

News

New Science Prize Setup by Yuri Milner

Philip E. Gibbs*

Abstract

Yuri Milner is a Russian hi-tech investor and has just given away \$27,000,000 in prizes to nine physicists in \$3,000,000 chunks. He plans to do the same every year making his the biggest recurring science prize of them all. I think the prize is good but with so much money to give away I think he could have afforded to try some other ways to encourage research as well. If I had that kind of money to give away I would limit to one prize each year and use the rest in other ways, e.g. for research grants. I would also love to see the effect of an open essay contest with a \$1,000,000 top prize.

Key Words: new science prize, Fundamental Physics Prize, Yuri Milner, string theorist.

July 31, 2012: [String Theorists get biggest new science prize](#)

Yuri Milner is a Russian hi-tech investor who dropped out of physics classes as a student. He must have done quite well with his investments because he has just given away \$27,000,000 in prizes to nine physicists in \$3,000,000 chunks. He plans to do the same every year making his the biggest recurring science prize of them all. Recipients of the prize this year which is given in fundamental physics are Ed Witten, Alan Guth, Nima Arkani-Hamed, Jaun Maldacena, Nathan Seiberg, Maxim Kontsevich, Ashoke Sen, Alexei Y. Kitaev and Andre Linde. Congratulations to them all.

Past winners will select future winners so we can expect to see a lot of rich people in string theory and cosmology in the coming years.

It is no accident that all the brightest theorists of our time are working on string theory and supersymmetry. Nobody gets anywhere in this game if they are not capable of thinking for themselves so they do not follow each other like sheep.

String theory has had many opportunities to reveal itself as a “bridge to nowhere” but at each turn the road carries on instead and another bridge is crossed. The theory is very tightly constrained by the need to be consistent with general relativity and quantum mechanics. The theorists are not making it up. They are following the course that logical consistency dictates and it is remarkable that there is anything at all that can match the requirements, but of course there has to be because the universe exists with these features.

* Correspondence: Philip E. Gibbs, Ph.D., Independent Researcher, UK. E-Mail: phil@royalgenes.com

I think it is a good thing that these theorists are being honoured. People will look back in a hundred years time and say that the Nobel failed to honour some of the greatest thinkers of this time because they were ahead of experiment. This prize corrects that. There is however a generation that has been missed out including people like Hawking and Susskind. Perhaps they will get their awards in future years.

To say that string theory fails because it cannot predict low energy particle physics is like saying that the standard model fails because it cannot predict biology. The objective of string theory is to tell us what happen in the realm of quantum gravity. To answer that, they must first determine its non-perturbative nature. When they do they will find its predictions but they may have little to do with what can be observed in a particle collider. We don't expect quantum mechanics to tell us what life we will find on other planets so why do we have such unrealistic expectations about what string theory would tell us about energy scales many orders of magnitude below where its effects are significant?

I also think the prize is good but with so much money to give away I think he could have afforded to try some other ways to encourage research as well, after all if he gives away 9 prizes every year it will not be long before every string theorist and cosmologist of any note will be rich and it is not clear that this will motivate everyone to work harder. If I had that kind of money to give away I would limit to one prize each year and use the rest in other ways, e.g. for research grants. I would also love to see the effect of an open essay contest with a \$1,000,000 top prize.

References

1. <http://blog.vixra.org/2012/07/31/string-theorists-get-biggest-new-science-prize/>