

INTRODUCTION: A REFERENCE WORK FOR HOPELESS AND HOPEFUL ROMANTICS

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For those who are interested in the development of religion in modern times, few things are as relevant as the romantic endeavor to make art, and poetry especially, a substitute for belief. You might want to discard it as a quixotic fantasy to lyrically counteract the substantial disenchantment produced by the capitalist and utilitarian breakdown and gradual dissolution of everything that goes beyond the individuals, their interests, desires, ideas, commitments, intuitions, boundaries, and standards, but the story goes much deeper and broader.

One of the greatest interpreters of the spiritual sources and philosophical roots of the romantic revolt against the rationalistic excesses of the Enlightenment is the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. At the remarkable age of 93, he produced what Adam Gopnik (2024) has described as “perhaps the most ambitious work ever written by a major thinker at such an advanced age” in a prompt review published on the “New Yorker”.

Cosmic Connections is an outstanding book, and not only because of its author’s age. It is extraordinary, first and foremost, for the intellectual joy it conveys. Taylor clearly loves the poets he has chosen as his conversation partners in the nearly 600 pages of his text. And he loves them because he believes that, with their poems, they have come close to formulating universal truths about the human condition that are at least as difficult to grasp as the realities that have stirred the greatest expressions of religious sentiment. He even devised a new name for the place where to look for them: “interspace” — the force field of

metabiological significances where mind and world, buffered self and disenchanted nature, can reconnect even after the epistemic triumph of the scientific revolution.

The post-Romantic spiritual predicament still concerns us, even if its actual impact on modern individuals' lives is difficult to measure and is interpreted in antithetical ways by scholars who agree on almost nothing, either on the definition of Romanticism or on the worth of its artistic and cultural legacy. This is one more reason for taking full advantage of the opportunity offered by Taylor's longevity and intellectual standing. In this symposium, which contains two critical reviews and a short interview with the author, his book is discussed at length and in-depth. That is, both its scope and its ethical/spiritual sources are considered, as well as are Taylor's balanced struggle against disenchantment and his urge for "beating the bounds" of human symbolic capacity.

"Romantic" is a word that is employed for different phenomena with sometimes opposing intentions. Notoriously, romanticism is both hopeless and hopeful. At its core, however, it harbors something noble. It indicates a human longing for the absolute, for what exceeds ordinary expectations, which, while it may look like pathetic bovarism when measured by the criteria of earthly success, remains an expression of the baffling and awe-inspiring nature of human beings. And, at any rate, is there a better term to pinpoint the commitment to the life of the mind personified by Charles Taylor in almost a century of thinking and study?

Bibliographic references

- GOPNIK A. (2024) *How the Philosopher Charles Taylor Would Heal the Ills of Modernity*, "New Yorker" June 17: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/06/24/cosmic-connections-charles-taylor-book-review>.