

Letting racists speak: what's the worry?

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Jared Taylor, the American writer and lecturer who calls himself a race realist, tells audiences that just about everyone has a deep-seated aversion to members of other races and, moreover, that blacks are genetically prone to criminality, destitution, and violence. For these reasons, Taylor advocates ending non-white immigration and benignly secluding and ignoring the non-whites already within our borders. Taylor, sadly, is not the only person saying and advocating these things.

It's painful to hear such stuff. We're disgusted by the pinched and ugly attitudes behind Taylor's views and we're appalled by the nastiness of his recommendations. Taylor and others of his ilk have no concern for people as individuals trying to live their lives as well as they can. They are indifferent to the pains and joys of individual people. They see only groups, and they treat individuals as representatives of groups. And that is vile.

It's painful to hear what Taylor says, but is anyone harmed by his saying what he says? Well, yes, certainly one or another person could be harmed, either merely by hearing what he says or by falling victim to someone stirred up by what he says. But none of us needs to be harmed by his saying what he says. We can take steps to prevent harm, steps that don't include silencing him or anyone else. Important for us here and now, as people concerned with justice and with creating an inclusive, multi-cultural, non-racist society, is to see why we needn't worry at all about racist talk. We can easily make it harmless. Moreover, to worry about it, and to silence it and punish those who speak it, is at least to betray our own best values, if not also, in the end, to aid the racists.

I suppose the fear motivating those who would silence racists is the fear that people exposed to racist ideas and attitudes and solutions will adopt them, or that people already racist will be encouraged by what they hear to act. Of course, silencing racists won't by itself stop racism from spreading, or at least we need evidence that it would. But should we even fear that racist talk must lead to racist actions and policies?

What would really do the job here is, first, to appreciate our own commitments and, second, to realize that those commitments are not hostage to anything science might have to say about the races. I mean our commitments to justice, to equality, and to decency.

For us, justice means that individual people are to be treated fairly and according to what they have come to deserve through their own actions. Equality means that each of us is to have good access to education, jobs, advancement, housing, health care, policing, and all the rest. Decency means that we are to act on a clear view of the needs and plight and dreams of others relative to our own. Because we are decent, we do not hoard for our own pleasure resources

others need for their well being. These commitments directly imply commitments to inclusion and multi-culturalism, and to immigration policies blind to race, religion, and ethnicity.

Our commitments to justice, equality, and decency are, at root, emotional. We like that other people, whoever they are, are doing well in their lives, and we like that we have something to do with their doing well. Whether I'm fond of you or not, and even when I'm not, I'm keen that you flourish in your life.

Why are these commitments not hostage to what research might reveal about the races? Well, imagine that everything that Taylor or the researchers he cites says about a matter of fact is true. Imagine, for instance, that on average Asians are more intelligent and less lascivious than whites, who in turn on average are more intelligent and less lascivious than blacks. Imagine that indeed people are innately uncomfortable around people of a race different than their own. What difference should these facts we're imagining make to our commitments? None at all. What implications could they have for policy? Few, if any.

The soundness of the research Taylor and others cite would make no difference to our commitments or to our policies, for our commitments are to treat individuals justly, equally, and decently. We want each individual to do well, to realize his or her potential, to flourish. That an individual is black, Asian, or white is irrelevant to our hopes for that person and to our commitments to her.

So we need not fear for our own commitments when racists appeal to empirical findings in arguing for their ugly recommendations. We can explain how the research they cite is irrelevant to what they advocate. Of course, we are free to evaluate the soundness as science of any purported research that comes our way. But we don't have to refute any piece of research in order to hold on to our values and to dismiss theirs.

But not everyone feels as we do. Not everyone cares emotionally for justice, equality, or decency; not everyone finds pleasure in the joys of others. Isn't the real worry that letting racists speak will win hearts for the racists?

That *is* the real worry. Yet once we see it clearly and for itself, we must realize that it is no worry at all. Feeling as we do is wonderful and its attractions compelling. Feeling as the racists do is small and sad. When we express our attitudes clearly and when we act publicly on our commitments, no one who sees us will go to the side of the racists.

When we express our attitudes publicly, *when* we act on our commitments—but that means investing thought, effort, and time. No one likes to work. And so many of us choose an easier path. Rather than standing up to the racists by meeting them and talking to them and listening carefully to what they say and criticising their views and showing them and everyone else how wonderful it is to take people simply as neighbours and fellow individuals, some of us stand up to the racists by excluding them, silencing them, and bullying them. Certainly it's easier to walk that path, and maybe it's more thrilling, too. Yet there's no reason to think that walking that path will get us to our destination. And, anyway, from the perspective of our commitments to justice, equality, and decency, it's an ignoble path, not one we should ever walk.