THE TEMPLETON PRIZE:
SCIENTISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS PRIZE WINNERS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper it is shown how the late Sir John Templeton established the world's largest annual award given to an individual, the Templeton Prize, which honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension. Its monetary value, currently £1,000,000 sterling, always exceeds that of the Nobel Prizes, which was Templeton's way of underscoring his belief that advances in the spiritual domain are no less important than those in other areas of human endeavor. Also, it is given a list of scientists and philosophers prize winners who have devoted their talents to expanding our vision of human purpose and ultimate reality, with a short review of each one’s main contributions.

SIR JOHN TEMPLETON, 1912 - 2008

As a pioneer in both financial investment and philanthropy, the late Sir John Templeton spent a lifetime encouraging open-mindedness. If he had not sought new paths, he once said, "I would have been unable to attain so many goals." The motto that Sir John created for his Foundation, "How little we know, how eager to learn," exemplified his philosophy both in the financial markets and in his groundbreaking methods of philanthropy.

John Marks Templeton was born on November 29, 1912, in the small town of Winchester, Tennessee. He followed in his brother's footsteps and attended Yale University, supporting himself during the Depression
and graduating in 1934 near the top of his class and as President of Phi Beta Kappa. He was named a Rhodes Scholar to Balliol College at Oxford, from which he graduated with a degree in law in 1936.

Templeton started his Wall Street career in 1938 and went on to create some of the world's largest and most successful international investment funds. He took the strategy of "buy low, sell high" to an extreme, picking nations, industries, and companies hitting rock-bottom, what he called "points of maximum pessimism." When war began in Europe in 1939, he borrowed money to buy 100 shares each in 104 companies selling at one dollar per share or less, including 34 companies that were in bankruptcy. Only four turned out to be worthless, and he turned large profits on the others.

Templeton entered the mutual fund industry in 1954, when he established the Templeton Growth Fund. With dividends reinvested, each $10,000 invested in the Templeton Growth Fund Class A at its inception would have grown to $2 million by 1992, when he sold the family of Templeton Funds to the Franklin Group. In 1999, *Money* magazine called him "arguably the greatest global stock picker of the century."

But John Templeton's interests were never confined to the merely financial. An unfailing optimist, a believer in progress, and a relentless questioner and contrarian, he devoted the second half of his long life to promoting the discovery of what he called "new spiritual information." To his mind, this term encompassed progress in understanding not only matters usually considered religious but also the deepest realities of human nature and the physical world—that is, subjects best investigated by using the tools of modern science. Templeton was convinced that our knowledge of the universe was still very limited. His great hope was to encourage all of humanity to be more open-minded about the possible character of ultimate reality and the divine.

In 1972, he established the world's largest annual award given to an individual, the Templeton Prize, which honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension. Its monetary value, currently £1,000,000 sterling, always exceeds that of the Nobel Prizes, which was Templeton's way of underscoring his belief that advances in the spiritual domain are no less important than those in other areas of human endeavor. Templeton also contributed a sizable amount of his assets to the John Templeton Foundation, which he established in 1987. That same year, he was created a Knight Bachelor by Queen Elizabeth II for his many philanthropic accomplishments. (In the late 1960's, he had moved to Nassau, the Bahamas, where he became a naturalized British citizen.)

Although Sir John was a Presbyterian elder and active in his denomination (also serving on the board of the American Bible Society), he espoused what he called a "humble approach" to theology. Declaring that relatively little is known about the divine through scripture and present-day theology, he predicted that "scientific revelations may be a gold mine for revitalizing religion in the 21st century." To his mind, "All of nature reveals something of the creator. And god is revealing himself more and more to human inquiry, not always through prophetic visions or scriptures but through the astonishingly productive research of modern scientists."

Sir John's own theological views conformed to no orthodoxy, and he was eager to learn not just from science but from all of the world's faith traditions. As he once told an interviewer, "I grew up as a Presbyterian. Presbyterians thought the Methodists were wrong. Catholics thought all Protestants were wrong. The Jews thought the Christians were wrong. So, what I'm financing is humility. I want people to
realize that you shouldn't think you know it all." He expected the John Templeton Foundation to stand apart from any consideration of dogma or personal religious belief and to seek out grantees who are "innovative, creative, enthusiastic, and open to competition and new ideas" in their approach to the Big Questions (Does moral action depend on reasoning? Does evolution explain human nature? Does the free market corrode moral character? Does science make belief in God obsolete? Will Money Solve Africa's Development Problems? Does the Universe Have a Purpose?).

Sir John's progressive ideas on finance, spirituality, and science made him a distinctive voice in all these fields, but he never worried about being an iconoclast. "Rarely does a conservative become a hero of history," he observed in his 1981 book, *The Humble Approach*, one of more than a dozen books he wrote or edited.

Sir John's death in 2008, at age 95, was noted around the world, with tributes that acknowledged the extraordinary breadth of his career and his vision. In an obituary titled "Maximum Optimist," the *Wall Street Journal* wrote:

As an investor, he always had confidence his picks would improve over the long term. Appropriately, the same "enthusiasm for progress," as he put it, also made him one of the world's great philanthropists. Life's spiritual dimensions were his abiding inspiration.

The *Economist* observed that:

Sir John revered thrift and had a horror of debt. His parents had taught him that in small-town Tennessee, instilling it so well that in his white-columned house in the Bahamas, overlooking the golf course, he still cut up computer paper to make notebooks. But he made an exception for love, which needed spending. You could give away too much land and too much money, said Sir John, but never enough love, and the real return was immediate: more love.

Sir John's passing was also marked by *Nature*, the world's leading scientific journal:

Templeton was a deeply spiritual, although unorthodox, individual. He lived a life firmly rooted in the Christian traditions of modesty and charity. Yet he was also a great admirer of science, the undogmatic practice of which he believed led to intellectual humility. His love of science and his God led him to form his foundation in 1987 on the basis that mutual dialogue might enrich the understanding of both.

**THE TEMPLETON PRIZE**

**PURPOSE**

The Templeton Prize honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. Established in 1972 by
the late Sir John Templeton, the Prize aims, in his words, to identify “entrepreneurs of the spirit”—outstanding individuals who have devoted their talents to expanding our vision of human purpose and ultimate reality. The Prize celebrates no particular faith tradition or notion of God, but rather the quest for progress in humanity’s efforts to comprehend the many and diverse manifestations of the Divine.

Men and women of any creed, profession, or national origin may be nominated for the Templeton Prize. The distinguished roster of previous winners includes representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Prize has been awarded to scientists, philosophers, theologians, members of the clergy, philanthropists, writers, and reformers, for work that has ranged from the creation of new religious orders and social movements to humanistic scholarship to research about the origins of the universe.

What these remarkable people have shared is a commitment to exploring one or more of the Big Questions at the core of the John Templeton Foundation’s mandate. All have been seekers of wisdom, humbled by the complexity of the human condition but determined to chart a path forward with their ideas and deeds. Some Templeton Prize laureates have demonstrated the transformative power of virtues like love, forgiveness, gratitude, and creativity. Others have provided new insights into scientific or philosophical problems relating to infinity, ultimate reality, and purpose in the cosmos. Still others have used the analytical tools of the humanities to provide new perspectives on the spiritual dilemmas of modern life. The Prize seeks and encourages breadth of vision, recognizing that human beings take their spiritual bearings from a range of experiences.

**CRITERIA OF MERIT**

The qualities sought in a Templeton Prize nominee include creativity and innovation, rigor and impact. The judges seek, above all, a substantial record of achievement that highlights or exemplifies one of the various ways in which human beings express their yearning for spiritual progress. Consideration is given to a nominee’s work as a whole, not just during the year prior to selection. Nominations are especially encouraged in the fields of:

1. Research in the human sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences.

2. Scholarship in philosophy, theology, and other areas of the humanities.

3. Practice, including religious
leadership, the creation of organizations that edify and inspire, and the development of new schools of thought.

4. Commentary and journalism on matters of religion, virtue, character formation, and the flourishing of the human spirit.

These fields do not exhaust the areas in which achievement might qualify for the Templeton Prize, nor is it necessary for a nominee's work to be confined to just one field.

**THE PHILANTHROPIC VISION OF SIR JOHN TEMPLETON**

Sir John Templeton wrote extensively on spirituality and the role that scientific research could play in expanding the spiritual horizons of humankind. The most comprehensive single account of his views is the volume titled *Possibilities for Over One Hundredfold More Spiritual Information: The Humble Approach in Theology and Science* (2000). Here he set forth his beliefs, his vision of the future, and his intentions for the John Templeton Foundation.

In a subsequent and complementary collection of essays, *Wisdom from World Religions: Pathways toward Heaven on Earth* (2002), Sir John expanded on his spiritual and theological beliefs. In this volume, he stressed the universality of the search for spiritual insight and underscored the historic contributions to human wisdom provided by the world's various religions and cultures.

In both of these works, Sir John frequently posed rhetorical questions designed to call attention to new possibilities for spiritual awareness and growth that previously may have been rejected, ignored, or overlooked. In the realms of both science and spirituality, he emphasized, we presently have far more questions than answers.

In an earlier book, *Worldwide Laws of Life: 200 Eternal Spiritual Principles* (1997), Sir John set out a number of what he saw as universal laws regarding the capacity of human beings to shape their own lives and minds in such a way as to promote personal happiness, social benefit, and spiritual progress. He firmly believed that the greatest truths might someday be available to us if we asked the Big Questions of life and existence with an attitude of humility, gratitude, and
open-mindedness. As the motto he devised for his Foundation declares, "How little we know, how eager to learn."

**An Era of Unprecedented Progress**

Sir John was a visionary optimist. He believed that we are fortunate to live in an age with momentous opportunities for the future, brought to us by past achievements in commerce, technology, learning, and research:

Should we be overwhelmingly grateful to have been born in the 20th century? Is the slow progress of prehistoric ages now speeding up? It seems that centuries of human enterprise are now miraculously bursting into flower. Is the development of human knowledge accelerating? Is the present generation reaping the fruits of generations of scientific thought? [*Possibilities*, p. 51]

The answer to each of these questions was a resounding "yes":

More than half of the scientists who ever lived are alive today. More than half of the discoveries in the natural sciences have been made from 1900 to 1999. More than half of the goods produced since the earth was born have been produced in the 20th century. Over half of the books ever written were written from 1949 to 1999. More new books are published each month than were written in the entire historical period before the birth of Columbus. [*Possibilities*, p. 51]

Struck by the unprecedented speed of human progress today, Sir John asked whether we might not be a part of the creator's much grander purposes:

It is a novel concept, but maybe one of the purposes of god is progress. This may touch upon a deep mystery: the purpose of freedom and the openness of creativity in the cosmos. If the cosmos and our own minds have this capacity, then maybe our activities have great usefulness and great potentiality in the creator's designs.

Possibly divine design appears in our own freedom more than in any cosmically enforced order, such as many religious thinkers have presumed in the past when they conceived of god as having attributes of a wise king. [*Possibilities*, p. 37]

If so, we may now be living in an age with unprecedented opportunities for spiritual growth:

Evidence indicates that the rate of spiritual development is accelerating. Throughout the two hundred thousand years of our history as a species, there have been periods of gradual growth, followed by rapid development. . . . Now, a new vision of our place and purpose in the cosmos is unfolding. Possibly, we may be setting the stage for a giant leap forward in our spiritual understanding. [*Wisdom*, p. xxii]
Our Present Ignorance

As impressive as our current knowledge may seem today, Sir John believed that it was slight compared to the knowledge that humanity might yet achieve. Just as a person living 200 years ago could have had little understanding of what the human race has now achieved, so we, too, can have little understanding of what the next 200 years will bring:

In spite of the enormous strides made by science and the incredible power of our new instruments to reveal the secrets of the universe, large and small, we must accept in all humility that our knowledge is still limited. We cannot even be sure that the vast universe unveiled to us by our telescopes is all that exists. There may be other regions of the universe far beyond the reach of our instruments having very different properties. It is even possible that entire other universes co-exist in parallel with our own. [Possibilities, p. 58]

Moreover, our ignorance extends beyond the material to the spiritual:

Modern science has revolutionized our understanding of the world. This is quite obvious. But what impact have these developments had on our knowledge of God? How do we see human beings fitting into the overall scheme? We know very little—probably less than 1 percent of what can be discovered—about God and fundamental spiritual principles. [Wisdom, p. 80]

The "Humble Approach"

Sir John therefore believed it was necessary to adopt a "humble approach" in all of our investigations of the cosmos, both scientific and spiritual:

Our five human senses are able to comprehend only a small portion of the mysteries, forces, and spiritual realities surrounding us. Our scientific and technological achievements, while impressive, are nevertheless but a first faltering step on the road to ever greater knowledge of this wonderful cosmos, including its invisible and intangible intelligences and realities. [Possibilities, p. 59]

In particular, we cannot presume that the human race represents the final stage of God's creative process. Rather, we may be just the beginning:

Although we seem to be the most sophisticated species at present on our planet, perhaps we should not think of our place as at the end of cosmogenesis. Should we resist the pride that might tempt us to think that we are the final goal of creation? Possibly, we can become servants of creation or even helpers in divine creativity. Possibly, we are a new beginning, the first creatures in the history of life on earth to participate consciously in the ongoing creative process. [Possibilities, p. 41]

In spiritual matters, particularly, Sir John urged us

... to explore the possibility that developing a humble approach in theology, which encourages research and engages carefully with science, may be even more fruitful than endeavors to
reinvigorate inherited systems of thought, whether they be polytheistic, deistic, theistic, monotheistic, pantheistic, panentheistic, or even older concepts. [Possibilities, p. 10]

If mainstream religious thinkers were to adopt this view, they might help open the door to new spiritual insights of immense importance to future generations:

The question before us is whether theologians and religious scholars, clergy, and laity can also take the humble approach. If they accept the inexhaustibility of God's revelation in terms of science, as do many scientists, should they hope that revelations in terms of the spirit are also inexhaustible, vastly exceeding our capacities to grasp them? Possibly, the greater part of divine revelation, both scientific and spiritual, may still lie ahead of us, not behind us. [Possibilities, p. 62]

The Imperative of Scientific Advance

Sir John believed that continued scientific progress was essential, not only to provide material benefits to humanity but also to reveal and illuminate God's divine plan for the universe, of which we are a part:

Each time new laws are discovered by scientists, we potentially can learn a little more about divinity. . . . It seems as if the evolutionary process rewards emergence of the capability of purposefulness as an adaptive advantage. Can this, and the vast, complex, and sublime order of mathematical physics which undergirds it, be a mistake? Would it not be strange if a universe without purpose accidentally created humans who are so obsessed with purpose? [Possibilities, p. 84]

All of nature reveals something of the creator. And God is revealing himself more and more to human inquiry, not always through prophetic visions or scriptures but through the astonishingly productive research of modern scientists. [Possibilities, p. 87]

For Sir John, any hope for advancement in our understanding of spiritual matters depended on strict conformity to the highest scientific standards:

A scientific approach has the benefit of being reality-focused and disciplined in relation to change. . . . So the development of new concepts in theology developed in close connection with rigorous science differs from unconstrained free thinking.

The difference involves differentiating between ideological enthusiasm versus following a careful, sober, and skeptically minded process of analysis, critical testing, and verification. Such a careful, humble approach helps ensure that experiments related to spiritual matters are done in a manner that can win respect among the best-educated people. [Possibilities, p. 115]
New "Spiritual Information"

Our present treasury of scientific information is the result of centuries of intense personal endeavor and, in more recent times, of research designed to foster new discoveries. Should we not seize the present moment, Sir John asked, to make a similar effort—and expend commensurate resources—to increase our store of what he called "spiritual information"?

This is the blossoming time in human creation. Evolution is accelerating. Progress is accelerating. One of god's great blessings to human beings is change, and the present acceleration of change in the world is an overflowing of this blessing. Should those who love god devote over 1 percent of income to research for new additional spiritual information to supplement the wonderful ancient scriptures? [Possibilities, p. 43]

By "spiritual information," Sir John meant

. . . the concepts from religions which have proven beneficial and which need to be supplemented through millions of dollars daily for rigorous, verifiable research, especially on those neglected basic invisible realities such as love, purpose, creativity, intellect, thanksgiving, prayer, humility, praise, thrift, compassion, invention, truthfulness, giving, and worship. [Possibilities, p. vii]

Scientists would play a key role in this effort:

There may be significant promise in supporting a wide range of careful and rigorous research projects by well-regarded scientists on basic areas with theological relevance and potential. [Possibilities, p. 11]

A primary purpose of Sir John was therefore

. . . to examine or foster the idea that through an expanded search for more knowledge, in which we are open-minded and willing to experiment, theology may produce positive results even more amazing than the discoveries of scientists that have electrified the world with their discoveries in the 20th century. [Possibilities, p. 10]

Free and Open Inquiry

From his experience in the management of investments and the creation of financial wealth, Sir John was impressed by the benefits of free and open competition in the marketplace. He observed that success in scientific research and many other areas of human endeavor likewise depends on free and open competition:

Freedom fosters the kind of constructive competition that makes progress possible. When the creativity, ingenuity, and competitive efforts of individuals are set free, the result can be progress and prosperity beyond anything ever before imagined. [Possibilities, p. 119]

Progress thrives in the context of fair and open competition. God gave us the benefit of having the magnificent capacity of creative freedom. It is a common unfortunate habit of groups in
power to try to stifle this free creativity and to enforce drab conformity and uniformity. [Possibilities, p. 36]

Progress in Religion and Theology

Given the resistance of numerous religious leaders to innovation and change, Sir John was not surprised to note that religion is perceived, in some circles, as a cultural backwater:

Many highly educated people feel that religion is obsolete. In some senses they may have a point. We typically do not observe the kind of dynamism in religion that we see in other areas of life such as science, technology, and business. To many, religion sometimes seems like a kind of history museum which lacks the excitement and vibrancy of other aspects of life that constantly experience innovation. [Possibilities, p. 9]

Sir John therefore proposed that religion pursue the same strategy that has led to progress in other fields of human endeavor:

Progress comes from constructive competition, and churches and religions can benefit greatly from it. By free competition the wheat is gradually separated from the chaff. A beneficial religion should welcome competition because when it is put to the test, the beneficial will survive and grow. Only an inferior religion needs to discourage competition, lest its inferiority be exposed for all the world to see.

The long history of evolution of plant and animal varieties would seem to indicate that competition is one of god's chosen methods of developing novel and fruitful forms of life in his accelerating creativity. Why should it be different in the realm of spirit and religion? [Possibilities, p. 122]

Sir John was well aware that such a view might be objectionable to those who consider the Bible to be the exclusive source of wisdom, but he suggested an alternate view of divine revelation:

Christians think god appeared in Jesus of Nazareth two thousand years ago for our salvation and education. But should we take it to mean that education and progress stopped there, that Jesus was the end of change, the end of time? Is such a notion compatible with the divine, free, open, creative nature of the universe? To say that god cannot reveal himself in a decisive way again, because he did it once centuries ago, can seem sacrilegious. [Possibilities, p. 38]

Sir John believed that a dynamic and evolutionary approach to religion could engage the minds of skeptics and help them to find meaning and purpose in older traditions.

Could young people and intellectuals be attracted to forms of religion that are genuinely dynamic and rapidly progressing? Does this mean that the old ways have to be discarded totally? I hope not, because it is clear that much of the strength of religion is in the precious core of wisdom and truth that it transmits from each generation to the next. So opening up a few religious
communities to new concepts and new adventures of spiritual learning should not be like a revolution which attempts to build the new upon the ashes of the old. [Possibilities, p. 9]

Turning from religion to theology, Sir John discerned a similar state of affairs:

Theology was once considered as queen of the sciences. It may someday regain that title; but first we may have to learn how to learn in order to regain that title. [Possibilities, p. 10]

An age of experimental theology may be beginning. This term is used to indicate efforts to gain understanding of the power of spiritual practices by concentrating on observable data resulting from spiritual experiences. Will following this approach open up religious concepts to rigorous empirical scrutiny? This should be an appealing notion even for skeptics. [Possibilities, p. 104]

Radicals and Heretics

As an investment manager, Sir John achieved spectacular success by following a simple rule: buy when others are selling (which requires the discipline to seek deep, hidden value), and sell when others are buying. Through this contrarian approach, he was able to create the assets that now endow the John Templeton Foundation. In religion as well, Sir John observed that success has often flowed to those who were regarded in their own day as unorthodox, radical, or even heretical:

Throughout history has religion developed and progressed often by the work of those who were first regarded as heretics? [Possibilities, p. 42]

Beneficial originators in other great religions also were often called heretics. Abraham and Moses were considered heretics by neighboring tribes in their age. [Possibilities, p. 38]

Rarely does a historian or conservative become a hero of later history. Many of history's most creative people have been unconventional, far-reaching thinkers who seek to improve accepted customs of their time. Often such people have been called radicals. [Possibilities, p. 42]

Spiritual Laws

Sir John believed that the laws of nature are not the only laws that influence and guide human behavior:

Now, if there are laws of nature that appear to be expressions of the character or being of physical objects in the creation, would it not be reasonable to expect that there can be analogous laws of the spirit that are expressions of the character of spiritual realities? [Possibilities, p. 154]

Drawing a contrast and comparison with the laws of physics, Sir John explained:
The laws of the spirit refer to patterns of voluntary human behavior, not to the involuntary behavior of physical objects. A person is free to choose to act in accord with these spiritual laws or to try to defy them. This being the case, the patterns which these laws express are not uniformly exhibited by humans at all times. Rather, they represent the ideal patterns to which humans may aspire.

Conformity to the laws of the spirit is a free choice of all responsible humans. So perhaps, to avoid misunderstandings, we should call them spiritual principles. [Possibilities, p. 154]

Thus, Sir John proposed that the laws of the spirit, like the laws of physics, could also be subjected to systematic scientific research:

It is my belief that the basic laws or principles for leading a "sublime life," to paraphrase Longfellow, can be examined and tested just as science examines and tests natural laws of the universe. [Wisdom, p. xxi]

By continually and carefully researching spiritual principles, can humanity reap substantial benefits, both for the individual and for human society at large? Can this point to challenging opportunities for beneficial researches by scientists and theologians? [Possibilities, p. 155]

Can researchers discover what personalities are achieving heaven while on earth? Who can devise tests to discover which are the happier people and why? [Possibilities, p. 134]

The John Templeton Foundation also welcomes proposals . . . to verify or falsify any one or more of these two hundred proposed eternal principles, or others not included in this book. The purpose is to continually improve these studies in a way readily acceptable worldwide! [Laws of Life, p. xxi]

Dialogue between Science and Religion

A centerpiece of Sir John's vision of the future was the prospect of an informed, far-reaching dialogue between science and religion:

Does the present offer theology a greatly expanded vision of the cosmos and of historical process and potentiality? Most excitingly, is an important challenge for theology opened up on the possibility of spiritual progress? How can theologians and religious communities research ways to develop real and beneficial aspects of spiritual progress? [Possibilities, p. 99]

Does the possibility of additional spiritual information depend upon scientists humble enough to admit that the unseen is vastly greater than the seen and upon theologians humble enough to admit that some older concepts of god may need to grow? Both hopefully can develop a vastly larger cosmology and wider, deeper theology, especially by working in creative dialogue. [Possibilities, p. 104]
A New Vocabulary for Spiritual Discourse

A productive dialogue between science and religion may require the development of a new vocabulary to facilitate communication among all parties concerned. Sir John called attention to this need:

Could discovery be accelerated if we find words with greater clarity to be used in place of some old words that instantly arouse prejudices in the minds of many great intellects? If the word theology is used mainly by those who study biblical concepts, could another word be found to show that discoveries of all sciences may be, in reality, discoveries of infinite intellect?

In the minds of some scientists and other intellectuals, do the words infinite intellect arouse fewer unconscious prejudices than the ancient word god which has been so different in various civilizations? Can the word revelation come to mean not only god revealing himself but also humans diligently discovering more of infinite intellect? [Possibilities, p. 151]

Leadership by the Best Minds

Sir John expected those with exceptional cognitive talents to play a special role in humanity's search for new ideas:

Perhaps only about one child in a million is born with talents which seem almost superhuman in one or more ways. Why does god's process of evolution produce these rare geniuses on earth? Is it the divine plan that they should help all people to progress?

The one in a million who contributes a new idea to humanity can be a blessing to billions, which helps god's creation continue to progress. [Possibilities, p. 43]

There is also a special role for those with exceptional spiritual gifts:

In addition to the geniuses given more-than-human minds, god also creates saints and prophets gifted with more-than-human souls. A prophet is a pioneer in the vast uncharted regions of the spirit. For spiritual progress to flourish, do we need to cultivate interest and humility to listen carefully and learn from such people, recognizing their important gifts? [Possibilities, pp. 43-44]

Sir John therefore urged strong support for those exceptional people who will lead the search for new spiritual information:

A major aim of the Templeton Foundation is to help those relatively rare and visionary entrepreneurs who are trying to encourage all religions to become enthusiastic about the concepts of spiritual progress and new spiritual information, especially by linking with scientific methods and lines of inquiry.

If benefits from this approach can be practically demonstrated, then it may be welcomed and can
help to reinvigorate appreciation for and to supplement the wonderful ancient scriptures which stand at the core of most religious cultures. [Possibilities, p. 11]

**Benefits for All of Humanity**

Sir John acknowledged that there was no consensus about the nature or possibility of spiritual laws:

When any field of research is begun, no one can possibly predict what may eventually be discovered. Astronomers before Copernicus could not have predicted or even imagined the galaxies or supernovas or pulsars that we are now aware of. In the same way, no one can yet say what laws of the spirit will be formulated and eventually verified. [Possibilities, p. 158]

But he was impressed by the many contributions to spiritual understanding already furnished by the world's great religious traditions, especially concerning the power of love:

Maybe we will discover that love is indeed the basic force in the spiritual world. Could Dante have been correct when he said, "'It is love which moves the sun and stars’? Can both theologians and scientists be enthusiastic to convince skeptics by many various experiments and by collecting many statistics to test repeatedly worldwide many such spiritual laws? [Possibilities, p. 163]

Indeed, Sir John believed that the power of love might well hold the key to advances in human spiritual and material welfare:

Bestowing technology and know-how on people in poor nations is a blessing; but the lasting blessing may be people who can radiate love and joy as they research and teach the basic spiritual realities, which then lead to progress, improved skills, spiritual wealth, and also material prosperity. Who can devise additional scientific or statistical research to test these concepts? [Possibilities, p. 129]

**Conclusion**

Sir John Templeton wanted his philanthropy to reach scientists, theologians, and opinion leaders, but his ultimate audience was all of humankind. He hoped to help every man and woman to acquire a passion for humble discovery, including discovery about God and God's purposes.

Sir John's aim was to liberate and empower the human mind, to encourage people to overcome their passivity and fatalism and to ask probing questions about life and existence. Humility and open-mindedness provided the surest path, he believed, to both material and spiritual progress.

In the face of God's creation, Sir John was consumed by a deep and abiding gratitude. Each new
discovery reinforced this sense of gratitude and provided, in Sir John's view, evidence of both God's love for humankind and His call to each of us to join a process of continuous creativity.

**SCIENTISTS PRIZE WINNERS**

**Sir Alister Hardy (1985)**
Sir Alister Hardy, founder of the Sir Alister Hardy Research Centre at Oxford, England, began his career as a marine biologist but went on to gain prominence for original empirical studies that used scientific methodology to investigate religious experience. He spent a lifetime seeking evidence of God’s centrality to the human condition.

**Stanley L. Jaki (1987)**
Stanley L. Jaki, a Benedictine monk and Professor of Astrophysics at Seton Hall University, was a leading thinker in areas at the boundary of science and theology. His many books carefully delineate the importance of differences as well as similarities between science and religion.

**Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1989)**
Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker explored the intersection of physics, cosmology, and theology in work that placed him at the forefront of the reconciliation between religion and natural science. His key discoveries in nuclear physics, along with his application of nuclear physics to astrophysics, caused him to question the estrangement of religion and science and led to his investigation of Christianity’s obligation to technology.
L. Charles Birch (1990)

L. Charles Birch, Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney, Australia, engaged in adventurous reflection on questions of science and faith throughout his career as a biologist and geneticist. He saw modern discoveries about natural science as expanding the understanding of God as designer and creator of the universe and its creatures.

Paul Davies (1995)

Paul Davies, a theoretical physicist and cosmologist, holds the post of College Professor at Arizona State University. His research has been in the fields of quantum gravity, black holes, early-universe cosmology, and astrobiology as it relates to the origin of life and the transfer of microorganisms between planets.

Ian Barbour (1999)

Ian Barbour is one of the world pioneers in the integration of science and religion. His books and articles have helped to expand the field of theology not only for Christianity but also for other faiths. A physicist and former chair of the religion department, Barbour is Winifred and Atherton Bean Professor Emeritus of Science, Technology and Society at Carleton College.

Freeman Dyson (2000)

Freeman Dyson is a physicist and mathematician and Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. His contributions to science include the unification of the three versions of quantum electrodynamics invented by Feynman, Schwinger, and Tomonaga. Dyson’s writings on the meaning of science and its relation to other disciplines, especially religion and ethics, challenge humankind to reconcile technology and social justice.
**John C. Polkinghorne (2002)**

John C. Polkinghorne is a mathematical physicist and Anglican priest whose treatment of theology as a natural science has invigorated the search for an interface between science and religion. His writings apply scientific approaches to the fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy and have brought him recognition as a unique voice for understanding the Bible and Christian doctrine.

**George F. R. Ellis (2004)**

George F. R. Ellis is a theoretical cosmologist and Professor Emeritus of Applied Mathematics at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He has investigated whether or not there was a start to the universe, if there is one universe or many, the evolution of complexity, and the functioning of the human mind, as well as the intersection of these issues with areas beyond the boundaries of science.

**Charles H. Townes (2005)**

Charles H. Townes, Professor in the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley, shared the 1964 Nobel Prize in Physics. His 1966 article, “The Convergence of Science and Religion,” established him as a voice seeking commonality between the two disciplines. He describes his 1951 discovery of the principles of the maser—while sitting on a park bench—as a “revelation” and an example of the interplay between the “how” and “why” of science and religion.

**John D. Barrow (2006)**

John D. Barrow is Professor of Mathematical Sciences at Cambridge University and Gresham Professor of Geometry at Gresham College in London. His writings on the relationship between life and the universe draw insights from mathematics, physics, and astronomy, challenging scientists and theologians to cross disciplinary boundaries to test what they may or may not understand about the origins of time, space, and matter and the behavior of the universe.
Michael Heller (2008)

Michael Heller, Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow, Poland, is a cosmologist and Catholic priest who has developed sharply focused and strikingly original concepts on the origin and cause of the universe. He engages a wide range of sources in mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, and theology, allowing each field to share insights that may inform the others without any violence to their respective methodologies.

Bernard d’Espagnat (2009)

Bernard d’Espagnat is a French physicist and philosopher of science whose explorations of the philosophical implications of quantum physics have opened new vistas on the definition of reality and the potential limits of knowable science. Much of his work centers on what he calls “veiled reality,” a hidden yet unifying domain beneath what is perceived as time, space, matter, and energy – concepts challenged by quantum physics as possible mere appearances.

Francisco J. Ayala (2010)

Francisco J. Ayala, Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of California, Irvine, is known for his achievements as an evolutionary geneticist and for his opposition to the entanglement of science and religion while also calling for mutual respect between the two. He has been a major voice on the ethical issues related to the study of human evolution and a frequent spokesperson in the debate between evolution and creationism.

Martin J. Rees (2011)

Martin J. Rees, a theoretical astrophysicist whose profound insights on the cosmos have provoked vital questions that speak to humanity’s highest hopes and worst fears, has won the 2011 Templeton Prize. Rees, Master of Trinity College, one of Cambridge University’s top academic posts, and former president of the Royal Society, the highest leadership position within British science, has spent decades investigating the implications of the big bang, the nature of black holes, events during the so-called ‘dark age’ of the early universe, and the mysterious explosions from galaxy centers known as gamma ray bursters. In his work with many colleagues over the years, Rees has enlarged the boundaries of understanding about the physical processes that define the cosmos, including speculations on the concept of “multiverses,” or infinite universes.
**PHILOSOPHERS PRIZE WINNERS**

**Thomas Torrance (1978)**
Thomas Torrance, former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, became one of the first religious thinkers to win the respect of both theologians and scientists. His insights on the rationality of the universe attempt to provide evidence of God through scientific reasoning.

**Ralph Wendell Burhoe (1980)**
Ralph Wendell Burhoe was the founder and editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Burhoe pursued a passionate investigation into the differences and similarities between theology and science, becoming one of the world’s most informed voices in communicating this evolving research.

**James McCord (1986)**
James McCord was chancellor of the Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey and president of the Princeton Theological Seminary. He spent his professional life investigating the relationship between science and religion through studies on the nature of reality.

**Holmes Rolston III (2003)**
Holmes Rolston III is University Distinguished Professor at Colorado State University and a Presbyterian minister whose 40 years of research on the religious imperative to respect nature helped to establish the field of environmental ethics. His work assigns value not only to human beings but also to plants, animals, species, and ecosystems as core issues of theological and scientific concern.
Charles Taylor (2007)

Charles Taylor, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at McGill University, argues that problems such as violence and bigotry can be solved only by considering both their secular and spiritual dimensions. He suggests that depending wholly on secularized viewpoints leads to fragmented reasoning and prevents crucial insights that might help a global community that is increasingly exposed to clashes of culture, morality, nationality, and religion.

Michael Heller (2008)

Michael Heller, Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow, Poland, is a cosmologist and Catholic priest who has developed sharply focused and strikingly original concepts on the origin and cause of the universe. He engages a wide range of sources in mathematics, philosophy, cosmology, and theology, allowing each field to share insights that may inform the others without any violence to their respective methodologies.

A Point of View: Can religion tell us more than science?


When he recounts the story of his conversion to Catholicism in his autobiography A Sort of Life, Graham Greene writes that he went for instruction to Father Trollope, a very tall and very fat man who had once been an actor in the West End.

Trollope was a convert who became a priest and led a highly ascetic life, and Greene didn't warm to him very much, at least to begin with.

Yet the writer came to feel that in dealing with his instructor he was faced with "the challenge of an inexplicable goodness". It was this impression - rather than any of the arguments the devout Father presented to the writer for the existence of God - that eventually led to Greene's conversion.

The arguments that were patiently rehearsed by Father Trollope faded from his memory, and Greene had no interest in retrieving them. "I cannot be bothered to remember," he writes. "I accept."
It's clear that what Greene accepted wasn't what he called "those unconvincing philosophical arguments". But what was it that he had accepted?

We tend to assume that religion is a question of what we believe or don't believe. It's an assumption with a long history in western philosophy, which has been reinforced in recent years by the dull debate on atheism.

In this view belonging to a religion involves accepting a set of beliefs, which are held before the mind and assessed in terms of the evidence that exists for and against them. Religion is then not fundamentally different from science, both seem like attempts to frame true beliefs about the world. That way of thinking tends to see science and religion as rivals, and it then becomes tempting to conclude that there's no longer any need for religion.

This was the view presented by the Victorian anthropologist JG Frazer in his book The Golden Bough, a study of the myths of primitive peoples that is still in print. According to Frazer, human thought advances through a series of stages that culminate in science. Starting with magic and religion, which view the world simply as an extension of the human mind, we eventually reach the age of science in which we view the world as being ruled by universal laws.

Frazer's account has been immensely influential. It lies behind the confident assertions of the new atheists, and for many people it's just commonsense. My own view is closer to that of the philosopher Wittgenstein, who commented that Frazer was much more savage than the savages he studied.

I don't belong to any religion, but the idea that religion is a relic of primitive thinking strikes me as itself incredibly primitive.

In most religions - polytheism, Hinduism and Buddhism, Daoism and Shinto, many strands of Judaism and some Christian and Muslim traditions - belief has never been particularly important. Practice - ritual, meditation, a way of life - is what counts. What practitioners believe is secondary, if it matters at all.

The idea that religions are essentially creeds, lists of propositions that you have to accept, doesn't come from religion. It's an inheritance from Greek philosophy, which shaped much of Western Christianity and led to practitioners trying to defend their way of life as an expression of what they believe.

This is where Frazer and the new atheists today come in. When they attack religion they are assuming that religion is what this Western tradition says it is - a body of beliefs that needs to be given a rational justification.

Obviously, there are areas of life where having good reasons for what we believe is very important. Courts of law and medicine are evidence-based practices, which need rigorous procedures to establish the facts. The decisions of governments rest
on claims about how their policies will work, and it would be useful if these claims were regularly scrutinised - though you'd be well advised not to hold your breath.

But many areas of life aren't like this. Art and poetry aren't about establishing facts. Even science isn't the attempt to frame true beliefs that it's commonly supposed to be. Scientific inquiry is the best method we have for finding out how the world works, and we know a lot more today than we did in the past. That doesn't mean we have to believe the latest scientific consensus. If we know anything, it's that our current theories will turn out to be riddled with errors. Yet we go on using them until we can come up with something better.

Science isn't actually about belief - any more than religion is about belief. If science produces theories that we can use without believing them, religion is a repository of myth.

Myths aren't relics of childish thinking that humanity leaves behind as it marches towards a more grown-up view of things. They're stories that tell us something about ourselves that can't be captured in scientific theories.

Just as you don't have to believe that a scientific theory is true in order to use it, you don't have to believe a story for it to give meaning to your life.

Myths can't be verified or falsified in the way theories can be. But they can be more or less truthful to human experience, and I've no doubt that some of the ancient myths we inherit from religion are far more truthful than the stories the modern world tells about itself.

The idea that science can enable us to live without myths is one of these silly modern stories. There's nothing in science that says the world can be finally understood by the human mind.

If Darwin's theory of evolution is even roughly right, humans aren't built to understand how the universe works. The human brain evolved under the pressures of the struggle for life.

Through science humans can lift themselves beyond the view of things that's forced on them by day-to-day existence. They can't overcome the fact that they remain animals, with minds that aren't equipped to see into the nature of things.

Darwin's theory is unlikely to be the final truth. It may be just a rough account of how life has developed in our part of the cosmos. Even so, the clear implication of the theory of evolution is that human knowledge is by its nature limited.

It's been said that the universe is a queerer place than we can possibly imagine, and I'm sure that's right. However rapidly our knowledge increases, we'll always be
surrounded by the unknowable.

Science hasn't enabled us to dispense with myths. Instead it has become a vehicle for myths - chief among them, the myth of salvation through science. Many of the people who scoff at religion are sublimely confident that, by using science, humanity can march onwards to a better world.

But "humanity" isn't marching anywhere. Humanity doesn't exist, there are only human beings, each of them ruled by passions and illusions that conflict with one another and within themselves.

Science has given us many vital benefits, so many that they would be hard to sum up. But it can't save the human species from itself.

Because it's a human invention, science - just like religion - will always be used for all kinds of purposes, good and bad. Unbelievers in religion who think science can save the world are possessed by a fantasy that's far more childish than any myth. The idea that humans will rise from the dead may be incredible, but no more so than the notion that "humanity" can use science to remake the world.

No doubt there will be some who are deeply shocked by Graham Greene's nonchalance about the arguments that led him to convert to Catholicism. How could he go on practising a religion when he couldn't even remember his reasons for joining it?

The answer is that he did remember - but his reasons had nothing to do with arguments.

Human beings don't live by argumentation, and it's only religious fundamentalists and ignorant rationalists who think the myths we live by are literal truths.

Evangelical atheists who want to convert the world to unbelief are copying religion at its dogmatic worst. They think human life would be vastly improved if only everyone believed as they do, when a little history shows that trying to get everyone to believe the same thing is a recipe for unending conflict.

We'd all be better off if we stopped believing in belief. Not everyone needs a religion. But if you do, you shouldn't be bothered about finding arguments for joining or practising one. Just go into the church, synagogue, mosque or temple and take it from there.

What we believe doesn't in the end matter very much. What matters is how we live.
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