is significant because Pirsig’s rebellion against Western culture is partial and does not include the basics of capitalism based on individual property, which is why the motorcycle and technique is so important to him.

### Quality and care: the technology of spirituality

Technology and metaphysics seem heavily isolated from each other since the times of Aristotle, because the world of physics was described in different categories than the remaining areas. However, it was before Aristotle that technology since the beginning of mankind was associated with practical applications, and humanity quickly learned to use symbolism practically. The metaphysical seemed far from the practical applications of technology. Yet, in the case of handwriting as a technological invention, it can be assumed that the initial use of arithmetic, very practical notches or nodes, quickly began to serve metaphysics. Handwriting as a representation of metacognition quickly started to be used as the best organizer of time management (clock, calendar), the economy (accounts, inventory) and society (the

<sup>11</sup> V. Mishra (1998), *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime*, State University of New York Press, Albany.

<sup>12</sup> *Zen in the Art of Archery* first time published in Germany in 1948.

commandments, orders, nominations). Without handwriting it is hard to imagine a Western culture. Modeling of reality was clearly related to energy management and self management. We still use the important statements an entire civilization, present in expressions such as “Time is money” or “Human capital”.

The very idea of Holy Scripture is a phraseological compound, but one which becomes completely lexicalised, which means the opacity of the structure. However, this is the idea for comparison of technique and metaphysics. Scripture is in this case, a management tool for holiness. It is as an artifact of culture, a result of contact with material of the fiercest of strengths (e.g. a notch on a piece of wood, then on the tablet). But writing alone is not only a technical invention, which can contain both metaphysics and technique. Even in the description of the shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*, Homer pays tribute to the practicality of art (Greek technē), at the same time suggesting metaphysical qualities associated with it. Plato among others in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* reflects on the technology (the art) of rhetoric, and it will also be a question close to Pirsig. In spite of all the antecedents of tradition, Pirsig’s juxtaposition of *Zen and motorcycle* in the title does not cease to provoke inter alia because neo-romanticist custom rules out technique from metaphysics. Such an expression can be seen in the metaphor of classicism “glass and eye”.

In order to make a better definition of this combination of metaphysics and technique<sup>13</sup>, then a closer look at what he proposes in his novel needs to be taken. In one of the early fragments we find a criticism of young car mechanics who seem not to be involved in their work, an absent in spirit, working without commitment, without enthusiasm and even without facial expressions. Workers finish the job exactly when the eight working hours passed, they do not care about the details. Most workers do not have any awareness at all of what they are doing. Pirsig knew what he was saying when he wrote about attention to detail, because he also mentions his own rewarding employment as a writer of the operating manual. In none of the typical operating manuals do we find: be careful what you do, be vigilant. Instructions may be treated as kind of algorithmic programs organizing the proceedings, but without the supreme principle.

In this context the postulate of the moral becomes care, caring about what you are doing at any given moment, usually seen as irrelevant: mindfulness, alertness, attentiveness. There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. (Kundera 1997: 26). The narrator in Z&A says: “I want to approach it slowly, carefully and with respect. In the fourth chapter the machines are presented as personas with character traits”. (Pirsig 2010: 54). The technique and her practical use is described by showing an interesting dichotomy of an “ordinary farmer” and “a man of the city civilization”. On one hand, ordinary farmers, using tractors and other machines appreciate this usable technique, but at the same time they can live without it, when they are deprived of it, they will survive, but they can also repair minor defects. In contrast, friends of Pirsig, “the city people” who negate technique and do not play any role in repairing the equipment, are deeply dependent on it: the failure of equipment in the city is a disaster for the residents. In other words, the practical knowledge of technical devices means independence from them. This is the dialectic of technique and quality. In this context quality means the recognition of involvement in the relation with the object (technique), the relation with care and attention.

<sup>13</sup> Technique — a way of doing on activity which needs skill.

Technology — the study and knowledge of the practical especially industrial, use of scientific discoveries.



*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1976) was discussed in popular culture as a “spiritual cult classic”, meaning a cult classic of spirituality<sup>14</sup>. How did it happen, that Robert M. Pirsig, born in 1928 in Minnesota, previously also a student of biochemistry, wrote a book which became a classic of spirituality? As a child prodigy with an outstanding IQ (170), he was expelled from biochemistry at the University of Minnesota. He journeyed throughout the United States, where he spent three years in the military, e.g. in Korea, where he helped to teach English to the natives and where he learnt the philosophy of Zen from them. He returned to Minnesota to study philosophy and then went to India to discover the secrets of the so-called Eastern philosophy at Benares Hindu University. After returning from his “journey to the East” Pirsig worked as a journalist and utility writer: mainly he wrote computer manuals. He married and he had two sons. He wrote *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* as a kind of travel diary, which took place in the 60’s. Pirsig sent 122 letters to editors, but time after time the manuscript was rejected. It gave the author a place in the Guinness Records Book as the author with the highest number of negative responses from publishers. Finally after publication, the book reached several million copies.

What factors caused this book to be classified as one of the classics of contemporary spirituality? The unique for this specific group of literary works (called spiritual classics) seems to be desire for a special value pulsating within individuality and the need to explore one’s individuality. According to a radio commentator it is present in writers such as J.P. Sartre, A. Huxley, J. Kerouac and R. Pirsig<sup>15</sup>. In the novel Pirsig can be seen searching for meaning, a study of the mind by using a structured road novel, but also using a detective story. In this context we are able to see the main claim from the author that science and technology are not devoid of value. Quality is seen by Pirsig as good, while “good” is etymologised by the English lexicon with divinity: good — God, according to Pirsig it is no coincidence that these words have a similar lexical value (the Z&A says: “You can ponder [you can meditate] on the common root of the English word God and good. God and goodness. Buddha and quality” (Pirsig 2010: 249). In this sense Pirsig’s book is a “carrier of culture”. (Pirsig 2010: 398). In Swedish there is a special word — kulturbärare, which literally means “the carrier of culture” or “culture — bearer”. Books of this type can change the existing system of cultural values and are often given a reason for accelerating the changes that begin to appear. These kind of books can provide people with a new view of values.

### Quality and Inspiration

Art (techne) is a divine thing, quality is buddha and it means dynamics, creativity and consciousness. The thread of identity dynamics, creativity and art is mostly visible through the motive of alter ego presented in the pages of Pirsig’s novel: sometimes the narrator describes himself as Phaedrus, but actually writes about himself as the apparition, spirit, similar to that of *The turn of the screw* by Henry James, at least the narrative strategy of “suspension”, and therefore the “ontological uncertainty” of the narrator and the reader is the same. One layer of the novel could be read as an allegory of the psychomachia inside the soul author’s

<sup>14</sup> See: T. Butler-Bowdon (2005), *Fifty Spiritual Classics. Timeless Wisdom From 50 Great Books of Inner Discovery, Enlightenment, and Purpose*, Nicholas Brealey Pub., London.

<sup>15</sup> See: radio interview available online: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, author Robert Pirsig <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4612364>.

of the book, the fighting of two separate identities. Phaedrus as a name for the psychotic personality returns repeatedly in the autobiographical sources of Pirsig as the embodiment of the changed “me”. Such intertextual reference to a major source of creation myths of Mediterranean culture entails consequences of interpretation, although it has also purely biographical motivations. Pirsig experienced a period of psychosis and saw himself as Phaedrus. His outbreak of psychosis was also linked to the conflict in the department of philosophy at the University of Chicago, where a classical education was dominant, in the sense that it stretched to ancient sources. Pirsig — Phaedrus exclaimed at a public meeting that the university does not have quality.

It is tempting to try to compare selected elements of Pirsig’s literary work and life to threads, which present the story of Phaedrus. Firstly the comparative motive may become remoteness, also an isolation associated with the contestation of modernity. Secondly, the Socratic way of doing education and understanding of philosophy as non-academic activities may be an equally interesting aspect of the comparison. And thirdly, the inspiration is the theme and content with a strong comparative potential.

As to the first element — the distance, you can pay attention to the fact that the long journey on a motorcycle across the United States is partly of a series of events in Western Mediterranean cultural history. This is the testimony of contestation of the world and strengthens the structure of the inner world; to use a term by Peter Gärdenfors.<sup>16</sup> By Pirsig the narrator himself writes about the world of internal structures. (Pirsig 2010: 76). Pirsig emphasizes that modern man is staring at an outside world and yet does not know their own inner world.

In this contestation and movement toward interiority we can find some other personal role models. By simplifying and agreeing for example according to William Powers<sup>17</sup>, we can indicate several concepts of merging with these role models of personal which move away from the outside world: on reflection with Plato we find distance; on reflection with Seneca we find internal space; thanks to invention by J. Gutenberg the readership and techniques of interiority have become widespread, Benjamin Franklin worked out rituals which strengthened the development of the spiritual world and the material at the same time, Henry David Thoreau pointed to the Walden area, and Marshall McLuhan called for a reduction of one’s internal thermostat in the context of the distribution of “cool” and “hot” media, a division which appealed to traits of popular music: cool jazz and bebop<sup>18</sup>. It is McLuhan’s dichotomy which returns today in terms of cognitive psychology, according to which it can be said that we have two systems, one deliberative, reflective and “cool”, the other one is intuitive, instinctive, and “hot”<sup>19</sup>. In general, we can speak of two kinds of reality: the classical and romantic.

Pirsig strengthens “the cool”, deliberative — reflective system, but also uses the “hot media”<sup>20</sup> to promote his patterns of life with passion. Therefore it should not be thought in the context of returning to the old, hackneyed forms of categorization of the so called histo-

<sup>16</sup> P. Gärdenfors (2010), *Jak Homo stał się sapiens. O ewolucji myślenia*, trans. T. Pańkowski, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warsaw.

<sup>17</sup> W. Powers (2010), *Hamlet’s Blackberry. A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*, Harper Collins E-books.

<sup>18</sup> See: J. Pluciennik (2012), *Sylwizność nasza powszednia i metakognicja*, „Teksty Drugie” 138, nr. 6, pp. 246–257.

<sup>19</sup> See: J. T. McGuire, J. W. Kable, *Decision makers calibrate behavioral persistence on the basis of time-interval experience*, *Cognition* 2012 Aug; 124 (2): 216–26. doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2012.03.008. Epub 2012 Apr 23.

<sup>20</sup> See more in McLuhan’s concept “hot and cool media” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (2013), Gingko Press, New York.

rical — literary process, according to which classicism is associated with reflection, while alternately it occurs within romanticism — with emotion and passion. Both cultural paradigms are mutually exclusive. Pirsig explicitly refers to these stereotypical oppositions and rejects them. He goes beyond them. He writes that “the classic and romantic understanding should be united at the root” (Ch. 25). The way of looking at the world should combine these two types of intellects. In another place he suggests the beyond-categories of Japanese “Mu” as going beyond the dualistic mentality of yes or no. “Mu” means “nothing”. We should not always understand everything in fusing rational thought. Man should strive for recognition of reality at a higher level. It is important to continually search. Furthermore, Pirsig writes about the opposition of mythos — logos as funding many categories of Western culture, as well as the juxtaposition of “hippie” (cool) and “square” (lifeless), objectivity/subjectivity. Going beyond the mythos is not automatically understood as a selection of the culture of logic and mind, but simply is called insanity.

Accordingly Pirsig among the three books, which are necessary in the educational motorcycle expeditions, are: the motorcycle service manual, practical guide to solving problems with a motorcycle in the way and *Walden* by H.D. Thoreau (first released 1854, and bearing the subtitle *Walden, or life in the woods*). Along the way, Pirsig reads aloud a classic work of American transcendentalism many times, important in that its reading is reading aloud, public, and in a reflective and interactive style. Pirsig reads to his son Chris a sentence or two and waits for questions, and then comments and responds. The relationship can be read as one which is between Master and Disciple, who has always been stronger in the East than in the West. In the philosophy of Zen it is important to have a great experience straight from the soul to the soul or straight from spirit to spirit.

The narrator relates to the popularity of his time in America when the practice of reading during the „flying universities of Chautauqua”<sup>21</sup> (the name comes from Lake Chautauqua, New York, where the first tents were pitched during the summer camps of the socio-religious movement) was very important. What is relevant here are the similarities to the Socratic practice of *Phaedrus* indicated earlier and the practice of this movement of self-teaching is also related to Christianity. It was a movement supremely educational and democratic at the same time, the first self-education camps were organized by Methodists. This is particularly important in the context of comments about the quality of university education and the different kind of reforms that Pirsig introduced — *Phaedrus* in his classes. The same can be said about selecting elements of the novel by Pirsig: road and travel themes evoke the whole tradition, ranging from *Don Quixote* and *Migration Pilgrim* by Bunyan, *Sentimental journey* by Sterne and *Joseph Andrews* by Fielding and the *Walking Child Harold* by Byron, *On the Road* by Kerouac until ending the career of this theme in video games, and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.

The theme of the road is a very good domain source for auxiliary metaphors categorizing many other domains in life, Lakoff and Johnson wrote about it. The conceptual domain of the road together with other auxiliary domains have become a good tool for education, if not to say for evangelization. It seems that it is important to travel, not as a goal, as Pirsig writes that: “The Zen is a ghost valley and is not the spirit on top of the mountain” (Pirsig

<sup>21</sup> The educational summer camp format proved to be a popular choice for speakers, teachers, musicians, preachers and specialists. Robert M. Pirsig uses the term „Chautauqua” to refer to the philosophical dialogues that he engages in with the reader while traveling.

2010: 237). Although, of course, the conceptualization of the mind as the peaks of spaces plays an important role in this novel (Pirsig 2010: 125). We can also recall the figure of the tramp and hiking, and even a pilgrimage. “Unhurriedly heroes of folk songs, rovers wandering from one to another mill and sleeping under the open sky” (Kundera 1997: 6). Pirsig has reached the sources of Western philosophy, and reaches at the same time towards a synthesis between East and West, which is present in Plato and is not present in materialistic Aristotle.

With this background we should see Pirsig’s return to the form of *Phaedrus*. Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus* belongs to so called medium dialogues, together with: *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *The Symposium* and *The Republic*. Among the many topics associated with Plato, some seem to be irrelevant in the context of the adventures of Pirsig, the others are very important. Pirsig practices the philosophy above all through a literary work, this is the reason why it is important to also look at views on Plato’s literature. In his day it meant that above all poetry — was a dramatic one. Plato sometimes admits that poetry can be useful in the education of youth, civic education, in persuasion, however, restricts her role continually. Conversely Pirsig who in the novel as a writing genre sees a supplement to the operating manual of the principles of mindfulness to detail. Plato in his dialogues recognizes that a society cannot exist without poetry, but it is the result of man’s fall. The ambiguous relation of Plato to poetry and poets is best seen in the fact that, in popular belief the great poets would be expelled from Plato’s ideal state.

All statements formed a more complex image. We must remember what poetry was in the times of Plato: above all it was live action, role-playing. Poetry in the times of Plato was not associated with lonely and quiet reading of volumes, with the cold and lonely distance of involvement in emotionality. Spectators of shows, dramas, comedies, are poetry lovers, but also listeners of rhapsodies claiming Homeric poetry. Poetry and literature in general today are associated more with private contemplation, poetry in the time of Plato — was primarily involved in spontaneous performance. Today we can compare this performance to rappers or movies from popular culture and we need to see that this is the background concerning the revolution of philosophy, tents and Chautauqua performances. The Methodist beginnings of Chautauqua had typical enthusiastic sermons. The representation of a succession of enthusiasm we have in the *Ion* — the most important dialogue entirely dedicated to poetry. In *Ion* appears the subject of inspiration, which is very significant in the context of Pirsig’s novel. In dialogue a poet creates inspired poetry, recites poetry enthusiastically and then his listeners seem to be inspired, enthusiastic, filled with the divine. Inspiration is afflation, afflation is Greek enthusiasm.

In the most interesting dialogue within the context of Pirsig’s novel *Phaedrus*, the negative attitude towards poetry and poets was replaced by a fascination with divine frenzy and enthusiasm. Plato already said in the *The Rights* that when the poet sits upon the tripod of his Muse, he loses his senses and becomes like a fountain. In this sense, especially if we remember that which is popular since the time of Romanticism, the imaginations of narcotic vapors emanating from the tripod, the enthusiasm is associated irresistibly with the sensual domain, which are associated with breathing, breath — *entheoi*, is full of God, to — breath (inhale) and *ekstatikoi* — it is standing outside of themselves (Ch. 26).

The theory of enthusiasm from *Phaedrus* is a theory of the four frenzies: poetic, prophetic, mystical (healing), and love. Philosophers can fall in love, and it should be emphasized that the domain of love for Plato is sensory — physical basis for comparisons and metaphors. The craze of love can be seen as an educational process for philosophers, enthusiasm and ecstasy of love

are a model of other frenzies, love is an ideal process. Earlier we also discussed ecstasy in the context of speed. “Everything changes when a man cedes the ability to speed on the machine: from this moment the body is out of the game, and man is entrusted with the speed, which is incorporeal, immaterial, pure speed, speed itself, the speed — ecstasy” (Kundera 1997: 6). Such a reference model for enthusiasm, frenzy, passion is extremely relevant in the reception of Plato in literary studies when discussing the writings of Horace, Pseudo-Longinos, Renaissance neo-Platonism, Shaftesbury, Kierkegaard, and finally Havelock and Derrida. Enthusiasm should be a guide, manifest itself through different kinds of “spirits”, whether in the form of prominent historical people (for example philosophers), whether in the form of qualities, especially the qualities which Pirsig in *Lila* defines as dynamic. The metaphysics of quality lies in the fact that quality becomes a force for categorising and determining the being. Dynamic qualities, the most orderly to the human existence are associated with ghosts, and these — although conceived as values non-literally spiritualist but metaphorically — are seen as a source of good. The element of isolation on a motorcycle from the usual order and the environment, expedition into the unknown, is like living in the forest in H. D. Thoreau and finding at a mature age that you are in the forest of life in Dante. This means opening up to entities that are able to infuse meaning and fervor.

Cool reflection consequently leads to commitment and gives meaning to existence, each moment, even when we commune with the machine. In this sense, the opening to quality allows a fuller existence not only in unity with nature, but also in unity with culture and technology. Culture is directly applied arts, it is the art of managing inspiration, as is the Holy Scriptures, a tool for managing holiness. Inspiration, in addition to enthusiasm, in Scots it is called common sense, instinct, gumption. The transformation of the world has to begin from the transformation of our heart, because the values of external action are dependent on the unit values. Others can afford to talk about the repair of humanity, Pirsig wants to talk and write about motorcycle repair, (Ch. 25) because it depends on him and he cares about quality.

We can also see the genealogical hybridization of Pirsig's novel, which is on one side a novel of the road and a philosophical tale, on the other hand a travel novel with elements of horror: the storm, ghosts and strange dreams create an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty, opening this novel to fiction.

### Quality of education at the university and a motorcycle

The issue of the quality of education is best summarized by the statement, that metaphysics is good if it improves everyday life, otherwise it is not deserving of our attention. The same can be said about education, particularly higher education. In chapter 16 one can find the first description of the reforms introduced by Pirsig — Phaedrus for his classes. The narrator begins by saying that he would like to talk about the travel and exploration of Phaedrus and the search for the meaning of the definition of quality. Then he follows the story of the teaching of rhetoric by Phaedrus, and his adventures with students during different tasks: he focuses on the need to revive in the students their independence and creativity, and the engagement of the many students in the classroom.

Pirsig in the real world, motivated by an obsession with quality came into conflict with the university which employed him and he had to resign from teaching. Pirsig's teaching takes the form of a philosophical novel on the one hand and the idea of educational travel

and the flying folk university of Chautauqua on the other. Consequently, in chapter 29, the quality is identified not only by human attitudes as care, states of spirit as fervor or enthusiasm, but it is directly referred to the ancient values of arete and Hindu dharma and Chinese tao. Virtue and excellence, quality and dharma have become an answer to the *Temple of Reason* — the university. It is also significant that on reflection there appears to be an equivalent to Scottish common sense and instinct, feeling and wisdom. The Polish translation is not entirely reflective of the importance of the word: “zarliwość” (gumption).

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* was a hit partly because in times of total contestation it proposed a partial negation of the status quo, to some extent, which does not mean devoid of verve and momentum. Common sense as an inspiration in Pirsig also marked the rebirth of individuality and some kind of alliance with the conservatives. In chapter 29, the narrator says that all are lacking mind and it is time to return to rebuild the famous American sources of value. We are dealing with a social crisis. People are lost in the rational structure of civilized life.

In this context it is worth mentioning that the proposal of Chautauqua by Pirsig is the response in advance to the crisis of the humanities, which according to many theorists and practitioners of education has to have a more practical dime<sup>22</sup>. A modern continuation inspired by Pirsig's book is the work of Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*<sup>23</sup>, in which the philosopher proposes to return to the values associated with handiwork. Himself as a doctor of philosophy in his spare time working in the shop with motorcycles, trading them and repairing. In this sense, it is clear that the proposal Pirsig interacts with current trends in culture in the centuries: for example, the “slow food” movement, although born in the twentieth century<sup>24</sup>, but its antecedence can already be found in Nietzsche in his definition of philology as an art of slow reading<sup>25</sup>.

Pirsig proposes to slow down while driving a fast motorcycle, the quality of the ride is more important than reaching to a specific location. In his next book *Lila* he has drawn a distinction in philosophy and philosophology<sup>26</sup>. Philosophologists claim that they are philosophers, but the actual philosophy must be rooted in the practice. Hence Pirsig's return to education on a motorcycle and quality, understood as excellence. It must be emphasized that nowadays pragmatism is very important, because in the entire system of education an increasing role is being placed on quality which is related to social and specific skills. Phaedrus-Pirsig has introduced the quality of education and he wanted to awake student's creativity, critical thinking and individual consciousness. In the introduction to his book Pirsig writes: “I was an outsider, who seemed more interested in undermining the learning content rather than absorbing them myself” (Pirsig 2010: 12). Where else he writes about the pervasive ugliness in classrooms at the university (Pirsig 2010: 133). This novel-philosophical tale of Pirsig's is the quality of education on a motorcycle, the quality of practical training, which opposes the wrong method of teaching.

<sup>22</sup> K. Sanneh (2009), *Out of the Office. Fast Bikes, Slow Food, and the Workplace Wars*, The New Yorker, JUNE 22.

<sup>23</sup> Penguin Press 2009. See also R. Mertens, *The philosopher-mechanic. Matthew Crawford finds the good life in repairing motorcycles*, „The University of Chicago Magazine”, September–October 2009.

<sup>24</sup> See Carl Honoré (2011), *Pochwała powolności*, Drzewo Babel, Warsaw.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Pluciennik (2010), *Przestrzenie kultury i wolne czytanie* [w:] *Poznanie słowa. Wykłady inauguracyjne Wydziału Filologicznego UŁ wygłoszone w roku akademickim 2009/2010*, ed. P. Stalmaszczyk, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PRIMUM VERBUM, Łódź.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J. Stangroom, J. Baggini (2007), *What More Philosophers Think*, Continuum.



## Summary

### Metaphysics of quality and diversification of the rhetoric of conceptual schemas

All the types of quality occurring in the novel of Pirsig, refer to different conceptual domains, creating diversified types of rhetoric. Perceptual quality seems to refer to the domain of sensory experience above all sight ("You have to open your eyes!" Says Phaedrus to a creatively blocked student) (Pirsig 2010: 187). Quality related to the personification of the machine and the corresponding care associated with empathy, compassion, charity is best symbolized in a caring gesture. It would be hugging and embracing hands. Quality understood as "fervor" and inspiration is associated with breathing: to breathe in the air is an extremely elementary act which plays a hugely important role in the culture of the East.

The conceptual domain would involve the principle of valence inseparable from another "source" quality when it is defined by the originality of the text or gumption (Pirsig 2010: 203, 292). Also excellence in the sense of arete or dharma would correspond to this domain. We therefore see three conceptual domains associated with the human body: eyes, hands and proprioception associated with breathing. All of these would be implemented during actual training when focused on the primer of everyday life and practice. All kinds of rhetoric refer to the discovery and awakening of individuality.

The quality of education at university or on a motorcycle must extend to all possible levels of the Great Chain of Being, it can not only address the abstraction. Conceptual diversification means diversifying the rhetoric and style, which may correspond to the different levels of quality for Pirsig. In this sense, his proposal of a metaphysics of quality is part of the current disputes about the crisis of the humanities and the need to give it meaning, practicality and socially responsible use.

The most important seems to be the inexpressible, mystery. However, without mindfulness in the daily practice of life, values may not exist at all. And it seems to be the most important message of Pirsig's novel. See, understand and wake up — this is a summary, with reference to the three conceptual domains related to the trip, secondly with mercy and understanding, thirdly with breathing and filling. Road, inclusion and a container they are three conceptual schemes inherent with underlying rhetorical formulas, stylistics and quality in the Pirsig trait. A metaphysics of quality uses the rhetoric of conceptual schemata which include: road, inclusion and container.

Pirsig in his own reflection is trying to present and describe the human mind. Readers have the ability to know the outside world, how it is formed, what affects the processing and representation of certain events and emotions. Conceptual domains occurring in Pirsig's book: road, inclusion and container are the testimony to civilization changes and types of signposts from an author for the modern man. Domains are necessary and helpful in understanding invisible processes like: thinking or reflection. Pirsig through using conceptual domain creates mind maps with which he leads his readers. The author presents some behavioral schemata of the modern man. Road — container — inclusion: life — an experience — engagement. The road is a metaphor for life, human's fortunes which consist of our daily experience and available knowledge. Mind maps constructed from these conceptual domains aid the process of the message of Pirsig's novel. In life we should be guided by our own experience, and intuition (internal structures), because cool reflection consequently leads to commitment and gives meaning to existence, each moment, even when we commune with the machine. The author emphasizes the importance of empirical knowledge. The awareness

of decisions and goals is an important element of the harmony of existence. The consistency of these conceptual domains creates a sense of human life, the sense is always the whole. We should not copy other people's lives because we have the own ability to categorize and analyze. Each human is a type of individuality with their own mind. This part of our body, despite a large number of research and reflections, remains inscrutable to the end by many scholars, physicians and scientists. We must always proceed reasonably and prudently, using our own experience. Pirsig through the journey also reveals the heterogeneity of the world. The philosopher presents some ways of how to get information and discover the secrets of the world by a man who uses knowledge from various scientific fields: physics, biology, philosophy, psychology, engineering. Pirsig claims that people should combine and compare the experience from dissimilar disciplines. In turn, he directly relates to the stereotypical oppositions, divisions and rejects them. Indeed, if we are using a variety of areas of knowledge: philosophical, humanistic, technical, biological, historical we can be more astute and we can create an entirely new field of creative cognitive activity. Attention is the basis of all higher cognitive and emotional abilities. British archaeologist Steven Mithen, the author of *The Prehistory of the Mind* determines the liquidity of the cognitive process (cognitive flexibility), which means the ability to achieve the free combination of content coming from different areas of activity, e.g.: Sphere of technology, social or environmental. This mechanism also leads to the divergent thinking that has the plurality of possible solutions and innovation. In this sense, the opening to quality (in Pirsig's book) allows a fuller existence not only in unity with nature, but also in unity with culture and technology.

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### Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia podstawowe typy pojęcia jakości występujące w powieści Roberta M. Pirsiga pt. *Zen i sztuka obsługi motocykla. Rozprawa o wartościach*. Te pojęcia odnoszą się do różnych domen konceptualnych, tworząc tym samym zdywersyfikowane typy retoryki. Wszystkie typy retoryki odnoszą się do odkrywania i przebudzenia jednostkowości. Jakość kształcenia na uniwersytecie czy na motocyklu musi sięgać do wszystkich możliwych poziomów Wielkiego Łańcucha Bytu, nie może adresować jedynie abstrakcji. Dywersyfikacja konceptualna oznacza zdywersyfikowanie retoryki i stylu, co może odpowiadać także różnym poziomom jakości u Pirsiga. W tym sensie jego propozycja metafizyki jakości wpisuje się w aktualne spory o kryzysie humanistyki i konieczności jej usensownienia, upraktycznienia i użycia społecznie odpowiedzialnego. Metafizyka jakości posługuje się retoryką schematów konceptualnych drogi, inkluzji i pojemnika.

jakość, domeny konceptualne, schematy konceptualne, retoryka, metafizyka, neoromantyzm, jakość kształcenia