

# ON THE CENOSCOPIC AND IDIOSCOPIC

And Why They Matter<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** We are accustomed to viewing polarities in the world of knowledge lined up like adversaries: science versus religion; the sciences versus the humanities; the old science versus the new science, and so on. Recent attempts to arbitrate in the matter have been few and confused. But there was one exception. C. S. Peirce borrowed a pair of concepts from Jeremy Bentham, steeped them in the stew of his own particular genius, and passed them on to posterity. Mostly ignored, they were finally picked up by John Deely a century later. They play a crucial role in negotiating a newly identified homeland for philosophy, allowing it to survive its near shipwreck in recent times. A sustained meditation on their full implications, however, takes us even further. Still honoring the conquests of modern science, a restored epistemic homeland is offered not only to traditional philosophy, but also to the otherwise marginalized realms of the humanities and religion.

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# I. The Story of a Distinction

When learning something “new,” the best ideas and distinctions are usually those that awaken something already there, but somehow hidden by more obtrusive concerns or outshone by what seemed to be greater lights. Most of our self-glorifying innovations turn out to be hardly more than technological tricks for doing things we already did, but with new velocity, power, and ease (e.g., writing faster, getting somewhere more quickly, crunching more data than before, etc.).

By contrast, more enriching advances typically fashion novel links among components of what we already know, and perform that fruitful fusion championed by Confucius, who identified the true teacher as the one “who could bring forth the new by keeping warm the old.”<sup>2</sup> This happens when you read Plato or Aristotle, Augustine or Aquinas, or those very few moderns (such as C.S. Peirce or C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton or Joseph Pieper) who stepped outside the stampede of innovation and found the perennial to be more up-to-date than the morning news.

No single expression captures more directly the focus of this obsession with the unprecedented—and one that has come to occupy center stage since the 17th century, despite multiple demonstrable links with the past—than “modern science.” This new cognitive and cultural sovereign has increasingly elbowed out of prominence three areas of human activity formerly enthroned in high authority, and which hitherto prevailed in ancient and medieval Western, as well as in non-Western traditional societies. We can classify them as (1) the humanities and the arts, (2) philosophy, and (3) religion and theology.

From of old, these three domains existed in symphony, all of them inseparable in their resources and interactive in their cognitive, as well as existential, claims on our attention; ever distinct, but never sundered. They were the default disciplines which, in saner times, positioned the human imagination, mind and heart firmly within the matrix of the real. But as the march of modernity has progressed, they have found themselves pushed to the side, or assigned new subordinate tasks. Once out of the way, modern science and its sidekick, modern technology, have proceeded to barrel forth into the world and into our everyday lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Confucius 479-475bc (posthumously compiled and written): *Analects* II, 11.

When I was an adolescent in the 1960s, I used to scissor out the “Science” section in the *Time* magazine our family subscribed to, quite confident that all the other news—political, economic, and cultural—was transient and doomed to the dustbin. I had been taught that science alone had a purchase on the future. Even today, I still follow scientific developments with keen interest, but I have since learned to be careful in distinguishing between proven fact and theory and the oft misguided interpretations pressed upon them by philosophically and theologically illiterate scientists.

Religion’s fate in this new ordering of cognitive priorities has been its exile to the world of the private (and usually of a private fantasy). Philosophy, in turn, is often sent off to the history department where it might find some legitimacy as chronicler of past, though mostly futile, attempts to find our way to the modern Shangri-La of science. The re-christening often occurs under the rubric of “the history of ideas.” In a kind of wistful reminiscence, one by one, the wisdom narratives of the past each receive their appointed diorama in a cabinet of ideological curiosities.

The arts and the humanities, in contrast, are assigned a more generous role, since the toils of science and technology wear us out, and a bit of fun and relaxation on the weekends is welcome. Any claim to cognitive or moral tutorship, however, is categorically denied them.

I will ask in this essay how one might realistically account for the new paramountcy of science and technology in a way that does not necessarily denigrate or demote the three earlier manifestations of man’s search for meaning. We will have to venture beyond the famous and ultimately futile grappling with this issue waged by C.P. Snow in the last century. In *The Two Cultures* (1959), Snow tried to envision a transcendence of the academic conflicts between the humanities and the sciences, though predictably encouraging a prioritization of the latter over the former. He still intended on keeping the humanities in place, but the increasing cacophony of new scientific conquests and technological toys finally drowned out the sound of our poems, our ponderings, and our prayers.

Often enough, even fine philosophers simply face what seems to be the inevitable and throw themselves prostrate before the new masters. With the poetic mode of knowing marginalized and religion privatized, philosophy itself struggled for breath. After all, Stephen Hawking, among others, decreed that

“philosophy is dead,” and the reason is that “it has not kept up with modern developments in science, especially physics.”<sup>3</sup>

More generous obituaries might still apportion a servile role to the descendants of Plato and Aristotle, allowing them to serve as science’s interpreters, even translators. The hyper-specialized scientists often enough are incapable of speaking among themselves (a physicist with a biologist, for example), and may welcome a “philosopher of science” to fashion a *lingua franca* for their interdisciplinary missives. Bertrand Russell proposed such a survival tactic. Similar provisional arrangements might be made even with religions; although regarded as mere subjective dispositions of certain private individuals not yet fully in sync with the new scientific worldview, they are uncommonly tenacious (and who wants to argue with their grandmothers?).

Again, the arts and the colorful world of languages, literatures, history, and the entire realm of the Muses will be escorted into their own modern nursery: a garden of diversions, to which all the belabored scientists and technicians can retire in their moments of leisure. There they may engage in restorative distractions, but, mind you, only in order to return thereafter to the world of true cognition in their laboratories and university departments of natural and social sciences.

But there is a way to free our hearts and imaginations from this nemesis. Apologists of the endangered wisdom of the past have been given a powerful aid in viewing the matter from a perspective that honors both of these conflicting epistemic claims—those of the past, and also the intrusively imperious ones of the present. I refer to the distinction between cenoscopy and idioscopy borrowed, somewhat paradoxically, from the foremost proponent of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham. The distinction is useful indeed. It was then adopted and enriched by arguably the most brilliant of modern American philosophers,<sup>4</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914).

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<sup>3</sup> Hawking 2010: *The Grand Design*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> 1816: *Chrestomathia* in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, v.8: 83n: “Coenosopic...from two Greek words, one of which signifies common--things belonging to others in common; the other looking to. By coenosopic ontology, then, is designated that part of the science which takes for its subject those properties which are considered as possessed in common by all the individuals belonging to the class which the name ontology is employed to designate, i.e. by all individuals.” Peirce 1905: “Review of Wilhelm Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*” in *Collected Papers*, vol.8.199: “The sort of science

This distinction was rather ignored for almost a century until taken up by a recent American philosopher who was able to eye its far-reaching implications. He did this by bringing to its construal both the insights of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and John of St. Thomas (of classical thought), and of John Locke, Peirce himself, Martin Heidegger, and a pioneer modern Hungarian semiotician, Thomas Sebeok (of modern thought). I am referring to the marginal, unrecognized sage: John Deely (1943-2017). As was the case with Peirce, whose range of accomplishments have only been fully recognized in recent decades, Deely too will only be noticed by those who find the time to spend a few hours within the world of his philosophical prose. It is quite an experience. Peirce was largely overlooked by the professional academy during his lifetime; Deely has fared a little better, but not much.

Both of these philosophers, due to wide reading in traditional Scholastic literature (and friendship with giants like William James, in Peirce's case, and an assortment of leading Thomists and the aforementioned semiotician, in Deely's), grew into atypical theoretical geniuses. Deely, in particular, cultivated even broader familiarity with the medievals, including the late "Latin Age" thinker<sup>5</sup> John of St. Thomas (João Poinot). All this brought his mind into collaborations with Mortimer Adler, a few high-octane Dominicans, and, finally, Heidegger, Maritain, and Sebeok. The cenoscopic/idioscopic distinction referred to above was brought to us through Peirce and Deely and gives, to my mind, the best framework for understanding how modern science truly relates to the imaginative, rational, and religious wisdom of earlier times.

This link is crucial since the danger of modern scientism's pomposity in the face of more traditional fountains of knowledge is mirrored by an opposite peril on the part of the very champions of the latter. They sometimes run the risk of dismissing modern science as an aberrant offspring of the modern "reign of quantity" (*à la* René Guénon).<sup>6</sup> Steadying the pendulum between these two

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that is founded upon the common experience of all men was recognized by Jeremy Bentham under the name of cenoscopy, in opposition to idioscopy, which discovers new phenomena". Cf. 1902: "A Detailed Classification of the Sciences" in *CP*.1.238-242.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the meaning of the term "Latin Age", see Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding*, 161-211 and 2020: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined as the Latin Age* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) *in passim*.

<sup>6</sup> 1945: *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times*.

extremes demands a pair of measured concepts, each of which can stand in the other's presence without humiliation or stigma.

### 1.1. The Cenoscopic and the Idioscopic

These fancy-sounding words actually highlight a quite elementary distinction, and one accessible to all with just a small amount of reflection. The “cenoscopic” is, as the Greek roots indicate, a “look” (*skopeo*, “I see”, “I look”) that is common (*koinos*). Charles Peirce, following Bentham, takes it to indicate the way we look at the world with our largely unaided senses, without the interposition of sophisticated technology or the imposition of devised mathematical hypotheses. It deals with “observations such as come within the range of every man’s normal experience, and for the most part in every waking hour of his life.... These observations escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives.”<sup>7</sup> We are accustomed to admiring modern science because it gets to things (like atoms and quasars) that also “escape the untrained eye,” but here Peirce points to a different mode of concealment.

In cenoscopy, things escape the eye not by being hidden by virtue of their tininess or hugeness, or their extension over eons of time or involvement in hyper-complexities of culture, but simply by their commonness. Their very obviousness requires a conscious direction of our attention, like that needed to notice the ticking of a clock that your ears were hearing all the while you conversed with someone, but which remained unperceived because you were otherwise occupied.

It’s the world in which we walk around, drive our cars, raise our children , feel pleasure and suffer pain , are born, grow and finally die; it’s the world in which elephants are big and ants are small, where cheetahs go fast and turtles go slow; a world with a splendid canopy of azure arched over it by day, and an even more splendid wash of mysterious stars by night; a world with wet, salty oceans over most of its surface and sweet water running in streams and rivers through the rest of it, of rain that comes down and balloons that go up. It’s the world where virtually all of our literature and poetry is staged (even science fiction, if only by contrast), the world about which traditional philosophy reflected, and the world

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<sup>7</sup> Peirce 1905: “Review of Wilhelm Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*” in *Collected Papers*, 8.199.

in which the great religious quests of history all took their first steps (and many more that followed).

The “idioscopic,” by contrast, is a “look” that is *idios*—“singular, special(ized)” — and that began to be cultivated in earnest only in modern times. It has become the very glory of modern science, and has brought countless blessings *and* maledictions into our contemporary biosphere. It consists of a number of radical shifts in our mode of attention. We can sum them up in four modifications of the cenoscopic approach to the world:

1. Instead of an unaided human sensorium of five principal senses, we have instead an assembly of highly sophisticated instruments designed to look above, beyond and below what cenoscopic perception can mediate. Here are all of our telescopes, microscopes, radiometers, and the whole arsenal of new instruments that enable us to “read behind the appearances and between the lines,” as it were, endeavoring in this way to uncover the hidden secrets of the cosmos.
2. Second instead of spontaneous, natural experience, we have in its place the contrived, choreographed *experiment*, isolated from the riotous world around it, and focusing on just one—or very few—selected aspects of things which are otherwise enveloped in a confusing whirlwind of relations. Everything extraneous is sidelined in order to permit a specialized scientific squint at an aimed-for “phenomenon,” deliberately orphaned from its cenoscopic matrix.
3. Third, instead of viewing the real within the rich perspective of all four of Aristotle’s classic causes, one simplifies the investigation by removing the two that are most troublesome and most suggestive of dimensions that lie beyond the isolated fact. Formal and final causes are disregarded (the former for threatening to inject metaphysics into the discussion; the latter, for worrying us with teleology). However, the two causes most germane to “getting a grip” on the world in practical and technical ways (material and efficient causes) are vigorously sequestered and empowered.
4. Finally, instead of appealing to a prior metaphysical grasp of reality with an eye to what the science of being has to say about all of that which is (material or not), one turns instead to the newly expanded and emancipated disciplines of mathematics, paradoxically limited by their very nature to a purely *quantitative* view of reality (analytical geometry, trigonometry, and the infinitesimal calculus for starters).

These shifts endeavor—as Galileo famously put it—to “measure what can be measured, *and make measurable that which cannot*” (my emphasis, although I am sure Galileo would be happy with the highlight). Not only is ever more exact measurement the new criterion for the identification of the genuinely real, but also the use of math to hypothesize in advance over what might be found in the real, so that afterwards experiments can be fashioned to confirm or disprove the hypotheses.

*Voilà*, in rough summary, the new scientific method that has given us technology beyond ancient and medieval dreams, but has also foreshortened our insight into meaning, value and purpose.

Kant famously characterized the old-fashioned, Aristotelian way to do science as modeled on a pupil paying close attention to *everything* his teacher was saying. In contrast, the new method frees the scientist from the role of a passive pupil. Instead, he models himself on the courtroom judge (today, we might say the prosecutor), asking very specific questions of the somewhat intimidated witness.<sup>8</sup> He will doggedly insist that all else be excluded (“Please just answer the question!”). You only get a slice of reality this way, but that’s the whole point.

These four innovations joined their energies and soon shot off in four distinct directions: beyond, below, before, or within the surface realities of the cenoscopic (see diagram at beginning of Part IV). Here on earth, massive geological and tectonic events of the past lie beyond the horizons of the cenoscopic eye, producing continents and oceans, mountain chains and deserts—all realities too big to catch sight of with a turn of the head. And there are far bigger things than these. Above and beyond the starry sky that we admire at night is the idioscopic world of quasars, pulsars, dark matter and energy, black holes and galaxies; recent calculations number these last at close to a trillion. None of these things are a part or could ever be a part of our cenoscopic world without making it a nightmare.

However, the readily visible night sky is *very much* a part of that idioscopic world, and—as I will endeavor to show towards the end of this essay—of even greater importance and significance than all the astrophysical data you can feed into a computer. But for the moment, I am interested in giving credit where credit is due, and the marvelous mega-world of idioscopic science and technology

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<sup>8</sup> 1787: *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xiii.

deserves a standing ovation. This is the world of earth science here below, and astronomy, astrophysics, and relativity theory up above.

Still, all that was accessed by the early idioscopic development was only the world of the very, very big. Now, we shall reverse the focus and look beneath and inside this material stuff we live in and are made of. Here is the realm of the very, very small. The idioscopic world of matter beneath us and within us, like the galaxies, also escapes our cenoscopic purview, but in this case not by sheer extent, like a mountain chain, but rather by being diminutive, like a dust particle. Nearly the whole world of living cells that make up all organisms, and virtually all the molecules in both organic and inorganic matter, and, even more emphatically, all the quadrillions of atoms, with their sub-particles in the heart of it all, are *there*, but are not a *perceived* part of our cenoscopic habitat. Chemistry, biochemistry, much of descriptive and molecular biology and nuclear science, for instance, are decidedly idioscopic sciences. Here, 20th century physics unleashes the bizarre world of quantum mechanics, and biology identifies DNA and other micro-structures of life.

The study of the very big and the very small aims for the more *synchronic* dimensions of our world—stretched out in space more than in time; time itself is even seen as but a dimension of space. They provide us with the idioscopic angles from which we gain a deeper understanding of cosmos, matter, and energy. But when we turn instead to the teeming world of *life* in all its forms and histories, modern science has taken the *diachronic* to unprecedented lengths. As we consider the third reach of idioscopic science, it is Father Time's turn to take the floor.

When we look to living plants and organisms themselves, in all their kinds, we view them cenoscopically in the populated meadows and menageries where they live—vivid and distinct, beautiful and scary: bushes, trees, vines, flowers and sprouts; tigers, bears, anteaters, dogs, cats, fish and birds and all the rest, not least of all the naked ape we ourselves are, our own awkward species—looking either like an animal gone berserk or an angel fallen from the sky. But when we read Darwin, or any of the updated versions of the evolutionary theory he hatched, we are asked to view all those life-forms as results of processes we cannot witness in a lifetime or photograph with a camera. Very few evolutionary processes can be witnessed today, most of them involving microbes. Yet, the evidence points overwhelmingly to the reality of this protracted process of selective variation that, in significant measure, made us all to be what we all are.

The idioscopic dimension here is not that of the exceedingly big (as with astrophysics), or the microscopically small (as with atomic physics), but rather

with a process unimaginably long-lasting, imperceptibly spread out over hundreds of thousands, and, usually, millions of years. Most importantly, these are no *imaginable* years, or even centuries or millennia—instead, they are incogitable eons. The modern instruments in this case are radiometric dating techniques; the experimental objects: the fossils we carefully separate from layers of rock. We then apply mathematical calculations as to the number of 0's we have to put after the agreed-on digits. Only in this way can we measure the gaping stretches of geological time during which these changes occurred. Some occurred gradually, some abruptly—but nearly all along unfathomable chronological spans that lie totally out of cenoscopic sight.

Although evolutionary theory, and biological science in general, seem to be slowly reapproaching the idea of final causality, the evolutionary narrative that has risen to prominence over the last century tells us that chance mutations of living matter and shifting environments join to furnish sufficient material and efficient causality to bring about the species we see. The genesis of the naturally, organically complex makes idioscopic sense only through natural selection, genetics, and epigenetics—and that only makes sense, when speaking of the overwhelming majority of species, if situated breathtakingly beyond the register of our clocks and calendars. That there must also be something transcendent at work here is a cenoscopic insight we shall return to later.

All the foregoing is just about life in its organic, cellular manifestation. But there is more—much more. A yet further reach of idioscopic cognition is gained by exploring how and why one singular species has gone on to develop in ways no other can and has produced a panoply of not only natural ethnicities, body shapes, physiognomies, hair types, and skin colors, but—far more impressively—kaleidoscopic universes of art, religion, philosophy, science, literature, music, and everything else made by human hand and ingenuity—in a word: culture.

Organic nature has produced a garden of plants and a zoo of animals, with man poised at the uneasy center of it all. But only from him has emerged the even more diversified and often exotic world of culture. Coming forth from biological nature but mysteriously transcending it, human culture invites idioscopic science to deal, in this case, not with the exceedingly big, nor the microscopically small, nor with the biologically complex and the extraordinarily long time it took to produce its array of forms, but instead with the almost unbridled and promiscuously fecund world of the *culturally complex*.

It is no secret that biological science is immeasurably more multiple and manifold than physics and chemistry and all that treats of non-organic reality. But the life sciences are trumped in turn by what we have come to call the “human” or

“cultural sciences,” or more frequently, in English, the “social sciences” (including what are sometimes called the behavioral and the cognitive sciences): anthropology, psychology, sociology, linguistics, historiography, archaeology, economics, and human geography (to mention only the more prominent).

As the former three realms of knowledge still deal with nature, and the third with its most complex biological manifestations, the fourth deals instead with culture. I am understanding “culture” here in a broad sense to include all that which exists only through the agency of free and intelligent human activity. Discussion of competing definitions of culture, and especially the tracing of the often fugitive line between nature and culture, are issues deserving separate essays. My understanding here is sufficient for the clarification of the cenoscopic/idioscopic distinction.

Culture exposes a further and virtually endless swirl of complexity, incomparably beyond even that of the biological. It emerges from *bios*, and is forever linked to it, but it also dramatically—and that *is* the right adverb—transcends it. Here is the intimidating and eloquent world of *logos*. We see matter below and around us and look up at the stars in our cenoscopic world, but we see neither the molecules and atoms within, nor the quasars and black holes beyond. We also see the plants and animals around us—and the animal we ourselves are—but we never witness any of them evolving into different forms during our brief human existence; nor does recorded human history document such transformations in significant profile.

Likewise, we see human cultures still living today, we witness the actions and reactions our psychological makeup produces; we live in varieties of societies, speak our thousands of tongues, pick up a bit of history here, another bit there; and we also exchange goods, save and spend our money as we walk over the hills and cross the rivers of our immediate habitat. But as with the other three areas, below the surface there are forces at work that are not easy to spot.

It takes idioscopic science to research the cultures of the past and evaluate the many still with us (anthropology); to go into the depths to find why some of our psychological behavior is so weird and often troubling (psychiatry and depth psychology); to examine the hidden forces at work in the sometimes forbiddingly complex interactions that occur when human beings live together over time (sociology); to look beneath our day-to-day chatter and contemporary literature to find what is constant and determinant in the ever-changing world of human language (linguistics); to attempt to put some order in the way we remember—as remember we must—what went before us, despite its overwhelming

convolutions and frequent confusions (historiography); to discover how our production, distribution and consumption of goods really works in its innermost causes, and why it turns so often into crass injustices and abuses (economics); and to study how the topography of the earth we walk and travel on, and in which we live our lives, enters deeply into the kind of thoughts we have and the sorts of lives we live (human geography). These, and a handful of other sciences explore the “undercover side” of our protean cultural manifestations. With these, we close the circle of the natural and cultural sciences.

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In summary, these four areas of human knowing—the astronomically big and the microscopically small, the biologically compounded and the culturally complex—invite idioscopic science to don its instruments, mount its experiments, measure and hypothesize about the objects in question, and finally to fashion technologies that will hopefully more deeply integrate humankind with its environment, solve problems and cure diseases. Still, the great ideal at the heart of all knowledge, namely, the desire to unify data and bring synthesis to multiplicity, floats temptingly over these four areas as it does over the divisions within each of them. Knowledge by definition tends toward unity.

One avenue of unification is by reduction. Past attempts at reduction—trying, for example, to reduce biology to chemistry, chemistry to physics, logic to mathematics or mathematics to logic—have famously failed. More recent dreams of “unified science” have concerned linking the very big with the very small, and also the organically complex with the labyrinthine world of culture. There are undoubtedly intersections to be identified, but whether they permit final reductions of one to the other is still a very open question. My hunch is that the four domains truly and meaningfully converge in one world and one world only: the **cenoscopic**.

Einstein was famous for successfully bringing relativity physics (principally about the very big) into view; he was also famous for failing to bring that mammoth accomplishment into sync with quantum mechanics (about the very small), which was also enjoying revolutionary advances. Similarly, evolutionary science has seen great conquests in accounting for the traits of organisms as they develop over eons of time, but it has also stared with puzzlement at the cultural explosion of activity that the human organism has generated. How to account for all *that* with the mere mechanisms of natural selection and genetics has not yet been brought anything close to scientific consensus. I have to wonder if attempts at causally coupling nature and culture in biological science—a holy grail keenly coveted by many an evolutionary theorist—may miss the mark as

much as Einstein did. Again, my suspicion is that the harmony will be found only in the ontological wealth of the cenoscopic.

In the following parts of my essay, I plan to describe in greater detail the nature of cenoscopic experience. Could the “common sense” context of that experience be the only point of convergence where the two extremes of physical science can make physical sense, and the two extremes of life’s complexity (natural and cultural) at long last make vital sense? Instead of reducing the cenoscopic to the idioscopic, could it prove more rational to look in the other direction—and then not by way of reduction, but rather by way of transcendence? That is to say, could it be that idioscopic science is so constituted, from the get-go, as to only achieve final harmony by permitting itself to be ordered to the cenoscopic as to that which both transcends it in meaning, and which alone can bring it to true scientific consummation?

## 2. Two Ways of Looking (and two worlds seen)

Often enough, the cenoscopic and the idioscopic intertwine, if only because we can never entirely extract ourselves from our experiential homeland in the former. That is where we live, and even when we peer deeply into telescopic space or down into the mini-world of the microscopic, or when we climb high to a hypothetical vantage from which to view Darwinian eons and the magic metamorphoses of evolution, or venture into whatever sophisticated methodology the human sciences may devise, still, once our idioscopic labors are concluded, we once again plant our buttocks on the same cenoscopic chairs, stare at our recorded results with eyes of flesh, and scurry off afterwards for a cup of coffee or a cocktail. No one resides among the galaxies, or buys an apartment next to a quark, or places bets on whether this or that primitive quadruped will eventually become a feline or a canine. And no one spends 24 hours on a psychoanalyst’s couch (although those who linger too long in an idioscopic mode may find they need to).

If our cognitive conquests in specialized science end up subduing and even disqualifying the sustaining environment of the cenoscopic, there is a price to be paid. What we lose in context, perspective and focus—and this is especially so when the idioscopic claims to be the *truer* or even the *only true* view of things—can make the new facts and truths, however valid in detail, ultimately bewildering. Our properly human problems do not easily map upon idioscopic dimensions; even the social sciences can only be of help to the extent that their results translate back into a cenoscopic idiom.

To protest that modern science demonstrably reveals new truths does not really address the question. It is not just truth that we want, but *truth in perspective*. It has been said that our moral problems are not really due to evils as such, but rather to misplaced and disordered goods. It can similarly be maintained that our knowledge-related problems are not ultimately due to falsehood or mendacity as such, but rather to misplaced and disordered truths. Pure evil and pure falsehood are so feeble in entity, they cannot even exist as subsistent realities. What purchase they have on existence is always parasitic on the good and the true, and upon them they piggy-back for their derivative life spans.

What we need in order to overcome human problems is human perspective, which idioscopic science, by definition, excludes. When your tummy hurts, your tummy hurts, and not your cells, your molecules, or your atoms. And when you laugh at a joke, your mind and your torso both quake with delight, and no calculations of cellular chemistry can explain “what’s so funny.”

Although modern science and technology have been sources of considerable enlightenment and progress in battling the ills that afflict us, they have also been begetters of horrific pollution, creators of biological, chemical, and nuclear weaponry, and upchuckers of masses of plastic toxins that get dumped by the tons into our oceans—and end up, sooner or later, in our organisms. Of course, the technocratic apologist will soon speak up in defense of his handiwork. You cannot have a tree standing in the sun without it casting a shadow, he might retort. And after all, many of the problems caused by advanced science may well be solved by yet more advanced science. True enough: but the real problem with science run amok is not just too little, or too much idioscopic data, but rather lack of the kind of context, perspective and focus that this sort of knowledge cannot gauge, or even surmise, to begin with.

It was not for this that it was developed, nor does its proven value and strength lie in any inherent, synoptic “wisdom.” Its obsessive specialization does not brook criticism of the blinkers that line its chosen channel of vision, for they were put in place with cold determination and approval. It *wants* the isolated target. It’s the cerebral left hemisphere all the way! What matters is that a method “works,” or that a fugitive phenomenon is seized and put under the spotlight. The limited and squinted field of vision is not seen as a handicap; it is indispensable for keeping attention focused. Only, too often that focus will zero in on two things and two things only: quantity to be measured, and power to be captured and exploited. When the more romantic among us insist on searching the world also for *meaning, value, and purpose*, we will be sent crestfallen from the fortresses of idioscopic victories. We shall have to look elsewhere to find an

ambience within which these questions still make sense. Fortunately, we won't have to look far.

## 2.1. The Cenoscopic World

The use of this rather heavy-handed term to refer to what in saner times would have simply been called “the world” was made necessary by the success of the idioscopic perspective in imposing itself on our imaginations. What we cannot see has, counter-intuitively, become more real to us than what we can see. We naively fancy that we know what atoms are (tiny solar-systems revolving merrily in the depths of matter), what black holes are (big black bottomless pits out there in the void), how one-celled protozoa can turn into complex mammals and reptiles (we've seen it in 3-D animations, haven't we?), and how the anfractuous theories of a Marx, a Freud, or a Durkheim can claim to lay to rest the conundrums of our behavior—all these modern insights we believe we have “sighted,” although they have only been imagined; our retinas were never invited to the show. All the while the things we truly see with the two orbs in our head—for instance, the textured surface of the real as it unfolds before us as we walk through a lovely park—are re-categorized as illusions at worst, or at best, mere “appearances.”

The sun only *seems* to rise and set, and only a fool thinks that it really does, right? The stars *seem* stately and stable, but they really aren't, right? And the “tiger, tiger, burning bright” that we admire at the zoo just *happened*, by chance, to turn out that way, right? Think about it. Is there really no way of acknowledging the legitimacy, for instance, of the heliocentric model without at the same time downgrading our cenoscopic eyeballs? Need we tell our eyes they are not seeing what they are seeing when they behold the solar orb ascending gloriously over yon horizon? And as the solar sphere climbs majestically to its noonday summit, we should seriously ask ourselves: *why* is it that we are unable to *watch* the horizon sink in the same way that we can watch the sun go up? What right have these new purveyors of the idioscopic perspective to mandate such imperialistic epistemology?

This dictatorial shifting of our sensibilities is not even consistent with modern science's very own conclusions regarding motion and relativity. If there is one consensual conviction that has come out of four centuries of modern physics, it is that in the cosmos as we know it, there is *no* fixed topographical point of reference anywhere at all. There are only relative points of reference, depending on the system in question; in each of our perceptions, we get our bearings from priorities of perspective that come—and this is important—from memories of

our past experience. That past has been formatted both individually and collectively according to the configuration we all recognize as our cenoscopic world. Even the most puzzling findings of quantum mechanics must eventually communicate with that world, even if only to enable us to be puzzled.

For an astronomer taking a wide-angle look at the earth from outer space, pondering its gravitational relation to the planets and the sun, the heliocentric model is logical and reveals physical causalities not readily evident from a geocentric point of view (e.g., the erratic movements of the planets). From that perspective, there is manifest truth in heliocentrism, and no cenoscopic thinker worth his salt will deny it. But why should that perspective be dominant for the non-astronomer, the simple earth-dweller—and to be honest, even the astronomer when he is off duty? We all crane our necks and look heavenwards, following the path of the sun, the soles of our feet planted securely upon soil and grass. If we were to exclaim: “Wow! That was one gorgeous sunrise!” are we just revealing that we are benighted and misguided yokels?

Consider the stars, seriously. The cenoscopic view of the night sky is of a beautiful canopy of twinkling wonders, all in an ensemble display that, like no other—as Plato said long ago—arouses the experience of wonder from our breasts. We instinctively assemble them in symbolically meaningful constellations, give them names, use them to navigate the seas, measure the seasons and establish the weeks and months of our calendars. They are reliable, always there, even when waiting for us behind the clouds. The sphere of their steadfastness is the grand celestial canopy under which we live, the largest embracing limit of the aesthetic miracle that is our home. It is our true celestial ceiling. The passages of sun, moon and planets against that stellar backdrop only highlight the permanence of their multiple sparkles.

Now what does idioscopic astronomy add to this? Actually, quite a bit. We know, for instance, that almost all of what we see up there is neither solid, nor liquid, nor gas, but a fourth state called plasma. That *is* interesting. We also know that virtually all the stars we see belong to our own, local galaxy: the Milky Way. We know too that there are further billions upon billions not just of stars, but of other galaxies out there, inconceivably beyond the reach of the naked eye. These and a few other insights can serve and even enhance the wonder we feel as we look at the starry sky. All this is fruitful, and shows how the two perspectives can co-exist and enrich each other, provided we not commit epistemological treason against the homeland of the cenoscopic. But this is a real danger. There is a point, you see, where idioscopic science tends to leave off supplementing and begin subjugating.

First, we are often told that the stellar stability we witness is an illusion, and that the galaxies with their stars are actually zipping away from each other at unimaginable velocities. Our innate senses never get to perceive this. Comparisons of present measurements with those of centuries ago may pick up small shifts, but this hardly concerns our everyday star-gazing. The real encumbrances are the distances. Ah, those distances! The closest star (still in our own cozy local galaxy) is over four light-years away (and beware of pretending that you can imagine how far that is; you can't even get close). Moreover, our nearest galaxy "neighbor" is two and a half *million* light-years away. And, adding immeasurably to the complications attendant on such incomprehensible remoteness is a truly surreal idioscopic revelation. Buckle up!

*Each* of those stellar points in the sky lies at a *different*—often wildly different—distance from us. That means the "age" of each star's light is also different. As if that were not enough, the stellar scientists then inform us that the starlight we see *here and now* does not give us empirical information on the actual being of the very stars we are admiring. It only tells us that so and so many years, centuries, millennia or even millions of years ago (depending on which celestial orb we point our pupils at), a certain star sent forth that illumination. Today we cannot even be sure that star still exists.

What a bizarre astronomical history lesson we are being idioscopically taught as we survey the vault of the heavens! Imagine if we applied this to human history. Imagine sending a camera drone over the earth for a few weeks and then afterwards viewing the footage. Imagine that as you watched the recording, you were to see, from those same few weeks, the first hominid sporting a tool, Caesar crossing the Rubicon, the beginning of the Second Crusade, Galileo walking over to the Holy Office in Rome, and John F. Kennedy being inaugurated on the steps of the U.S. capitol. This would not be history, but a chronological phantasmagoria. So it is with the stars.

After evaluating these new astronomical perspectives in idioscopic science, any nocturnal stroll under the stars will remind us that, far and away, the most significant and most realistic view of the stars is the one on unmistakable display in our cenoscopic experience: it is *how they look to us from our home on Earth*. Again, all motion is relative, as is all rest. You cannot get away from perspective. *Our* perspective, dictated by our human nature and habitat, is not false; it is obviously revealing and meaningful. The fixed stars of our sky look the way they do because that is, for us, *truly the way they are*.

I am willing to agree that the idioscopic data is largely accurate, but it remains quite secondary, even tertiary in relation to understanding what our unaided eyes see. Decontextualized knowledge not only does not help, it actually blurs and confounds our ordered appreciation of the world. You gain no additional insight into the beauty of Marilyn Monroe when you learn that her body contained approximately 30 trillion cells.

I am not disputing at all that modern science can give us a new perspective on why the sun “appears” to rise and set, enlightening us indeed on how the earth—in the great “out there”—rotates about its axis as it revolves around the sun. This is a new angle one might bear in mind while we gaze at sunrises and sunsets. However, it is something quite different to insist that *that*, and that alone, is the truth of the matter, and that what we are seeing is a beguiling semblance, a *fata morgana*, even an optical illusion. No, it is not.

If our terrestrial existence postulates the relative stability of the earth we stand upon (whose speedy cosmic career through our galaxy is a part of *no one's* everyday experience), and the relative mobility of all that passes over our heads—and that means not just clouds and birds, but also sun, moon, planets and stars—then in our system of reference, we have full epistemological rights, I would even say a duty, to declare that what we see is real. Assuming, quite legitimately, the relative stability of our domestic orb, it is hardly just one more “planet” among many. It would be like calling a diamond just another stone among others.

We who live in the cenoscopic world—a world which includes, by the way, the idioscopic scientists (but don't tell them)—do walk around on two legs, watch the sun rise each morning and, naive romantics that we are, find it beautiful, even moving. We look “up” and are uplifted by the view of a sky populated with light and meaning, rather than peering “down our noses” into empty cosmic space. We play snooker with David Hume's descendants and find that the balls on the table—however the Scot may have impugned their consistency—really do “have balls,” so to speak. We hum a tune, love a lover, and entertain a dream. We even plan trips to that mysterious, formidable, and enticing mass of entity we call “the ocean.”

We instinctively *know* that the idioscopic view of reality is a *supplement*, an *addition*, full of new and fascinating perspectives indeed, but not at all one which casts our day-to-day experience into irrelevance. Neither do nuclear reactions, evolutionary necessities or newly unveiled explain-it-all narratives from the most recent version of the hermeneutics of suspicion lead us astray. Hopefully, our senses have been awakened by the humanities and the arts, our thinking trained

in realism by proven philosophy, and our hearts steadied in this world of pain and sorrow, but also of transcendent joy, by the world's religions.

The three sources of cenoscopic experience—the poetic, the philosophical and the spiritual—are not just diversions or superficial projections, but genuine sources of true and momentous knowledge. Without them, we soon lose purchase on our humanity. And a particularly surprising feature of this cenoscopic cognition—one that may sound offensive to the champions of scientism—is that it is actually more certain of itself and secure in its claims than all the results of idioscopic science taken together. Today's representatives of contemporary science will reluctantly admit that, for all its insight and usefulness, modern science is at best a haven of high statistical probabilities, forever vulnerable to new discoveries, updates, revolutions, and so-called paradigm shifts.

The cenoscopic world, in contrast, is the home of the perennial, the universal, the formal and final *par excellence*. Of course, there is still plenty to learn and many discoveries to be made. However, they will all find their true meaning only by finding their true place; and that place is within the selfsame picture of reality first gazed upon by the first human beings at the inception of our incredible saga.

### 3. Cenoscopy's Triple Jurisdiction (under five judges)

#### 3.1. Three Cenoscopic Dimensions

We have always lived, we still live, and our descendants will continue to live in the cenoscopic world. Since that is where our homeland lies, idioscopic ventures will inevitably carry traces of the language and perspectives so familiar to us. This will be true however far its voyages distance themselves from domestic shores. Not only will we find ourselves referring, almost biologically, to the “birth” and “death” of stars, give celebrity civil names to comets and lunar craters, we will even distinguish subatomic quarks from each other by referring to our own familiar coordinates of “up” and “down,” and classify leptons according to their “flavors.” Why, we will not even shy away from baby-talk when casually referring to the solemn idioscopic inauguration of the cosmos; we pull the pacifier from our lips and giggle as we blurt out the mantra: “Big Bang!”

There will also be slightly ambiguous areas of overlap between cenoscopy and idioscopy. We can, for instance, catch sight of a galaxy or two with our naked eyes, spot a few of the larger molecules, and no one in Hiroshima or Nagasaki had any doubts that their everyday experience was invaded by the then very

visible power of the atom. Blurry borders, however, do not cease to be borders, and once you are beyond the blur, the ambiguity unmistakably fades. These are two diverse, though not unrelated, universes of knowledge. And however many nominal mementos you may carry along into these alien probes, the differences will still be obvious, and their exegesis imperative.

Although my focus here has been on philosophy as the privileged exercise of reason within the cenoscopic context, this is not to say that reason is the only road on which we walk in our common experience. Far from it. Our direct bodily experience in moving about, taking a stroll, practicing a sport or performing exercises is obviously presupposed before we can philosophize at all. Indeed, we need these primitive acrobatics even before we can embark upon whatever idioscopic adventure we choose.

Philosophy is practiced to some extent by everyone endowed with an intellect, whether in an amateur and shorthand mode in most cases, or with method and elaboration on the part of the few who are called to dedicate their lives to it. But the high vocation of the love of wisdom is flanked by two companion cenoscopic dimensions providing knowledge of at least equal importance. Without them, philosophy itself tends to be either unduly absolutized, or (worse) reduced to a servile shadow of its true self. These are, on the one hand, the humanities and the arts, and on the other, religion and theology.

### 3.2. Humanities and the (Fine) Arts

We first must resist the modern tendency of dragging both philosophy and religion (or “religious studies”) under this rubric, or under one of the idioscopic classes of social science. What I understand, in the present context, as the humanities are based upon four areas of irreducibly human experience, predicated on our characteristic word- and language-oriented natures (grasping, creating and interpreting signs; speaking, reading and writing), and our lives situated necessarily, and consciously, in time and space. Accordingly, we may divide the disciplines into these four groups: 1. languages; 2. literature; 3. history; and 4. geography.

What today is usually called art tends to be restricted to the visual arts, with both music and literature—and for more technical reasons, architecture—generally located in separate departments at institutes of higher learning. This is largely a continuation of a tendency in the ancient world to attribute to the “Muses” (the mythic daughters of Zeus and Memory) principally the arts that address the ear. Our ears seem to be more spiritually open to inspiration, remaining—unlike our

eyes—always physically open to receive their stimuli. Included here would be music itself, but also all forms of poetry, drama, and narrative. Even astronomy chimes in with its “music of the spheres.”

The visual arts, in contrast, find their works more connected with matter and thus with the “servile” labors of preparing materials, cutting canvas, building edifices, etc. Nonetheless, philosophically considered (at least if we listen to Aristotle), all of these would be seen as forms of productive activity (*poiesis*), and thus susceptible of being disciplined and guided by a kind of knowledge, or “know-how.” This is precisely what the ancients called *techné* (our “art” from the Latin translation, *ars*).

Even so, two additional ambiguities further muddy the waters of distinction. First: 1) there existed a medieval discrimination between the *servile* arts (those performed in view of some end beyond themselves, like agriculture, medicine, culinary art, etc.) and the *liberal* arts (those performed by persons free from the time-consuming labors of the servile arts, and also—in theory, at least—exercised for their own sake and the light and intuition they afford, like the language and mathematical arts; these were arts not designed to be “put to use” in order to justify their existence); and 2) before modern times, and especially before the Industrial Revolution, there really did not exist—certainly not with the same emphasis we give today—the now so familiar distinction between the artistic (or the aesthetic) and the technological. Both these two contrasts have to do with the question of “use.”

In more tradition-oriented ages, the idea of making something that is useful (like a chair, a spoon, a hat, a building, even a comb) that was not simultaneously beautiful, was less common, and often enough unthinkable. This is why contemporary furniture lovers often go for “antiques.” It is also, I suppose, why Americans fly by the thousands to Europe in order to wander about in its cities, which are—in comparison with comparatively drab and homogenous American municipalities—stunningly beautiful. These old towns and cities are also surprisingly efficient at allowing people to get around without bulldozing asphalt highways through them.

Thus, my reference here is only to what we usually mean today by the “fine arts.” These are, namely, the visual arts: architecture, sculpture, painting and photography, and then the numerous minor varieties; the performing arts: drama, dance and music in all their forms and combinations; and today, we must add the “seventh art”: film (in all its manifestations). One can fan out from these into subdivisions and hybrid arts, but the ones here enumerated are enough to make my cenoscopic point. Along with the humanities, the fine arts provide our

senses, our emotions, our imaginations, and our memories with the vicarious experiences which provide some compensation for what our own limited time on earth, and our always limited opportunities for travel and human experience, cannot afford us. Still, though vicarious, the experiences sought are *human* (read: cenoscopic) experiences, and not further registers of idioscopic details.

### 3.3. Religion and Theology

Since religion typically addresses the question of transcendence, it is inevitably directed to the person as a whole (traditionally symbolized by the *heart*), and not just to one or the other of our faculties. Whereas the arts and humanities approach us through the senses and the imagination, and philosophy through reason and reflection, religion goes for the jugular.

When speaking of transcendence as a component of religion (whether a transcendence in being or even just in consciousness, as would be the case with most types of Buddhism), one might wonder if the idioscopic perspectives—all four of them—do not, by the very nature of their “special look,” offer transcendent views of reality. Many apologists for the new sciences will stake the claim that it has been *their* glory to finally provide the deeper, over-arching view of reality the religions of the past attempted but failed to bring into focus. Each idioscopic sphere is, after all, a region of human experience by definition lying “beyond” the day-to-day world around us (see the 1<sup>st</sup> of seven qualifications in Part IV). One could even argue that religious practices, in their endeavors to access transcendence, actually seem to mimic the four marks of idioscopic method outlined at the outset of this essay.

Are not the “graces,” “energies,” “states of consciousness,” “*siddhis*,” “favors,” etc., typically offered to religious adepts much like the telescopes and other contraptions used in specialized science to “pass over” into a new dimension of knowledge? And are not the churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras and pagodas in some ways like the controlled experiments of the scientists—the holy places marking off the sacred from the profane comparable to the way experiments mark off their area of inquiry from the rest of the world? Is this not analogous to the scientist separating the sought phenomenon from extraneous factors, just as the religious seeks to separate the sacred from the profane?

Not really, but the parallel is interesting. The “going beyond” which is germane to idioscopic science still advances by taking steps circumscribed by measurable space or time (see chart in Part IV). Religious transcendence, in contrast,

characteristically opens a door that is within the depths of our personhood, and engages a transcendence *sui generis*, one that is akin to intellectual intuition, although it proposes to go much deeper. It is, in the classical formulation, a transcendence that is immanent, and an immanence that is transcendent. Even the penetrations of depth psychology, at least from a metaphysical and theological perspective, only enter the world of the *psyche*. *Pneuma* (spirit) is deemed by most religions to be a deeper (indeed, the deepest) dimension of the human person, and indeed of reality as a whole.

One finds no true religious enlightenment, liberation, or salvation by floating in outer space in a cumbersome spacesuit, or by imagining a nose-dive down into the inhospitable quantum world, or by regressing backward to some pre-human state or even progressing forward to some “transhuman” state. Although they have proffered theories of novel explanation, even the social sciences have only helped to understand how we got to where we are, *but not why we are anywhere at all*. Our existential predicament remains. *Understanding* ourselves requires the activation of our higher faculties of intellectual intuition and inference. And that has always meant bringing them into communion with a spiritual reality beyond them. Most religious traditions would agree with this.

So just as the arts and humanities are all greeted and practiced only within the realm of the cenoscopic, likewise the religious quest can only make sense within that same matrix. It is the place where our lives unfold in all their specifically human shapes, sizes, needs and hopes.

### 3.4. Philosophy (or “Cenoscopic Science”)

Perhaps nowhere is the relevance of the cenoscopic perspective more evident than in the defence of traditional philosophizing. Philosophy and modern science may not have resolutely gone their separate ways until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was only the latter’s growing commitment to idioscopy which forced the former to defend its methods and champion the broader horizon of its interests. Peirce was the one who clearly acknowledged the legitimacy of cenoscopic knowledge, regarding philosophy, together with Deely, as “cenoscopic science.” Looking at and perceiving the world, viewing ourselves and the evident limits of all around us and within us, generates questions and provokes the pursuit of answers. These contextualize themselves in the natural and cultural world we inhabit. They arrive at meaningful formulation and development without recourse to instruments, calculation, and controlled experimentation.

One might formulate the purpose of philosophy as follows: it proposes to make us fully aware of what we already implicitly know, so that we can, in turn, fully become what we already potentially are. This is what most projects of classical philosophy, both theoretical and practical, aim for. Its contextualization within the humanities and the arts on the one hand, and its ultimate issue in the religious quest on the other, allow it to grow ever closer to this ideal. For us in the West, this project has been best understood and most perfectly articulated in the legacy of the compact triadic dynasty of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

None of them knew about cells, molecules, or subatomic particles; they were not informed about the extinction and origin of species and the mechanisms of natural selection; they did not suspect that we live in a galaxy, or that there are rings around Saturn and moons around Jupiter. Their awareness of language was limited to Greek and a few barbarian tongues. But they knew how to philosophize, and even the most accomplished of today's thinkers still go to them to learn the art.

Unlike the modern sciences, philosophy is not defined by discovering new phenomena, but rather by enlarging the contexts, deepening the perspectives, and properly adjusting the focus of what we already know. It does this by virtue of our inherited humanity and those five windows to the real we call our senses. Thanks to the aforementioned masters, this enterprise finally matures into disciplines of logic, the philosophy of nature, philosophical anthropology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics and more. Although it looks appreciatively into the discoveries of the new sciences, philosophy insists on bringing their often surprising findings into conversation with the cenoscopic launching pad of all thought, the principles of *being*. Here they are submitted to the cenoscopic exegesis without which they remain but intellectually orphaned oddities.

The unavoidable launching pad of the mind's journey into reality is its confrontation with being—our *noein* (thinking) standing in the face of *einai* (being). This was accepted by all three of our Greek masters, although with different foci. A menu of possibilities was rehearsed in Plato's dialogues and explored with such intensity that the greatest Platonist of them all, Aristotle, could escort the most vindicated Platonic conquests into the newly identified outlines of the sciences to which he himself would give birth. In the last part of this essay, I would like to suggest how the distinction of cenoscopic and idioscopic knowledge might help us to put all this into an order of refreshing coherence and far-reaching implications. It will mean restoring those traditional domains of human experience and wisdom to their proper place at the center of

our cognitive universe. And it will also mean insisting that only around this center can modernity's spectacular, but perilous contributions find their proper and well-deserved stations.

#### 4. Science and Philosophy (non-identical twins)

The two terms "science" and "philosophy" were often used interchangeably in pre-modern, and even well into modern times. What was meant by either term was simply a methodically ordered body of knowledge, or the pursuit thereof. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that they programmatically parted ways as separate words for two separate sorts of human knowing. To be sure, some idioscopic investigation was ventured long before its rise to dominance in modernity. Medical science, in particular, has long since studied the meeting point of cenoscopy and idioscopy at their most intimate juncture: the human body. But the science that was practiced in ancient and medieval times—including medicine—as a rule still bore a philosophical openness to metaphysical questions. Exclusivist specialization is largely a quite recent development.

Astronomy with astrology, and chemistry with alchemy, for instance, tended to walk hand in hand. The overarching meaning of it all was never far from the mind of investigators of the cosmos, medical doctors or even mathematicians. However, after the ascendancy of what we have described as idioscopic science, it was principally reserved to the world of the humanities, philosophy, and religion to dare a "synoptic" view of reality; the new sciences became increasingly, and even obsessively focused on parts. Thus, the distinction I am insisting on in this essay attains its full relevance only in a modern context.

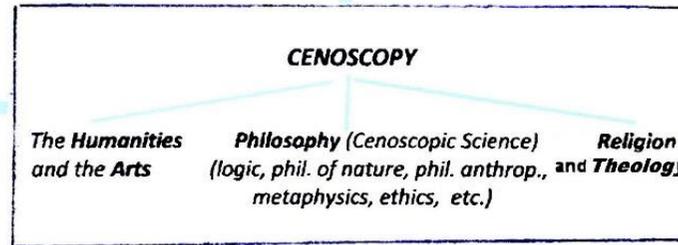
Dorion Sagan (son of Carl Sagan) has stated that the scientist tends to know more and more about less and less, and the philosopher less and less about more and more, with the result that the former may end up knowing everything about nothing, and the latter knowing nothing about everything. Though overstated for effect, the intuition is sound. I think, however, that the distinction highlighted in this essay could free us from Sagan's dark prophecy. I will try to illustrate this with a diagram:

## MACROCOSM

Idioscopic Science of the Very Big – above us and around us  
(geology, astronomy, astrophysics, Relativity Theory, etc.)

## BIOS

Idioscopic Science of  
the Very (Naturally) Complex –  
in and of the body, eons before us  
(evolutionary science)



## LOGOS

Idioscopic Science of  
the Very (Culturally) Complex -  
within and from the mind  
(social (cognitive, behav.) sciences)

Idioscopic Science of the Very Small – below us and within us  
(chemistry, cellular biology, nuclear physics, Quantum Theory, etc.)

## MICROCOSM

The above graphic offers, I hope, a plausible way of situating the cenoscopic and idioscopic dimensions of knowledge in their interrelations. As with any scheme, this one too will finally fall short of embracing important nuances, but it still may prove useful as an initial sketch of the implications of this important distinction. A more complete contemplation of the contrast might explore how to distinguish, for instance, between a cenoscopic geometry (the Euclidean) and an idioscopic (the non-Euclidean); between a cenoscopic logic (the Aristotelian) and the idioscopic (modern symbolic logics); between cenoscopic medicine (traditional, more holistic approaches) and idioscopic (highly specialized modern approaches), etc.

The box at the center is intended to show how cenoscopic knowledge, in its three domains, should be seen as normative and central (the arrows around the box simply point to the “beyondness” of the idioscopic—no further correlations with the contiguous area within the box is intended); that which lies beyond, beneath, before and within (the very big, the very small, and then the very complex, both biologically and culturally), presuppose the cenoscopic as point of departure, but also as ultimate context of cognitive resolution.

I add the following seven qualifications to address some issues the diagram cannot fully display.

1. The “Beyond” – As mentioned before, both idioscopic science and cenoscopic knowledge aim at going “beyond immediate experience,” but their reasons for doing so are quite different; thus, the transcendence reached is likewise different. The first typically pursues causes, conditions, and things hitherto unknown (and the word for this is “discovery”), whereas the latter endeavors to make us conscious of principles and contexts already known implicitly and tacitly, but often forgotten or grown dim by time and distraction. As stated above, philosophy’s ultimate purpose is to make us fully aware of what we already implicitly know (that is, to uncover presuppositions and principles already in use, but not yet drawn into the full light of consciousness). Its finality is to bring us to fully become what we already potentially are (that is, allow our nature to unfold as much of its potential as possible).
2. *Why transcend?* – What is the purpose of “getting beyond the appearances,” and, especially, “saving the appearances”? Idioscopic explanation often carries the unspoken assumption that “*despite* the way things look, this is how they *really* are.” Cenoscopic science, on

the contrary, affirms that the way things look actually makes sense, and that philosophy exists to help us to grasp why they look the way they do and indeed what that “look” finally means. The former understands its work as that of *saving* the appearances from the de-contextualizing reduction of its own analyses (for instance, to show that if you just order 30 trillion human cells in a certain way, you really get a human body). Cenoscopic explanation, however, will endeavor to *read* the appearances and bring their principles to the foreground, *in the context of those very appearances*. The underlying conviction is that what you see really is what you get.

3. *Overlaps between the cenoscopic and the idioscopic* – In the graph above, “nature” is idioscopically studied by the top, bottom, and left-hand sciences. But it is also studied, although with different methods, by cenoscopic philosophy; we call this the “philosophy of nature.” These two complementary versions of a given area of knowledge will appear in most domains of science. Aristotle’s *Physics* invites us to look deeply into material nature, but without sophisticated tools, mathematical hypotheses or contrived experiments. Still, we learn much about what motion *is*, rather than how to measure it; what time *is*, rather than how to clock it; we see the way form and matter actually cooperate in the constitution of a material body and even an organic body, but without the need to dissect it first, and so on. The idioscopic perspectives brought later by Galileo and Newton no more negate Aristotle’s insights than when, for example, you learn, idioscopically, that water is composed of two gases, and then observe, cenoscopically, that it is nonetheless a liquid and not a gas. The modern insight into water’s chemical composition will not keep you from lifting a glass of cool water to your lips for a drink.

“Culture” (again, in its broadest sense) is idioscopically studied by the right-hand sciences in the diagram. Among other things, one looks beneath the obvious world of our consciousness to what upholds it, guides it, but also what abuses and contorts it, within the intricacies of the unconscious mind; one looks behind the conflicting tendencies of our social instincts; into the uniting and yet mystifying constants in the morphologies, syntaxes and semantics of the thousands of human languages; into the underlying patterns and possible meanings of our cultures, their varieties, histories and conflicts; into the forbiddingly complex interrelations between mental experience and the most complex matter known to the universe, our brains, etc. But all this culture is also studied in its immediate, surface reality by cenoscopic science, when we turn to the philosophical disciplines of ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics and the philosophy of art and

technology. It is, in a word, “practical” philosophy (the world of praxis and poiesis), assisted and supplemented indeed by the social sciences, but in no way replaced or marginalized by them.

4. *Idioscopic collaborations?* – There are obvious interrelations between the four outlying domains: not only the aforementioned attempts to bring the very big and the very small into a single explanatory pattern, but also the persistent essays of evolutionary science at giving a comprehensive account of human culture. Neither of these proposed marriages are anywhere close to consummation, but we would do well to pay attention to their courtships. More promising, and already much more in evidence, are the relations between the exceedingly small and evolutionary science, on the one hand, and the emergence of the idea of cosmic evolution in the very big. These conceptual links exist, but again, they hardly justify underplaying the distinctions that still hold between the interlinked domains, which stand in a far more imposing profile.
5. *Idioscopic usurpations?* – Since idioscopic science is often practiced by specialists with little or no familiarity with traditional philosophy, and perhaps a reluctance to attribute epistemic value to the humanities and the fine arts—and even more reluctance regarding religion—the vast cenoscopic realms of human experience often find themselves under “idioscopic assault.” Since we all live in the world of our five senses, no one can realistically ignore the immediacy and obviousness of the cenoscopic and its time-honored claim on our attention. But the methods of modern science have often looked askance at these common-sense coordinates of the everyday world. Some scientists begin to have an imperialist and colonizing look in their eyes.

Any researcher intent on explaining as much as he possibly can with his new tools and perspectives may be tempted to move in, triumphantly, on parts of the cenoscopic world and occupy it. He may long to be the first to hoist the flag of idioscopy over one more conquered landscape of outdated cenoscopy. He may hope one day to declare its entire surface content to be, in truth, *only* what idioscopic analysis says it is. Earlier in the essay I referred at length to this tendency, so will only point out a few of these epistemological usurpations already with us today: logic, for instance, and sometimes even metaphysics, are sometimes usurped by highly sophisticated forms of mathematics (although, curiously, in the past, it was mathematics that was under assault from logic); philosophical psychology (or anthropology) by the cognitive sciences; philosophy of

nature by modern physical science as a whole; ethics by behavioral psychology or psychoanalysis; and those are just a few cases.

For such reductionists, it is either idioscopic science or no science at all. This is why thinkers like Deely hold it imperative that philosophers today defend and highlight philosophy's autonomy in the cenoscopic domain.<sup>9</sup> I would only add that this is best realized when accompanied by analogous defenses of the arts and humanities, on the one hand, and religion and theology, on the other.

6. *Inverse hermeneutics* – Although we can clearly learn significant truths about the cenoscopic world through idioscopic perspectives, I suggest that even greater truths *about the idioscopic* could actually be mediated by the cenoscopic. Bravely facing all the gigantic telescopes and cyclotrons of the contemporary specialist, the cenoscopic thinker may appear overly bold in suggesting that *he* possesses even more far-reaching methods of interpretation than the great titans of idioscopic science. But in the face of such frequent debacles in attempts at so-called “unified science,” it could even be the case that only the lights of cenoscopy provide frameworks within which the idioscopic can become not only intelligible, but also meaningful—even worth singing about. It was David who wrote the psalms, after all, and not Goliath.

The extrapolations performed by modern science can then be embraced, but not without semantically subordinating them to the more relevant perspective of cenoscopy. It may be that this alone can make the cognitive chasms we mentioned before finally bridgeable. For those well-tempered in the humanities and the arts, trained in thinking straight with the help of classical philosophy, and with steadied hearts through proven spirituality, the cenoscopic world will seem more like a painting than a pattern, more like a musical score than a mathematical scribble, more like a strangely significant scenario than a haphazardly produced pastiche, more like an ordered cosmos pregnant with hidden meanings than a whirlpool of teasing but deceptive mimicries. When looking upon a painting of Rembrandt, or watching a play of Shakespeare, or listening to a Haydn string quartet, it will not be without interest to know how the canvas was made and where the pigments were first mixed; how the stage

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<sup>9</sup> A good introduction to Deely's approach to philosophy can be found in 2009: *Realism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A John Deely Reader*, ed. Paul Cobley.

was mounted and the potential actors auditioned; what kind of wood and what kind of gut went into the making of the violins.

All this will bring interesting information to bear upon the beauty and drama of your experience of the art. But here comes the insight that may help us to truly situate the real value of the idioscopic disciplines when face-to-face with the traditional ones. We instinctively subordinate the canvas, the pigments, the stage floor, the interviews, the wood and gut of the instruments, and all these hidden processes to the work of art itself. Who would do otherwise?

And lest the world of art be deemed too arbitrary to serve as an adequate metaphor for the sweeping principle I am invoking, let us consider instead a human body. We may regard a given beautiful woman to be lovely as nature made her; but as we gaze upon her, we may be excused for lack of interest in knowing her exact weight, her cholesterol levels, the precise length of her alimentary canal, the number of molecules in her body, and exactly how many millimeters lie between her two nostrils. All such idioscopic cognition only points to what we already see—and see quite well—cenoscopically. More to the point, it distracts from it.

Those idioscopic factors only make sense in semantic subordination to the one context that really counts: the cenoscopic. It may sound bizarre to modern ears so accustomed to hearing how small and insignificant we are in the world of galaxies, or what a bizarre mixture we are in the world of protons, or how adventitious is our frame and touch-and-go our beauty over the eons of evolution. But maybe it is the modern ears that are bizarre, and not the idea. This leads me to my seventh and final point.

7. *How real is the cosmos anyway?* – Cenoscopy will hardly be favorable to idealistic, acosmic or solipsistic worldviews. But still, the philosopher will want to distinguish things that have more being, more substantiality, from those that have less. The Colombian philosopher Nicolás Dávila, in one of the thousands of his celebrated *scholia* (short sayings), wrote: “The universe is important if it is appearance; insignificant if it is reality.” This seemingly overblown Platonic point actually grows in wisdom the more you ponder it. It may in the end apply to all of created reality, whether cenoscopically or idioscopically viewed. But I think it applies in a particularly revealing way to the latter.

How *real* is our modern picture of the cosmos, after all? How *real* is that thing we imagine an atom to be? As for the vast idioscopic cosmos astronomy unveils, and then the bizarre, trembling worlds of the atomic and subatomic dimensions nuclear physics lays before us—what do we really have here? When the specialists tell us, without blinking an eye, that the (idioscopic) cosmos is predominantly empty space, and that the so “foundational” atoms hardly fare better, instead of just dropping our jaws and giving another salute to the scientists and their wonders, we might stop and actually think about what is being said.

We might begin by protesting that *our* world (the cenoscopic one) is quite *full* of things indeed: the stars *as they appear*; the earth *as we tread upon it*; the animals *as they fly, crawl and swim*; and we humans as we show off million-fold the fruits of our intellects and free wills (both the nice ones and, sadly, also the not-so-nice ones!). And these are things we know and know every day; and although they are full of mysteries and enigmas, the mysteriousness itself is, so to speak, quite palpable.

As for the atoms and the interstellar wonders, the evolutionary narratives and even the sociological and psychological explanations of why we humans do what we do, things are a bit less straightforward. Despite the advances, conjecture is often more in evidence than apodictic conclusion. And especially as concerns our beloved physical cosmos, we have to politely ask: how *knowable* (i.e., how full of cognizable *entity*) are these things (black holes and quarks, for instance), anyway?

If it is only in knowing *such* things that we achieve a genuine grasp of reality, we seem to be in a rather regrettable situation. Add to this the current scientific claim—the bombshell nature of which still does not seem to have been grasped—that we have yet to get firm cognitive hold on some 95% of material reality (so-called dark matter and energy), the question gets even more disturbing. It is not inconceivable to imagine idioscopic science one day running away from its instruments and seeking refuge in cenoscopic philosophy, if only in order to again feel the solidity of the reality it reveals, and the overwhelming meaning, value, and purpose with which it vibrates.

At the very least we have to admit that we can only ask these questions from a cenoscopic point of view. This does not rob the idioscopic of its value, but it does challenge its hegemony. I hope nothing I have written here suggests that I am anything less than an

enthusiastic fan of the best of modern science and technology. But I wish more specialists would join me in the celebration of cenoscopic normativity.

It may be the only way to resist the temptation of putting an exaggerated zoom on subordinate and second-order realities. Instead, we should follow our ancestors in confronting the world with a certain filial trust. Before we reach for the microscopes or telescopes—or place unquestioning faith in the latest *eurekas* from the world of science—let us stop for a moment and take a childlike look at what lies before us. However we got here to begin with, whatever hidden building blocks lie within us, and however extensive the stretch of inter-galactic space might finally prove to be, an incredibly significant world is showing its wonders to us at this very moment, right before our eyes.

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