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English 125

The True IQ System

In Isaac Asimov’s essay “Thinking about Thinking,” he challenges the idea that intelligence can be measured by a “universal test” (Asimov 39). He believes that there is no “objective definition of intelligence,” and he goes on to explain the problems with IQ testing (Asimov 40). For example, when testing IQ the test makers do not take into consideration the culture or lifestyle someone is coming from and by failing to do so the results are going to differ drastically in different people. They use the test to create a feeling of dominance over others. It in reality is nothing more than a “game of power” created by people who feel they are intelligent and anyone who doesn’t meet their standards is below them (44). The idea that a test can accurately represent a person’s intelligence does not work because every person is different. That’s Asimov’s conclusion and thesis: different people have different positive strengths and that’s more important than a label like IQ. This is a convincing argument that Asimov makes, but it makes me wonder if IQ should still be more important because if we made it less important unqualified people might do important jobs that they shouldn’t.

Asimov questions what it is we are testing when we give an intelligence quotient. If as he believes there is no objective definition of intelligence, how can someone create a test to measure it? The test is created by individuals who put only their own skills into it, making it possible for only people like themselves to pass with what they would consider an acceptable score. These test makers “force a subjective definition of intelligence”(Asimov 40). The test makers fail to create something diverse that includes skills outside of just the common math and vocabulary. “You are tested in what is culturally fashionable- in what educated men consider to be the criteria of intelligence”(Asimov 41). They are so narrow minded that they fail to recognize many skills that can convey a person's intelligence.

Intelligence can not be measured with a universal test because every individual person is different. Asimov explains that what some can do others can not and vice versa, “...a given individual may be superior to others in the group or inferior or both depending on definition and circumstance” (Asimov 44). The terms superior and inferior are meaningless, there is only differnce. The differences that humans possess are “mankind's chief asset” they are what make us strong as a whole and not acknowledging that is damaging (Asimov 44).

These tests are designed to make the individuals who pass it feel “superior” to everyone else. Men in control of the public say they are intelligent and then create a test to allow only minds like their own in. The whole concept is based off of “circular reasoning”, the people who pass the test get to decide how much worth it has (Asimov 43). “What after all does such an intelligence test measure but those skills that are associated with the intelligence by the individuals designing the test?”(Asimov 40). No matter what, the people creating the test feel they are superior and they will keep creating tests that prove that.

Once someone has the high IQ score, things that would be considered stupid if done by someone with low IQ are now just “lovable eccentricity” (41). And “any demonstration of stupidity no longer counts.” (41). People are quick to judge others with negativity, so when someone with the label of smart very obviously does something stupid it is overlooked. Asimov explains this concept using examples from his own life. One of the instances he talks about he was having car trouble and called his brother for help because he felt that he was helpless in the situation. “With all you intelligence Isaac, how is you lack the brains to join the AAA?” (Asimov 41). The entire time Asimov’s brother was helping him he never once thought about his AAA membership, his brother didn’t immediately ask if he had a membership because he assumed he would have been smart enough to use it. People base what think of others on labels and they let that cloud their judgment even though something may be obvious (like the fact Asimov forgot he had AAA) it is overlooked.

Asimov talks about how some might disagree with him and his ideas about IQ. William B. Shockley a physicists pointed out that the average IQ of whites is higher than that of blacks.His assertion made people who want to be the best feel that they were. These people fail to see that the people getting “substantially lower scores”, are taking a test based on the white subculture. In order for them to get a higher score on the tests they would have to alter who they are to be more like those who create the test (Asimov 42). This is just another example of how circular reasoning is being used in the IQ testing system.

Asimov benefits from the IQ tests, but he still sees the flaws in it. He knows that it is being used to benefit the white people, “The values of that subculture are defined as inferior to those of the dominate culture, so that the black IQ is arranged to be lower ”(Asimov 42). He goes on to explain a counter argument to his, if there is a way to measure intelligence and the Black Americans really do just score lower because of something in their own DNA should Whites treat Blacks differently? (Asimov 43). He then reverses situations as if it were the Blacks who scored a higher IQ than the Whites, “should we give them a double vote?” he knows that anyone reading that would disagree because it is clearly racism (Asimov 43).

To truly measure someone's intelligence with a test it would need to consist of so much more than what the IQ test does now. It would need to go beyond the basics and be for the specific person because, as Asimov believes every individual is different. “I think we should value these differences” (Asimov, 44). In valuing and accepting that we are all different we can grow as a race and not be divided by white, black, smart, or stupid. There would not be a group of test makers that allow in only individuals like themselves into a intelligent category, but unfortunately that is not the case and we base intellect off of a flawed test.

But even though Asimov says his argument in a convincing way, I still can’t stop wondering if we need IQ tests for public safety. Without IQ tests could just anybody be a doctor or a judge? If IQ didn’t matter maybe uncapable people would get these jobs, and it would cause real problems. I wouldn’t want to go see a doctor who scored really low on an IQ test. Maybe that’s kind of prejudiced, but I think most people deep down feel the same way. When important jobs like that are on the line we want the smartest people to do them.

Even though this might be a problem raised by Asimov’s essay, he still makes sense. People are different and it’s unfair that different people get treated differently in a bad way. Maybe some people like Black people are discriminated against by IQ tests. Maybe we should understand that different people have different skills that can work together to make us all better. Maybe, just maybe, Asimov’s ideas will take over and we will improve our country by not discriminating.

Works Cited

Asimov, Isaac. “Thinking about Thinking.” *The Norton Mix,* Ed. Katie Hannah, Norton &

Company, 2014, 39-44.