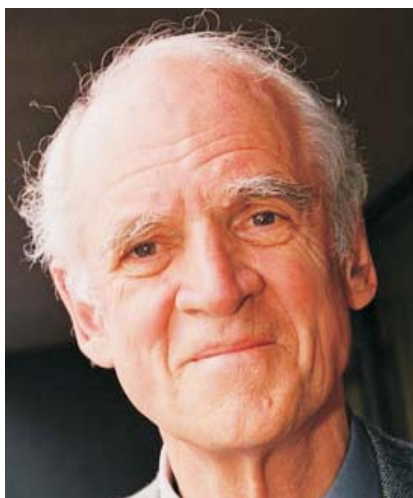


## IN DEFENSE OF MULTICULTURALISM

Charles Taylor



CHARLES TAYLOR is one of the leading political philosophers of modern-day society. He is a well-renowned public figure and a professor at McGill University in Montreal (Canada). He also serves as the Vice-President of the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna (Austria). In 2007, he received the prestigious award presented by the Templeton Foundation. In 2008, he was awarded the Kyoto Prize (the Japanese equivalent of the Nobel Prize)

Multiculturalism is one of the biggest challenges of modern democracy - both due to the fact that, owing to migration-related tendencies, our societies are steadily becoming more diversified and to the fact that the prevailing ethos of contemporary democracies is seemingly more and more hostile to the suppression of the differences existing between people.

The growth of multiculturalism is a fact within our society, preceding any policies that are adopted in order to respond to this fact, and these are often labeled as 'multicultural'. There exists a great tension here, which sometimes amounts to a contradiction. The point is that

democracies need to have a high degree of consensus around the political identity of a society, whereas that is not the case with despotic regimes, which can be satisfied with docile populations who simply obey the law and pay their taxes. But **how can one combine cultural diversity and strong consensus?** It may sound impossible, but it has previously been done. This has already been done in some Western democracies, which are economically prosperous and dynamic. Immigrants flow towards these societies, as they are attracted by the freedoms that they offer and the economic prospects that are available to both themselves and their children. If the host society manages to integrate these immigrants, to find jobs for them, to open up opportunities, to break down the barriers of discrimination, etc., then it is often the case that these immigrants become very patriotic, more so often than those people who were born in those countries. This is a frequent occurrence in, for instance, Canada and the United States.

But one can only integrate newcomers in this way and, at the same time, combat discrimination if the host society is convinced that immigrant inflow is actually a gain for their society; if they actually welcome a society which is more diverse, due to the fact that it is also a more dynamic and more creative

When German Chancellor Angela Merkel says that 'multiculturalism has failed' in Germany, I would rather say that it has never actually been tried - at least not the multiculturalism of integration that I have been describing here. Immigrants were originally received as 'Gastarbeiters', based on the understanding that they would eventually return to their respective home countries and would not become part of German society. Thus, no effort was made in order to integrate them into society, to teach their children German, or to see that they acquired the necessary skills to compete for jobs. The outcome has, of course, been disastrous.

The hopeful sign that we can see today is that these policies are gradually being reversed, and many German Laender are now beginning to adopt measures aimed at integrating the children of these immigrants. This kind of multiculturalism can indeed succeed, but not if the majority of the population in the host society is determined to reject such newcomers. Germany and many European societies are now at a crucial stage in their development. They have essentially become diverse without any serious attempt to integrate their new populations. This has ultimately produced alienation among these people, as well as a backlash among those who are

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one. This creates what one could call an 'ideology' of multiculturalism'. **An ideology of multiculturalism is a sense that our society is defined by its ability to welcome and integrate differences.** An ideology of this kind is very strong in Canada, for instance.

native born in those host countries.

Now these countries face a choice: they will either continue on this disastrous path, or they will adopt the requirements of a successful integrative multiculturalism. ■

*Recorded by Dmitry Uzlaner*