



Arthur Robert Jensen (1923–2012)

Although I met Arthur Jensen only three times, I feel that I have lost a colleague that I respected and liked and whom I saw daily. There was no such contact, of course, but his ideas were always in my mind and for over 30 years, we had a dialog that dominated much of my scholarly research. I will say something about his character, which has been much maligned.

He was without racial bias. He took it for granted that all human beings should be judged on their merits as individuals and could not understand how others might misuse his research to do otherwise. He was unprepared for the storm of abuse that greeted his conclusion that the black–white IQ gap had a significant genetic component. Later, in print, he acknowledged that this had roots in his own background. As an American of Danish origin, he belonged to a group so thoroughly integrated into the American mainstream that he had no sense of apartness.

He had not sought out racial differences as an area of research. Early on in his career, one of his students told him that he was uneasy. He was working with children labeled “mentally retarded” and found that the label seemed to fit the white children but not the minority children. Jensen’s impressions were similar and he tried to invent an IQ test that was color blind in the sense of giving similar results for all ethnic groups. He could not invent one that had external validity (predicted real world outcomes) and thus began his study of ethnic differences. Many young scholars today would suppress such a finding and curb their desire to know the truth. Which is to say that Jensen had the integrity of a true scholar and they do not.

He never deviated from the ethical code of scholarship. When I was about to send my book, *Race, IQ, and Jensen* (1980) to press, the publisher wanted me to anticipate anything relevant in Jensen’s forthcoming *Bias in mental testing* (1980). Although Jensen knew that my conclusions differed from his, he sent me the page proofs of the chapter summaries so I could argue against him with maximum effect. After the book was published, he wrote me a letter. It said that since none of his critics had argued with him effectively on evidential grounds, he had contemplated filling the gap with a book published under the pseudonym Nesnejah R. Ruthra, a plausible spelling of his name backwards. He thanked me for saving him the trouble.

Another example. When writing on Chinese Americans, I approached Jensen for the fuller unpublished results he had obtained in Berkeley and the test manuals he had used. Once again, knowing I was “second-guessing” him, he sent everything. Like a true scholar he wanted to be able to refute opponents who had made the strongest possible case against his views. He never was interested in point scoring: refuting a case that had some eliminable deficiency that sapped its potency.

In 1984, after reading my article on massive US IQ gains, he accepted the evidence immediately (when did he ever not?) and posed the question of whether there would be similar gains on a culturally reduced test like Raven’s. His suggestion (as usual) dictated my next research project. When it turned out that there had been massive gains on Raven’s throughout the world, I ventured my first tentative opinion that we had to rethink whether IQ tests measured intelligence. This was simplistic, of course, as I later realized (sometimes they do and sometimes they do not). His next letter was a masterpiece of tact. He said that if he had only my evidence in front of him he would have agreed. What a kind way of saying that I needed to learn more!

The second time we met was at the Novartis Symposium at London in 1999. He invited me to walk with him toward a concert he was attending in the city. Our musical tastes were similar, although he was far better informed having contemplated a career as a conductor before he opted for psychology. Jensen made landmark contributions because he was a man of broad culture, unafraid to transcend the narrow expertise that characterizes so many that practice a particular social science. How many Professors of Education would master education, psychology, sociology, matrix algebra, quantitative genetics (where he made original contributions), and advanced statistics? A colleague, no lover of Jensen, conceded to me that his statistical expertise “was infinitely above that of the average psychologist”.

Jensen was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1998 in this journal, he said he had tried to practice Gandhi’s assertion that he would say in public exactly what he believed in private. How many of us have had the courage to do that? Few in these miserable times, where courses are taught on the *Bell Curve* that do not assign the *Bell Curve*, where courses on intelligence

are not offered simply because some student might raise the question of racial differences, where someone taking IQ seriously would be ostracized in an education or gender studies department, where the history of the black family is distorted for political purposes, where scholars rise in wrath when a speaker details obvious ethnic differences? I have spent much time writing letters to oppose the dismissal of academics that committed thought crimes.

A scholar I respect has told me he could not afford to do research on racial differences: “what if I discovered a genetic component – I would have to leave town”. Jensen suffered violent threats against himself and his family, disruption of speaking engagements, and hate mail. Nothing intimidated him. I dedicated my most recent book: “To Arthur Jensen – whose integrity never faltered”. I hope he saw it before his death.

As the list of his accomplishments implies, Jensen's most important contributions had nothing to do with race. He was first to set the theory of intelligence on modern foundations. He resurrected the concept of *g* (the general intelligence factor) as a measure of what most of us mean by intelligence: learning faster and better how to solve problems of cognitive complexity. The fact that Sternberg, Gardner, and myself challenged and amplified his views merely indicates their fecundity. To paraphrase Whitehead on Plato, the theories of intelligence of the late 20th century are a series of footnotes to Jensen. His life-long quest for a physiological substratum for intelligence is a quest shared by all serious scholars, however much they differ in what they expect to find.

Although he never wavered in his endorsement of Wechsler–Binet tests as measures of *g*, his views on the utility of IQ were measured and sound. He thought these tests were a

first tool of diagnosis when presented with children with a special learning problem. He saw no point in their mass use for streaming. As he said in print, he never bothered to have his own IQ measured. If he wanted to take intermediate Algebra, he put his heart into elementary Algebra. The results would tell him what he needed to know. His massive work on *Bias in mental testing* (1980), with its careful discussion of both internal and external sources of bias and how they are kept to a minimum, is a classic reference work destined to dominate for decades.

The question now is how to fill the void Jensen's death leaves, particularly for scholars open to scientific inquiry who challenge some of his conclusions. There is no substitute for someone of great intellectual caliber who disagrees with you. With Jensen no longer alive, we will have to invent him. But we cannot really do that, because no one is so constructed as to put the same energy and imagination into a fictitious opponent as we put into polishing our own ideas. No one can pretend to believe what they do not believe, but I hope there is a young scholar out there with the convictions and mind of Arthur Jensen. I am sometimes asked why I spoke so well of him. The answer is that it was easy.

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