

The Case for I.Q. Tests

Reply to McClelland

by Arthur R. Jensen

Readers of *The Humanist* ought to realize that many arguments against I.Q. tests ignore a large number of scientifically established facts. Below I have listed some of those that seem most germane; except the first, all items are amply substantiated by research published in scientific journals. *Note:* Unless explicitly specified, the following points pertain only to standard intelligence tests. Although such tests take a number of different forms (for example, verbal and nonverbal, group and individual, and so on), not *all* tests are intelligence tests.

1. The level of technology needed to maintain the standard of living enjoyed in North America and Europe, given their present populations, demands that a substantial proportion (say, 15 per cent) of the population possess a high level of the kind of mental ability measured by intelligence tests. We could get along without this kind and amount of intelligence in the population only if we drastically reduced population size and returned to a simple agrarian way of life or became hunters and gatherers of food, as in primitive societies. The present population could not be sustained without the technology (food production, transportation, health services, sanitation, and so on) and the kinds of brains needed to maintain it. Thus, to denigrate intelligence is to abandon civilization as we know it.

2. Intelligence tests do, in fact, predict socially and occupationally significant criteria. I.Q. is in a sense a measure of a person's ability to compete successfully in the world of work in all known civilized societies. When the "man in the street" is asked to rank various occupations in order of their "prestige," "desirability," and so on, it turns out that the rank order of the average I.Q. of persons in those occupations closely corresponds to the rank order of their desirability. For example, most of the practical business executives to whom McClelland refers have an average I.Q. that places them above approximately 96 per cent of the rest of the population.

3. Persons would still differ in intelligence even if there were no intelligence tests. Any merit system based on performance reveals these differences. I.Q. tests reveal the same differences to the extent that the performance involves mental capabilities. They are not intended to predict performance based on physical capacities or on special talents such as artistic and musical ability. Bright persons and dull persons were recognized long before intelligence tests came into existence, and there has always been a marked relationship between mental characteristics and occupational attainments. Throwing out intelligence tests will not improve a person's intelligence or reduce differences between persons, just as throwing away the thermometer will not cure a patient's fever.

4. The use of intelligence tests in the armed forces shows that they are highly correlated with the kinds and levels of skills for which men can be trained and the time they need to achieve certain levels of skill. Reversing the assignments of recruits in mental Categories I and IV would guarantee the greatest snafu in military history.

5. Intelligence tests do not reflect only the accidents of cultural and social privilege; they get at some quite basic biological capacity underlying the ability to reason, to organize and utilize one's knowledge, and so on. Hereditary or genetic factors account for more of the I.Q. differences among persons than do cultural and environmental factors. In the white European and North American populations, where this has been studied most extensively, it has been found that genetic factors are about twice as important as environment as a cause of individual differences in I.Q.

6. Intelligence is positively related to other nonintellectual traits of personality and character that are also involved in competing successfully for what most persons in our society—rich or poor, black or white—regard as the "good things in life."

7. Various intelligence tests differ in

their degree of "culture loading." Contrary to popular belief, blacks perform *better* on the *more* culture-loaded than on the *more* culture-free tests. (The opposite is true for other minorities.) Blacks also do better on verbal than on nonverbal tests. Thus, on some nonverbal I.Q. tests, about 85 per cent of American blacks score below the average for whites, while the culturally very different Arctic Eskimos score on a par with white norms. This shows that higher scores on these tests do not depend upon having experienced a white, middle-class American background.

8. Just as no one has been able to make up a test of mental ability that favors younger children (say, 10-year-olds) over older children (say, 12-year-olds), so no one has been able to make up a test that favors persons of low socioeconomic status over persons of middle- and upper-class status. If the reasons for social-class intelligence differences were due to status-biased content, it should be possible to make tests that reverse the differences. Yet, despite many attempts, no one has succeeded in devising such tests.

9. Language and dialect do not have the importance in intelligence tests attributed to them by popular belief, especially where nonverbal I.Q. tests are used. Urban black children tested on the Stanford-Binet I.Q. Test by a black tester using ghetto dialect do not score appreciably higher than when the test is administered in standard English. Children who are born deaf, though scoring poorly on verbal tests because of their severe language deprivation, score no differently from children with normal hearing on the nonverbal tests.

10. College aptitude tests, such as the S.A.T., predict college grades for blacks as well as for whites, for rich as well as for poor. The tests are color-blind. Black individuals and white individuals, rich or poor, with the same I.Q. can be expected to perform equally well in school or on the job—insofar as the job depends upon intellectual ability. In predicting a person's scholastic performance, knowledge of his race or social class adds little or nothing to what is predicted by his I.Q. ■