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CHARLES TAYLOR WINS $1.8M TEMPLETON PRIZE

Revered Montreal philosopher filled with 'joy and humility'

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OTTAWA CITIZEN

ON LIFE SUPPORT

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DOUBLE SHOT

Barstow's Osvaldo Levy wins top interuniversity basketball award — again:

Ottawa Citizen, published in Ottawa, Canada
Revered Montreal philosopher filled with ‘joy and humility’

BY JENNIFER GREEN
in Ottawa
AND STEVEN EDWARDS
in New York

Charles Taylor, one of the world’s most renowned philosophers, has become the first Canadian to win the Templeton Prize, the most lucrative academic honour in the world with a cash value of more than $1.8 million Cdn.

The annual prize was created by American philanthropist John Templeton in 1972 to recognize research in the field of spirituality — especially as it intersects with science and modern society.

He made it more lucrative than the Nobel prizes to underline his conviction that matters of faith are the most important to mankind.

At a reception in New York to announce the 2007 prize-winner yesterday, Mr. Taylor spoke of the “great affinity” he has for the goals of the Templeton Foundation, and said the bilingual environment in which he grew up in Montreal — his mother’s native tongue was French, his father’s English — gave him his investigative spirit.

“It was my life in Quebec — in a family that was ... between two solitudes — where all the great questions were asked,” he explained in French. “And it’s that which fed and gave me a sense from a very young age of the importance of these questions,” he said, switching to English halfway through his sentence, in typical Montreal style.

Mr. Taylor was born in 1932, and went on to a career studied with awards: Rhodes scholar, companion of the Order of Canada, l’Ordre national du Québec, the Molson Prize and the Prix léon-Guérin, as well as professorships all over the world.

See TAYLOR on PAGE A14

Charles Taylor accepted the Templeton Prize yesterday, attributing his investigative spirit into Canadian nationality to his upbringing in a family of “two solitudes” — a mother whose native language was French and a father who was English.
Taylor: Espoused philosophy that was grounded in reality

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A practising Roman Catholic, Mr. Taylor has long argued that human intolerance and violence can only be understood if examined from secular and spiritual perspectives.

Mr. Taylor has had the unique ability to descend from the ivory tower to the hurly-burly of the public square. During the 1960s, he ran as an NDP candidate in four federal elections, all unsuccessfully. His most notable campaign was in 1965 against Pierre Trudeau.

He delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures in 1998, at which he spoke on “Living in the Secular Age,” the basis for his three-volume magnum opus, whose final edition (A Secular Age) will be published this fall by Harvard University Press.

David Martin, a noted British sociologist who nominated Mr. Taylor for the prize, said Mr. Taylor’s latest work “provides a magisterial overview of the relations between religion, secular humanism and science such as no-one else has attempted, or perhaps could attempt.”

What (Mr. Taylor) has to say gives contemporary thinkers ... a compass and a star to steer by. Crucially, his body of work provides the richest vein of resources for anyone who seek today to defend or promote religious and spiritual understanding.”

In a recent interview, Mr. Taylor said he is honoured to receive an award that bridges damaging divisions between science and faith.

“It’s a great endorsement of all the things I’ve been doing, and I didn’t really expect it,” he said, noting recent winners have largely come from the natural sciences as opposed to the social sciences and humanities. “I’m hoping that some of the issues I’ve been talking about will get more saliency because the Templeton Prize has been awarded to someone who has dealt with them.”

He said he will use the prize money to advance his studies of the relationship of language and linguistic meaning to art and theology, and to develop new concepts of relating human sciences with biological sciences.

Mr. Taylor has long argued that academia and spirituality are far from incompatible.

“We have somehow to break down the barriers between our contemporary culture of science and disciplined academic study on one hand, and the domain of spirit, on the other,” Mr. Taylor said yesterday.

“This has been one of the driving goals of my own intellectual work, and to have it recognized as such fills me with an unstable mixture of joy and humility.”

He went on to say that “the deafness of many philosophers, social scientists and historians to the spiritual dimension can be remarkable,” with disastrous results for society.

The human thirst for violence is one of society’s most pressing problems, he said, adding that nobody can properly examine the issue as long as secularists and believers complacently assure themselves they could not possibly be part of the problem.

“We will pay a high price if we allow this kind of muddled thinking to prevail.”

“We have somehow to break down the barriers between our contemporary culture of science and disciplined academic study on one hand, and the domain of spirit, on the other.”

CHARLES TAYLOR

Because Mr. Taylor is revered for his thoughts, journalists and academics attending the reception used the question segment to focus on his philosophical analysis of the world’s current trends — a central topic being the supposedly pending “clash of civilizations.”

“(The West) and Islam are the two candidates that are often selected for this idea of a clash of civilizations,” he said, adding as a warning: “The tragedy is that if we buy into that narrative, we could make it true as each (side) begins to treat the other as a monolith which is hostile to (the other, and which has the worst possible motivations ... Therefore, we have to mobilize.”

What’s necessary in the western world to avoid this outcome, he advised, is for people to “fight back against a creeping Islamophobia,” which he said was “growing in our societies.”

He added there was a need in the Western and Islamic worlds for each to learn more about the other, and about the diversity of each other’s respective civilization.

Recently, Quebec premier Jean Charest asked Mr. Taylor and another academic to chair a public commission into “reasonable accommodation” of immigrants after the small town of Herouxville forbade women to cover their heads and men to carry ceremonial knives for religious purposes.

David McCabe, a philosophy professor at a liberal arts college, who once reviewed Mr. Taylor’s work, wrote that many people assume philosophy and daily life have virtually nothing to do with one another.

“What this assumption ignores, however, is that our understanding of the so-called everyday world is, in large part, the result of our internalizing, in ways most of us are unaware of, ideas and attitudes that are the subject of enduring philosophical debate.”

“The task of elucidating this interplay between philosophical theory and everyday practice thus takes on signal importance, and there may be no philosopher alive who does it better than Charles Taylor.”

WITH FILES FROM CHRIS LACKNER
Charles Taylor ran four times in Quebec elections for the NDP. In 1965, he lost a famous battle with future prime minister Pierre Trudeau.

WRITINGS ON AND BY CHARLES TAYLOR

Books and articles cited or consulted for this essay include:


Charles Taylor's many books and essays, some of which have been quoted in this essay, include:

The Explanation of Behaviour, 1967.

Hegel, 1975.


The gentle giant of philosophy

At age 75, Charles Taylor has a lifetime of accomplishment behind him. But the great Canadian philosopher, about to release another book and co-chair a provincial commission into his home province's spiritual life, has no intention of slowing down.

"I was appointed to another direction in 1967... that seemed to me the beginning of a new phase in my work," he said.

"I have been thinking about the role of philosophy in public life," he said.

"The question is how can philosophy be relevant to public life in the 21st century?"

"We are living in a world of unprecedented complexity and uncertainty," he said.

"As a social scientist I have been thinking about the role of the humanities in public life," he said.

"The humanities are about understanding the human condition," he said.

"As a philosopher I have been thinking about the role of philosophy in public life," he said.

"The question is how can philosophy be relevant to public life in the 21st century?"

"We are living in a world of unprecedented complexity and uncertainty," he said.
True patriot love

One subject that has always inspired the thinking of Templeton Prize winner Charles Taylor is the future of Canada and Quebec’s place in the country.

BY ROYAL SIBLEY

The theme of "true patriot love" that ran like a bright red thread through the tapestry of Canadian microsympathy and political philosophy. Numerous thinkers, from John Dewey to Donald Macmillan, have pointed to the idea of "true patriot love" as a unifying force in the country's multicultural society.

Canadian history demonstrates, as one scholar says, "a quest for a national identity in the face of various geographic and cultural influences, as well as of imperial power and the shifting realities of cultural diversity." This is a problem that is not exclusive to Canada, as it is a problem that has plagued many countries in the past.

The question of English-French tensions — two nations vying for dominance in the bilingual country — is a serious concern for many Canadians. The question of the status of Quebec, seen as a distinct society with its own culture and language, is a source of tension.

"We have never really been able to come to terms with the fact that we are a bilingual country and that we have a distinct culture," says philosopher Leacock. "It's something that we have to work on constantly and improve our understanding of." Indeed, Canada's existence serves as a demonstration of "multicultural pluralism," to borrow the phrase.

"The idea is to create a space where different cultures can coexist and flourish," says philosophy professor Charles Taylor. "It's not an easy task, but it's a necessary one."

The Canadian state, Charles Taylor argues, should be constitutionally structured to accommodate multiple cultures within a single political order.

In this regard, Taylor's thought offers an attempt to recast the concept of "belonging" or community, within modern liberal philosophy. He argues that "true patriot love" is not a matter of mere sentiment but a deeper engagement with the idea of freedom and the community as a whole.

"Our identity is partly shaped by our recognition of others, often by the recognition of others as persons or groups of people who can enter into positive relations with us," he writes. "This is a concept of recognition that is simple in nature and respect, but it is a complex human one."
The Templeton Prize

The Queen signs the constitutional proclamation in Ottawa on April 27, 1992. Far from uniting Canadians, the Constitution has sparked equilibria and spawned discord.

sprightful example of the politics of recognition is Charles Taylor’s concern. Our constitutional quagmires demonstrate a fundamental conflict between the principles of the universal Enlightenment (as promoted by English-speaking Canada and Romantic expressionism) and those of the separatists of francophone Quebecs.

Mr. Taylor seeks to ameliorate this conflict by promoting a politics of “deep diversity” that accepts a plurality of ways of belonging, and that does not require individuals or groups to pass through some other more dominant community. The Canadian state, he argues, should be constitutionally structured to accommodate multiple cultures within a single political order.

Mr. Taylor distinguishes this idea from the “first-order diversity” of traditional liberal societies in which the diversity of cultural groups is acknowledged but all are treated equally by the state — “the politics of equal dignity” as he calls it.

Mr. Taylor argues that such comprehensive equality cannot produce genuine recognition because it does not meaningfully provide equal dignity to different cultures. In particular, francophone Quebecers (along with aboriginals) are under pressure from English-speaking Canada to adopt forms of governance that conflict with their culture. But both francophones and aboriginals fear that the kind of procedural or rationalist civil rights used by English-speaking Canada will have homogenizing consequences and undermine the culture that gives meaning and identity to their lives.

Hence, Mr. Taylor concludes that proposing a basket procedural liberalism on Quebecers constitutes a form of oppression. “The claim is that the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles of equal dignity is in fact a reflection of one hegemonic culture. As it turns out, then, only the minority or suppressed cultures are being forced to take alien form. Consequently, the supposedly far and difference-blind society is not only inhuman (because suppressing identified but also, in a subtle and unconscious way, itself highly discriminatory).”

To end this “oppression” requires the rest of Canada to acknowledge that maintains their francophone culture need not turn to traditional liberal principles such as freedom of speech, association and religion. Mr. Taylor argues.

There is room to allow collective rights such as language protection to take precedence over other rights when legitimate collective aspirations require it. English-speaking Canada fails to understand that the recognition of the equal rights of individuals provided by strict adherence to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms could undermine Quebec’s cultural identity and lead to the disappearance of the French culture in North America. And, of course, is something francophones cannot accept, which is why Quebec has been unwilling to sign on to the Canadian Constitution.

Mr. Taylor’s notion of recognition has been controversial. Traditional liberal recognition recognizes that individuals possess an inherent dignity irrespective of differences of class, race, religion or sex. Mr. Taylor wants to extend the principle of recognition to include what is due to persons as a member of a particular ethnic, racial or sexual group.

Critics, however, say Mr. Taylor’s culture-based liberalism could, if taken to extreme, produce antiliberal communism. If a national culture is the deepest level of diversity, then, presumably, almost any political action could be justified to preserve it, including the oppression of individuals or groups believed to pose a threat to that “national” culture.

Does the privileging of francophone rights in Quebec open the door for the suppression of other cultures within Quebec? If Canadians value multiculturalism, why would they value cultures that do not value multiculturalism and may not even be interested in multicultural policies to protect them against being seen as multicultural?

Mr. Taylor acknowledges the potential dangers of taking the “politics of recognition” in the wrong direction. “I recognize the principle commitment of the independence movement in Quebec is to building an open, tolerant, pluralistic society, with place for minority cultures. But I sense in the dynamic of the independence movement itself, in the passions it feels required to mobilize, the harbinger of a rather narrower and more exclusivist society.”

“Separation would not only mean the failure of the Canadian experiment in deep diversity but also the birth of two new states in some ways even less amenable to diversity than our present condition.”

Nonetheless, Mr. Taylor argues that without pluralistic recognition Canada is even more likely to break apart. “Deep diversity is the only formula on which a united Canada can be reborn;” Canadians must reconcile the liberal tradition of individual rights with the communistic emphasis on collective rights.

Clearly, this ideal of reconciliation is the hallmark of Mr. Taylor’s philosophical enterprise, whether applied to his political theory or his critique of science. This idea, however, raises the question of where to place Mr. Taylor philosophically speaking.

The ancient Greek poet Archilochus once said there are two types of thinkers, foxes and hedgehogs. “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

Scholarly tradition, borrow from Isaiah Berlin, interprets Archilochus to mean that some thinkers discover a single, universal organizing principle that provides an all-encompassing vision of reality, while others understand the world in a more multifaceted manner that precludes finding the diversity of experience into an all-embracing worldview.

Where does Mr. Taylor fit? The gamut of his concerns suggests a fox-like thinker. Yet the overriding theme of his thinking, the quest for reconciliation, implies a hedgehog mind.

Perhaps the fact that he’s won the Templeton Prize, which honours those who regard spiritual reality to be as important as the material reality investigated by science, suggests that Mr. Taylor himself is uncertain, still trying to bring the parts into a unified whole, still contemplating a search for meaning. If so, well, that makes him endearingly Canadian.

Robert Stern is a senior writer for the Citizen. His books include A Nation of Citizens, a history of Canadian political philosophy, including Charles Taylor, to be published by McGill-Queen’s University Press.

'Separation,' says Charles Taylor, 'would not only mean the failure of the Canadian experiment in deep diversity, but also the birth of two new states in some ways even less amenable to diversity than our present condition.'

Separatists demonstrate in Montreal in May 1984.
A good investment

Sir John Templeton earned his billions in the material world, but the spiritual realm has long been his passion.

BY CHARLES ERMAN

Jesus is alleged to have said that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

That might be bad news for billionaire philanthropist Sir John Templeton. And Sir John himself once told a reporter: "There's a lot of truth in that. When people trust in something other than God, it's difficult to be truly spiritual."

"Don't fall in love with money." With this advice in mind, let's consider the prospects of Sir John's prospects, we can agree that this billionnaire has attempted to use his money in ways that will serve his purpose of earning the human heart on the next screen.

And the deky's radar screen, and related matters, is surely a major interest of Sir John.

As far back as 1971, he established the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which was intended to honour people who advanced knowledge of spiritual realities. If this seemed to bring science, so

For Sir John Templeton, spiritual realities were every bit as important as those areas that science more conventionally investigates.

long cast as a natural antagonist of religion, into a new posture of examining religion without preconceptions or bias, Sir John was all for this new posture.

"If even a sixth of world research funds were focused on the spiritual realm, I don't see why we couldn't vastly increase our knowledge of those realities - perhaps learning, in a few years, ten times more than we know today," he said.

And he pointed to the vast increases in knowledge of medicine, physics, cosmology and other areas that the frontal assault of scientific investigation has achieved in the past two or three centuries.

There was no reason, he believed, that similar progress could not be made in areas of spiritual investigation, given equivalent support.

For Sir John, spiritual realities were every bit as important as those areas that science more conventionally investigates, and so he established a monetary award higher even than those that Nobel laureates receive.

This year, the award will be 800,000, or more than 8.8 million, the largest monetary prize of any kind given to an individual.

In 2003, the award was renamed the Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities.

Many famous people have won the Templeton Prize. The first winner, in 1972, was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In 1973, evangelist Billy Graham was chosen. The next year's prize went to dissident Soviet novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

A surprising winner from 1993 was Charles Colson, convicted Watergate felon, who founded the Prison Fellowship, an organization that seeks to use the teachings of Christ to help the rehabilitation of prisoners.

Sir John Templeton would open every meeting of company directors with a prayer. But his religious commitments did not stop at the office door: for 42 years, he was a board trustee of Princeton Theological Seminary. The latest seminar of the Presbyterian Church, and served as its chairman for...