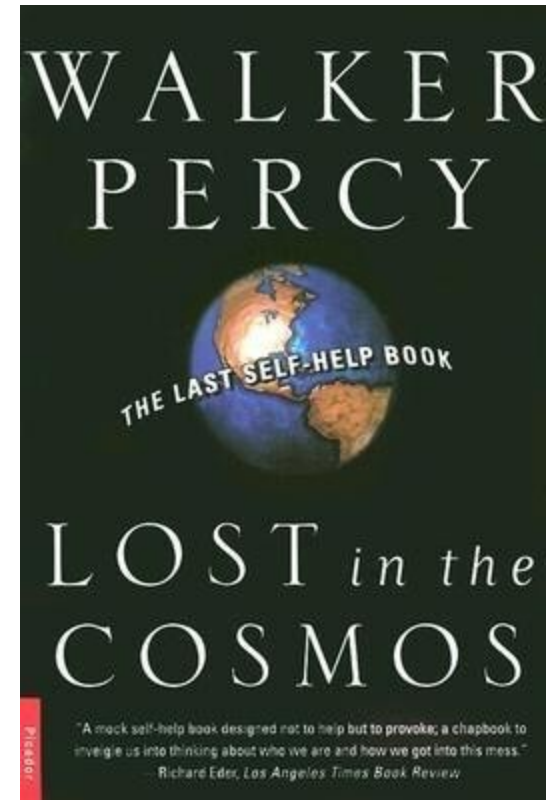


# “No end to the mystery”: Scientist-as-prince, scientist-as-scientist, and what one has to do with the other in *Cosmos*

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**“Walker Percy: Science and Literature”**  
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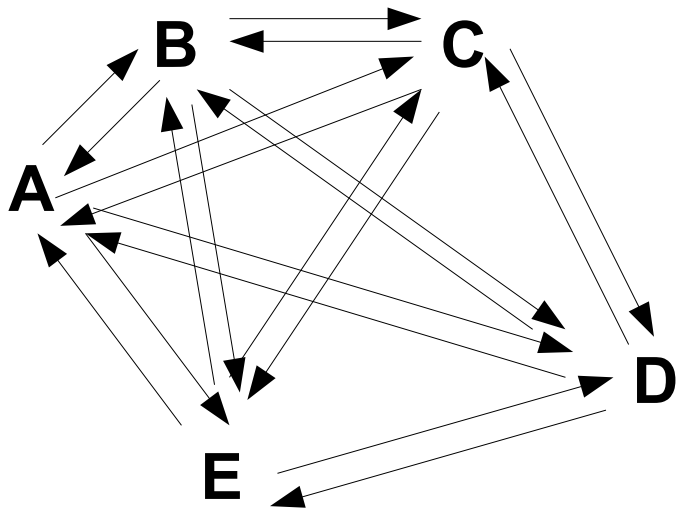
**Percy is *ambivalent*, not strictly negative, on promise of science for studying the human person.**

**I argue that Percy advocates a sort of well-surveyed redistricting of the prince's territory. He wants the prince's subjects to understand clearly the boundaries of that territory, but he does not oppose a slow and legitimate expansion after the proper royal claim is reestablished. Setting aside the conceit, we might say that Percy's fierce anti-scientism polemic should not be allowed to obscure his surprising optimism about the power of science to probe the mysteries of the human self.**

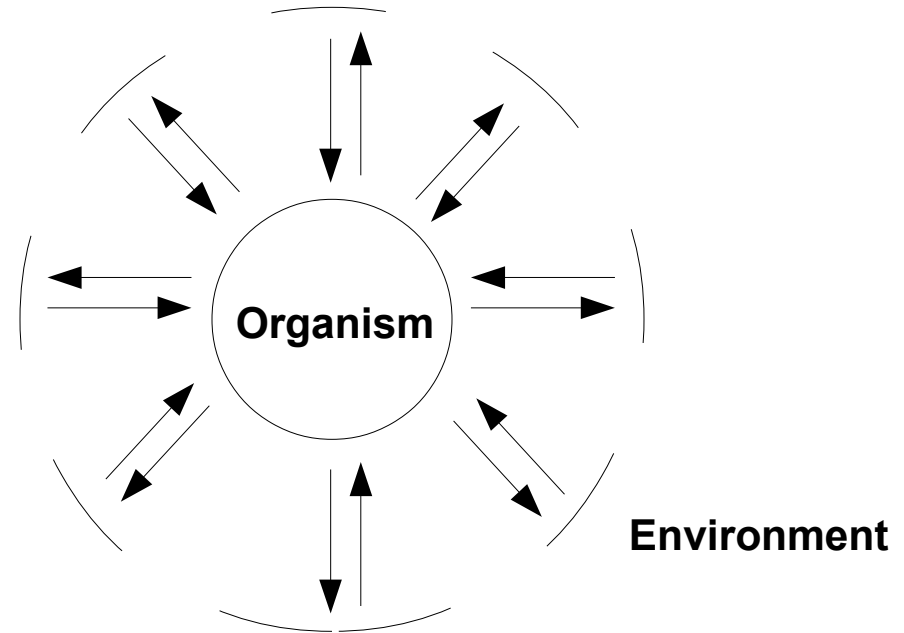
***Welt vs. Umwelt:***

**Dyadic machinery loose in a triadic world**

**Dyadic interactions are particle interactions, energy exchanges, and environmental responses.**

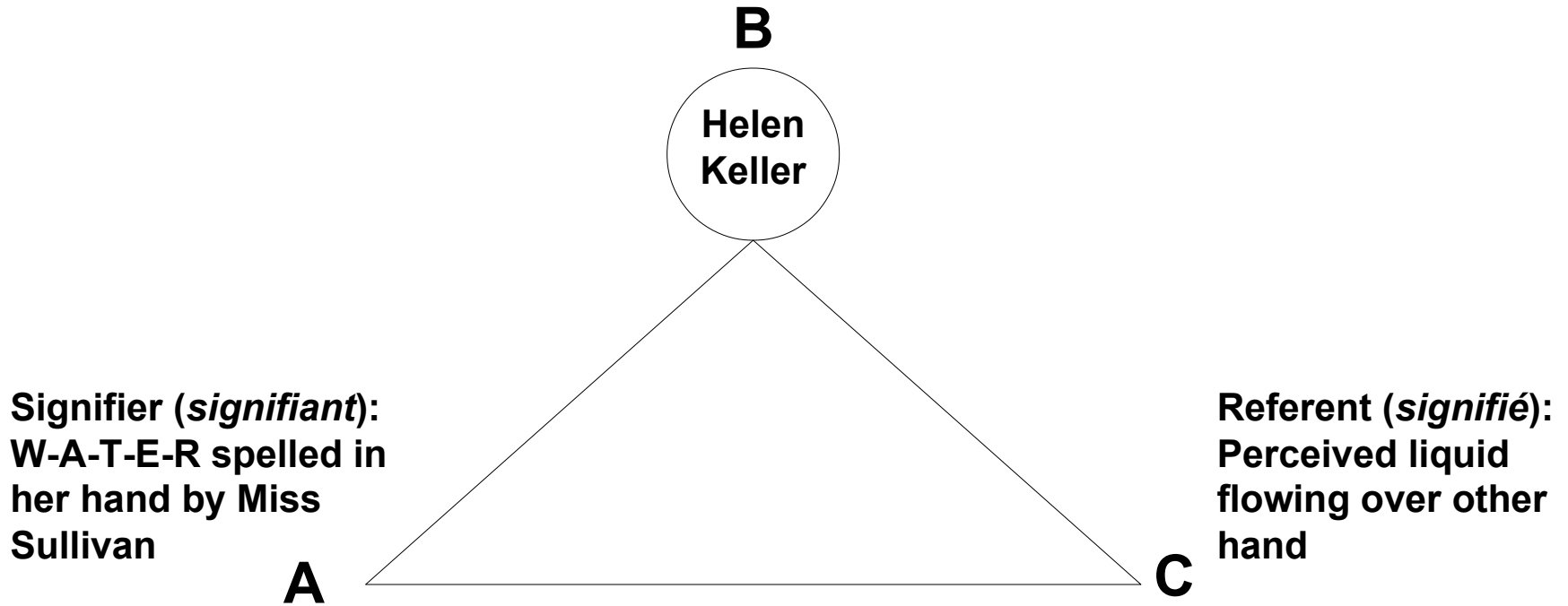


**Even ... the Cosmos itself can be understood as [a dyadic] interaction. (*Cosmos*, 86. Image adapted from same.)**



**The organism 'respond[s]' to ... segments of its environment. (*Cosmos*, 90. Image adapted from same.)**

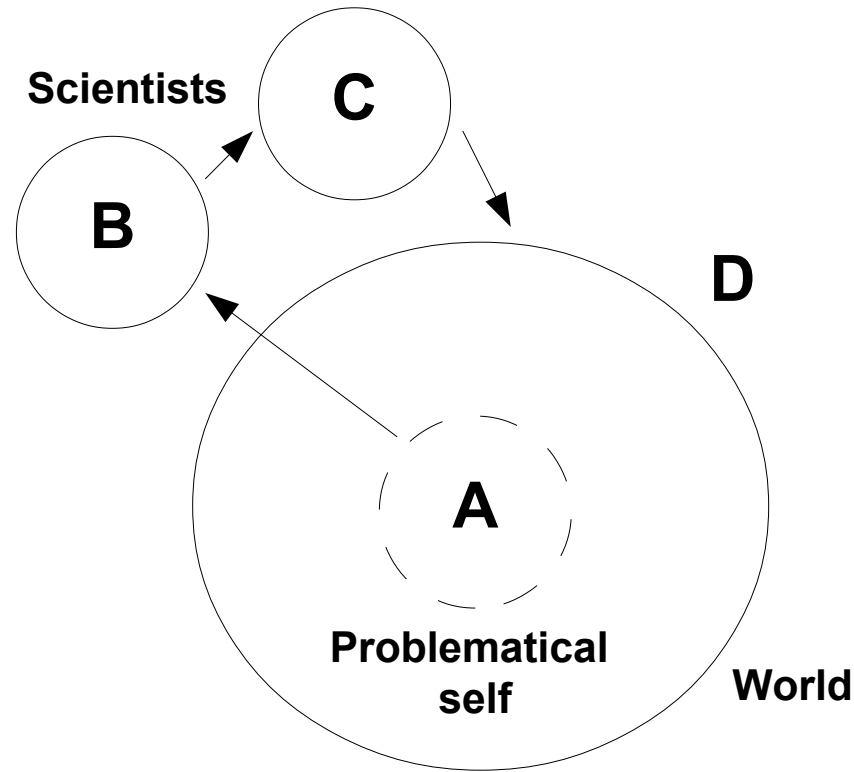
**Triadic activity is the irreducible assignment of a signifier (A) by a subject (B) to a referent (C).**



**Relations AB, BC, AC cannot be explained as dyadic interactions. This is a triadic event. (*Cosmos*, 95. Image adapted from same.)**

**Overextended, irresponsible, and self-serving:  
The reign of the scientist-as-prince**

# Percy: “the Problematical Self can Escape its Predicament by Science” (*Cosmos*, 116).



- AB** ․ The problematical self ... escapes by joining the scientific community.
- BC** ․ The transcending community of scientists.
- CD** ․ From the perspective of BC, the world can now be seen by A triumphantly as a dyadic system.  
(*Cosmos* 116. Diagram adapted from same.)

**Mysterious and generative:  
The promise of the scientist-as-scientist**



# Wonder and mystery are key to Percy's portrayals of the scientist-as-scientist.

[Most people] see[] a line of ants crossing the sidewalk and see[] it as—*ants crossing the sidewalk*. Fabre saw ants crossing the sidewalk and stopped to wonder where they came from, where they were going, how they knew how to get there, and why. Then, like von Frisch and his bees, he discovered there is no end to the mystery of ants.

*Cosmos, 105*

# In *Cosmos* and elsewhere, Percy considers himself an amateur semiotics researcher.

Scientists should be less worried about overt intrusions by religion upon science, which never succeed, and more worried about covert scientific dogma, e.g., that we triadic scientists require that only dyadic events be admissible to scientific theory. For example, scientists have never seriously addressed themselves to the phenomenon of language, *considered as a natural phenomenon and not as a formal structure*, that salient triadic property of man. It is only when science is willing to focus on what Sebeok calls “the intersection of nature and culture” that the full import of man's emergence in the evolutionary scheme can be calculated.

*Cosmos*, 163

# **Percy was optimistic about the promise of language research to transcend mechanistic reductionism.**

**[Charles Peirce, George Mead, etc.] underwrite the reality of the self without getting trapped in the isolated autonomous consciousness of Descartes and Chomsky ... by showing that the self becomes itself only through a transaction of signs with other selves—and does so, moreover, without succumbing to the mindless mechanism of the behaviorists.**

*Cosmos, 87*

**Questions?**