Friends Cannot Be Objects (Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance) Essay, Research Paper

Friends Cannot Be Objects

“I suppose if I were a novelist rather than a Chautauqua orator I’d try to ‘develop’ the characters of John and Sylvia and Chris with action-packed scenes that would also reveal ‘inner meanings’ of Zen and maybe Art and maybe even Motorcycle Maintenance. That would be quite a novel, but for some reason I don’t feel quite up to it. They’re friends, not characters, and as Sylvia herself once said, ‘I don’t like being an object!’ So a lot of things we know about one another I’m simply not going into. Nothing bad, but not really relevant to the Chautauqua. That’s the way it should be with friends.’ Page 121

Chapter 12

The statement, “I don’t like being an object!” is encountered throughout many situations in an average daily life. As people, we sometimes tend to take advantage of certain things without meaning to because we’re so used to the fact that they’re always there. Friends aren’t an exception to this statement. In the book, “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” by Robert M. Pirsig, the man telling the story, Phaedrus, lightly goes into this fact of life.

Phaedrus is a very confused man with an interesting past, who tells the story about the man he used to be. While telling his story, he’s travelling with two longtime friends, John and Sylvia Sutherland, and his son, Chris. During the times where he drifts back to reality and describes where he and his companions are in their travels, he never really describes himself, as in what he looks like or the looks and personalities of his travelling companions. This can seem a bit puzzling to the reader if they are attempting to picture the scene described or even the characters but the author had a good reason for doing so. The author and Phaedrus, the storyteller, are attempting to get the reader to concentrate on the actual story, Phaedrus’ story, and not the secondary characters.

Phaedrus was a very intelligent man, a little confused and, for that matter, confusing at times but he knew a lot about the world around him. He knew how much of an important resource that friends are to people and he also knew enough not to overdescribe them in his “Chautauqua.” The reason he did that was this: friends aren’t, just like he said. A friend is someone whom a person has a common bond with as long as that person knows what that bond is, why bother explaining it to every other person who may or may not care? Sometimes friends need to feel needed and cared about and when that doesn’t happen; they begin to feel as if no one cares about them.

When you know a person for a really long time, when you feel as if they can read your mind and vice versa, people tend to stop explaining things in hopes that the other person will understand completely. This doesn’t always happen and the other person sees it, as their friend isn’t communicating with them as much. By not explaining things like this, that person is inadvertently taking advantage of their friend by assuming they are a mindreader. This isn’t always the case with misled friendships but it is very common. What both parties need to understand is that people change and when that happens in a friendship or any other relationship, both people need to adapt and get used to the change if they want to save the relationship.

It’s very sad that in the story of Phaedrus, his son, Chris got so neglected due to Phaedrus’ mental breakdown and change in attitude and personality. When Chris dies, the tragic fact that Phaedrus didn’t appreciate and pay attention to his son leads him to an epiphany; he finally realizes the true meaning of life. He realized that the difference you make in others people’s lives and the world reflects your accomplishments in life. If a person goes through their whole life doing nothing, not helping or talking to anyone, they’ll die and be forgotten, no one will care they were ever there. When Chris dies, Phaedrus realizes that the neglect he showed for his son shouldn’t happen again and he starts over with his daughter, Nell, letting her know how much she is loved and appreciated.

Sometimes all a person needs in life is a second chance, and Phaedrus accomplished this more than once. The first time was with his new personality, the second, his daughter, Nell. Like this, sometimes all a friendship needs is a second chance. If two friends get upset at each other, if they have a good enough relationship, they’ll at least attempt to work things out. Obviously, if they have enough in common to be such good friends, they’ll have enough patience with the other person to compromise. Compromise is an important part of any relationship; no friendship would last without it.

Phaedrus was a lucky and, at the same time, unfortunate man in many ways. He got new chances in at life but also lost a lot that he loved. People or other things shouldn’t be taken for granted, that’s a big point in “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.” Everything needs to be appreciated or else, without paying enough attention, it’ll disappear and then you’ll understand what you had all along. No one likes to be an object, a lot of people need to learn this or else, they’ll find out the hard way. If no one cares while something’s there, it’ll disappear without anyone noticing.