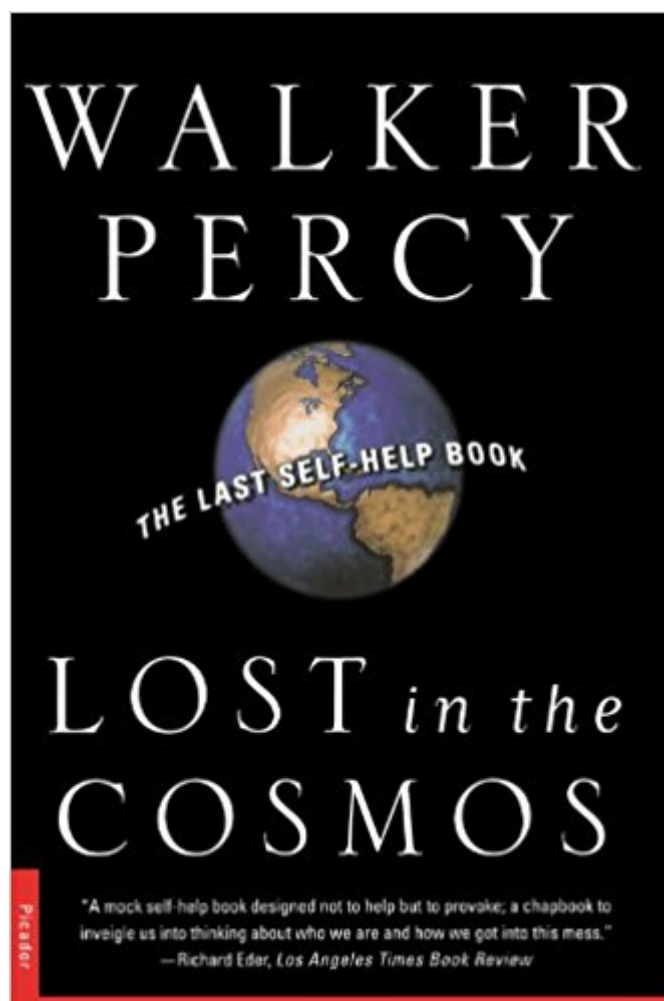


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# Lost In The Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book



## Synopsis

Walker Percy's mordantly funny and wholly original contribution to the self-help book craze deals with the Western mind's tendency toward heavy abstraction. This favorite of Percy fans continues to charm and beguile readers of all tastes and backgrounds. *Lost in the Cosmos* invites us to think about how we communicate with our world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The late Walker Percy's mordant contribution to the self-help book craze of the 1980s deals with the heavy abstraction of the Western mind and speculates about why writers may be the most abstracted and least grounded of all. (Before taking up novel writing, Percy was a medical doctor who became a patient in the very institution where he had worked.) The book disappeared for a time. Now it's back in print. Take the quizzes in it, then take a walk--you need to be back in the world before you write another word. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“A mock self-help book designed not to help but to provoke; a chapbook to inveigle us into thinking about who we are and how we got into this mess.”  
—Richard Eder, Los Angeles Times Book Review  
“Original and imaginative, it conveys a serious, occasionally somber message in a vein of high comedy. I love this book. It is not to be read once through, but to be reread, savored, and pondered.”  
—Edmund Fuller, The Wall Street

Journalist  
“This is a stunningly innovative collection, for readers who like both to chuckle and to think hard.”  
People

Walker Percy draws you in with his deep searching questions that should resonate with anyone wrestling with existential questions like who am I and why am I here. I would say more than providing answers, he challenges you to reexamine all assumptions about yourself.

Very introspective. Everyone should read this book on a path to understanding their "self". A great Catholic Author appealing to everyone regardless of their religious affiliation.

Wickedly funny! Very insightful and thought-provoking. Even though Percy says that one can skip "The Semiotic Primer" that falls in the middle of the book, one shouldn't.

A class is and must-read for any prudent gentleman. Always takes me back to my college reading list.

Ironic - but only in format. Great wisdom and a lesson in semiotics. And Percy's beautiful prose...

In a nutshell it gives you a lot to think about. Thought provoking: A lot of questions but you choose the answers from the author's list or opt for non-of the above.

This is an odd and fascinating book. It is funny, at times satirical and smart-ass, but it is at the same time very insightful and thought-provoking. I really enjoyed it.

Walker Percy is very much a modern-day Pascal, in that he is wrapped up in the project of waking up modern man from his numb, jaded, over-entertained stupor into realizing what a predicament he is in. It's an existentialist concern, in the Christian-existentialist sense of Kierkegaard, especially insofar as both Percy and the Melancholy Dane are obsessed with the problem of subjectivity, and our awareness of it, and the paltry ways we try, unsuccessfully, to transcend it. So, this is NOT really a humor/satire book, per se, although the dust jacket's description tries to bill it as such (perhaps to expand the market appeal? Feh!). Early on, though, there is a send-up of the Phil Donahue show that is just \*hilarious\*. Most of the book is a series of (fairly involved) rhetorical questions, about such things as who in a hypothetical situation you would identify with the most, and why. The way

the questions are counterposed, one could accuse Percy of making his points backhandedly via strawman-demolition, but that would be beside the point. Percy's overall aim is to get at the background of all our operating assumptions, and the ways in which we judge and evaluate others in relation to self, and what that says about what kind of thing man is. In the middle of the book is a digression on semiotics, the theory of signs. One of Percy's central ideas here is that man's cardinal innovation over other animals is his use of signs and not just signals. The "sign" usage is essentially triangular, involving subject, object, and the intersubjective sign, whereas an animal "signal" is two-dimensional, such as "danger, run away." All of our thought and communication is predicated on that sign-based three-dimensional framework. The self constantly has to situate oneself with respect to other selves and in the intersubjective framework that marks our communicative network. The main human predicament is that that intersubjective framework is essentially unstable due to our confusion about ourselves, and our desire to cover up our insecurities. No solution to this problem is forced upon the reader, although some suggestion of one is implied. The humanist and religious outlooks are both presented, fairly, I think, and the reader is left to evaluate the human condition as portrayed. The book ends with a couple of arresting sci-fi scenarios, that for thought-provocation, I haven't seen since the likes of Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*. This is a no-holds-barred look at ourselves that is rewarding as it is unflinchingly realistic, and I highly recommend it.

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