



# World Religions Summer Reading Assignment

To be prepared for the start of class, you are required to read the following book:

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

You will need to purchase a copy of this book or borrow it from the library (It is about \$7 from Amazon). It is an exploration of values—of what makes for a good life. This book is a fictional autobiography of a seventeen day motorcycle journey from Minnesota to Northern California. Along this journey, the narrator ruminates on numerous philosophical discussions on topics such as epistemology (how we know what we know), our relationship to technology, the philosophy of science, and the pursuit of quality. Many of these discussions include references to the narrator's past self, who is referred to as Phaedrus.<sup>1</sup> The narrator is using this journey to recover from a nervous breakdown; towards the end of the novel, he reconciles with his past.

As you read this novel, consider your own answers to some of the questions/ observations the narrator poses: How do you look at the world? How do you process what you know? In what ways do you seek the good in your life? We will examine these and other questions in greater detail in August. Robert Pirsig makes numerous references to Western philosophical thought and Eastern religions in this book. You may find it helpful to maintain a chart of his references to these topics, which include Greek thought, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and, of course, Zen practice. Enjoy your summer break, and see you in August!

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<sup>1</sup> See Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*.