

What is Intelligence, Anyway?

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What is intelligence, anyway? When I was in the army, I received the kind of **aptitude** test that all soldiers took and, against a normal of 100, scored 160. No one at the base had ever seen a figure like that, and for two hours they made a big fuss over me. (It didn't mean anything. The next day I was still a buck private with KP - **kitchen police** - as my highest duty.)

All my life I've been registering scores like that, so that I have the **complacent** feeling that I'm highly intelligent, and I expect other people to think so, too. Actually, though, don't such scores simply mean that I am very good at answering the type of academic questions that are considered worthy of answers by people who make up the intelligence tests--people with intellectual **bents** similar to mine?

For instance, I had an auto-repair man once, who, on these intelligence tests, could not possibly have scored more than 80, by my estimate. I always took it for granted that I was far more intelligent than he was. Yet, when anything went wrong with my car I hastened to him with it, watched him anxiously as he explored its **vitals**, and listened to his pronouncements as though they were **divine oracles**--and he always fixed my car.

Well, then, suppose my auto-repair man devised questions for an intelligence test. Or suppose a carpenter did, or a farmer, or, indeed, almost anyone but an academician. By every one of those tests, I'd prove myself a moron. And, I'd be a moron, too. In a world where I could not use my academic training and my verbal talents but had to do something intricate or hard, working with my hands, I would do poorly. My intelligence, then, is not absolute but is a function of the society I live in and of the fact that a small subsection of that society has managed to **foist** itself on the rest as an **arbiter** of such matters.

Consider my auto-repair man, again. He had a habit of telling me jokes whenever he saw me. One time he raised his head from under the automobile hood to say: "Doc, a deaf-and-mute guy went into a hardware store to ask for some nails. He put two fingers together on the counter and made hammering motions with the other hand. The clerk brought him a hammer. He shook his head and pointed to the two fingers he was hammering. The clerk brought him nails. He picked out the sizes he wanted, and left. Well, doc, the next guy who came in was a blind man. He wanted scissors. How do you suppose he asked for them?"

Indulgently, I lifted my right hand and made scissoring motions with my first two fingers. Whereupon my auto-repair man laughed **raucously** and said, "Why, you dumb jerk, he used his voice and asked for them." Then he said **smugly**, "I've been trying that on all my customers today." "Did you catch many?" I asked. "Quite a few," he said, "but I knew for sure I'd catch you." "Why is that?" I asked. "Because you're so goddamned educated, doc, I knew you couldn't be very smart."

And I have an uneasy feeling he had something there.

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper, typed:

A. Literal level questions:

1. What is the topic, or subject, of this essay?

Determine the **part of speech** and **definition** for each of the following words, as they are used in the essay:

2. **aptitude**
3. **KP- kitchen police**
4. **complacent**
5. **intellectual bents**
6. **divine oracles**
7. **foist**
8. **raucously**
9. **smugly**

Interpretive level Questions:

10. What is the evidence that Asimov thinks he's smart?
11. In what way(s) is the mechanic smarter than Asimov?
12. What is the **most important point** Asimov makes about the topic?

Critical level questions:

13. Do you agree with his main point? Why or why not?
14. **Journal topic:** Write a full page about how you think/feel about your intelligence and other capabilities. (Private)

"Isaac Asimov was the most famous, most honored, most widely read, and most beloved science fiction author of all time. In his five decades as an author, he wrote more than four hundred books, won every award his readers and colleagues could contrive to give him, and provided pleasure and insight to millions.

He was born in Russia in 1920 and grew up in the USA. His fantastic career as a science fiction writer began in 1939 with the appearance of a short story 'Marooned Off Vesta', in **Amazing Stories**. He won the Hugo Award four times and the Nebula Award once. With nearly five hundred books to his name and several hundred articles, Asimov's output was prolific by any standards. He died in 1992 at the age of 72."

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