

## I.Q. Tests: Building Blocks for the New Class System

In the following article Noam Chomsky discusses the controversial views of Harvard Psychologist Richard Herrnstein, which first received widespread attention when they were presented, under the laconic title "I.Q." in the September 1971 Atlantic. Herrnstein stands as one of the more intellectually respectable of a recent crop of scientific apologists for social inequity, the more notorious exponents ranging downward through Berkeley Professor A. R. Jensen, to the lower depths occupied by William Shockley, the Stanford electrical engineer. But if all these academics cannot be fairly lumped together without distinction, one thing they do share in common is the basic intellectual decrepitude of their arguments, which in essence they have merely dug up from the past and fitted out in terms that suit the current mode.

Class subordination and social privilege have never been

the most promising subjects for ethical defense. Historically the defenses that have been mustered, and which could be espoused with any presentable show of disinterest or conviction, have turned out to be very few, and by now rather ancient. But since every system of social inequality craves to be legitimized, the same time worn apologia of privilege have had to be perennially resurrected. And in each case an attempt is made to draw renewed conviction from the particular epoch's most vital springs of faith.

Thus, in orthodox times the social order is sanctified by its conformity to the Divine Order, a sanctity which has been considered useful at one time or another by both the pedigreed noble and the successful bourgeois, by the anointed and the elect.

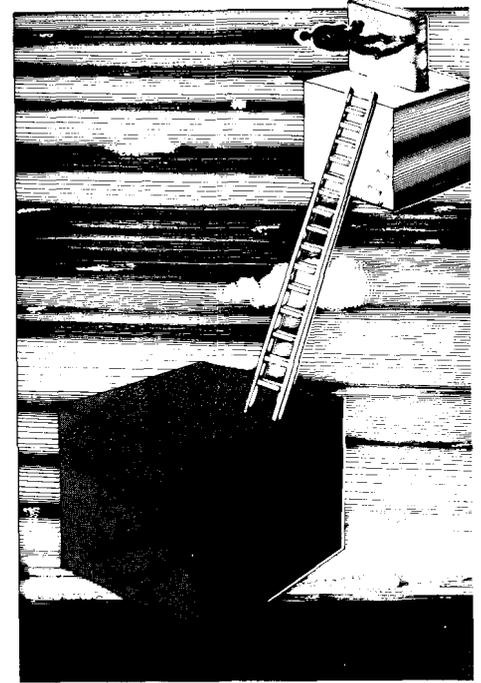
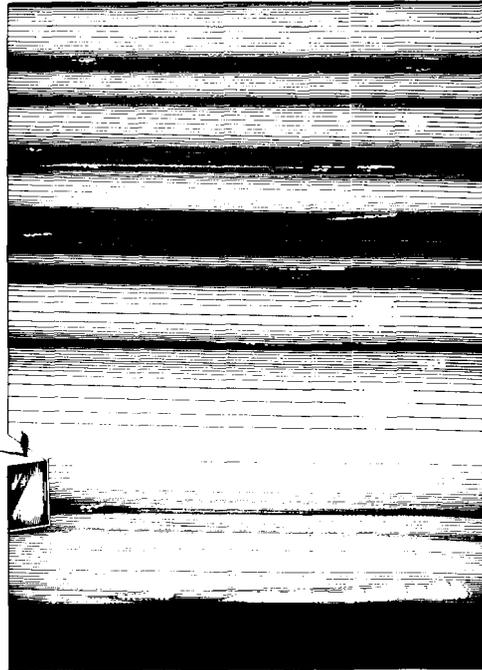
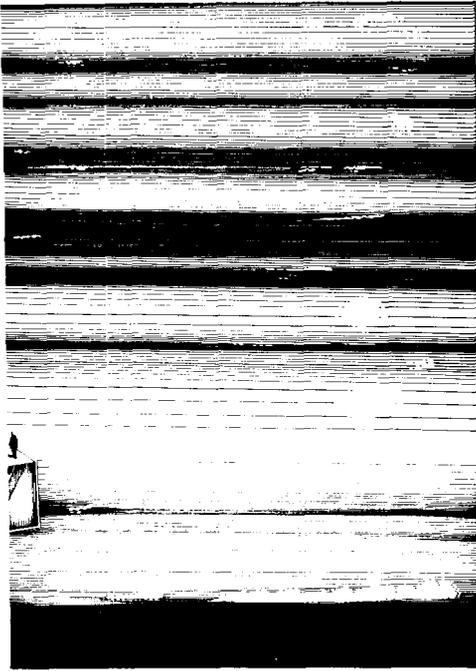
In a period (like our own) when rationalism casts doubt on divine testimonials on behalf of the ruling class, a substitute is usually found in science. Privilege is now shown to be in conformity with the Natural Order rather than the Divine. Class subordination is no longer "what God decreed," but "what Nature intended."

For those on top, whether their endorsement comes from science or religion, the main thing is that authority is on the side of power. Of course for people (like ourselves) who consider themselves hardheaded, the appeal to science has always been more persuasive, since any subjective inclination of the privileged in favor of the status quo will presumably be tested against objective data.

Aristotle, for instance, considering whether slavery was really natural and just, appealed to the evidence of biology: "all tame animals are better off when they are ruled by man; for then they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled," and he concludes, "this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind."

The Greeks generally at this time relied on an objective criterion to indicate the naturally subordinate. The barbaros, meaning those people who did not speak Greek,

by Noam Chomsky



were set off almost as a distinct species by their deficient linguistic ability. Greek speaking served as a kind of I.Q. test for them, and those who flunked it were fair game to be conquered and enslaved.

An appeal to science was also made by Thomas Hobbes in his defense of absolutist government and total submission to established power. These were necessary, he argued, as the only viable alternative to the intolerable state suffered by people lacking such an authority. So that we should not have to rely on his own speculative assessment of the dire alternative to absolutist rule, Hobbes resorted to what we now call anthropology, citing empirical data gathered by observers in the field: "The savage people in many places of America, except for the government of small families, the concord whereof depends on natural lust, have no government at all and live at this day in that brutish manner as I said before."

In the 19th century, Charles Darwin's depiction of Survival of the Fittest gave a tremendous scientific boost to those who wished to believe that the people on the top in society were there because they deserved to be. In Bertrand Russell's words, Darwin's model was popularly pictured as "a global free competition, in which victory went to the animals that most resembled successful capitalists."

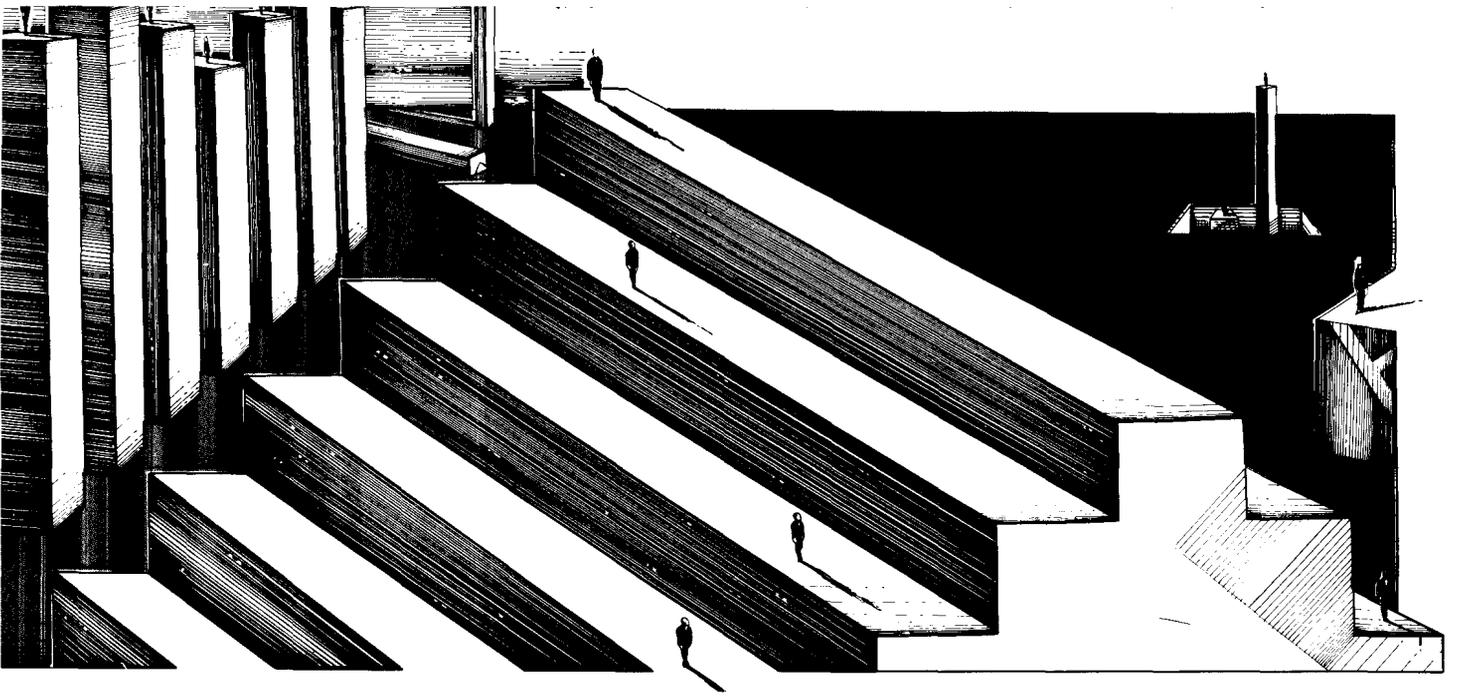
Of course nowadays the self-serving interpretations and anecdotal methods that used to pass for science would influence no one. Today we give credence only to what impresses us as hard data, and we look for the authenticating signs: everybody recognizes that laboratories are scientific, and everybody knows that numbers are precise. It is natural then that the current attempts to legitimize class subordination and social privilege should employ these present day talismans of scientific authority as they are applied in the study of human psychology. So we have appeals first to the principles of behaviorist psychology, whose identification with the laboratory is so complete because they never found much in reality outside

of it; and second to the statistics of the I.Q. which being numerical are thought to transform the amorphous concept of intelligence into something quantifiably precise.

Appeals to one or both of these are the basis of the new genre of scientific apologia for established privilege and the status quo. Although white racial chauvinism is not flatly expounded in the more respectable of the various arguments, it is always present. And it is clear that in the consciousness and unconsciousness of white America there exists a longing to have the socially repressed ugliness of candid racism vindicated and unleashed by prestigious professors using two dollar words. There is the feeling that if debator's points could be won in a few university classrooms, the great historical imperatives of racial justice that are straining and testing American society will somehow be eased, and continued suppression of black people will suddenly be morally sanctioned and socially tenable.

It is odd that these academicians and others ever got the idea in the first place that the roots of the intractable racial conflict in America could be searched out by probing for a statistical margin of racial difference. The manifest social reality that stares us in the face is just the opposite. It is precisely the tension between equality and inequity that is so agonizing and explosive. Hobbes understood the dynamic of equality and social conflict far better than today's computerized numerologists: "From this equality of ability arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies . . . and from hence it comes to pass that . . . if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come with forces united to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labor, but also of his life or liberty. And the invader again is in the like danger of another."

—DAVID KOLODNEY



**I**N THE TEN MONTHS SINCE DR. RICHARD HERRNSTEIN'S article "I.Q." first appeared in the *Atlantic*, it has become the focus of an intriguing controversy, predictably intense but surprisingly sustained. There is no question that Herrnstein's argument is provocative; he purports to show that American society is drifting inexorably towards a stable hereditary meritocracy, towards a social stratification determined by inborn differences and a corresponding distribution of "rewards."

Herrnstein's argument is based first of all on the hypothesis that differences in mental abilities are inherited and that people close to one another in mental ability are more likely to marry and reproduce so that there will be a tendency toward long-term stratification by mental ability (which Herrnstein takes to be measured by I.Q.). Secondly, Herrnstein argues that "success" requires mental ability and that social rewards "depend on success." This step in the argument embodies two assumptions: that it is so in fact; and that it must be so for society to function effectively. The conclusion is that there is a tendency toward hereditary meritocracy, with "social standing (which reflects earnings and prestige)" concentrated in groups with higher I.Q.'s. This tendency will be accelerated as society becomes more egalitarian, that is, as artificial social barriers are eliminated, defects in prenatal (e.g., nutritional) environment are overcome, and so on, so that natural ability can play a more direct role in attainment of social reward. Therefore, as society becomes more egalitarian, social rewards will be concentrated in a hereditary meritocratic elite.

Herrnstein has been widely denounced as a racist for this argument, a conclusion which seems to me unwarranted. There is, however, an ideological element in his argument that is absolutely critical to it. Consider the second step, that is, the claim that I.Q. is a factor in attaining reward and that this must be so for society to function effectively. Herrnstein recognizes that his argument will collapse if, indeed, society can be organized in accordance with the "socialist dictum, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'" His argument would not apply in a society in which "income (economic, social, and

political) is unaffected by success."

Actually, Herrnstein fails to point out that his argument not only requires the assumption that success must be rewarded, but that it must be rewarded in quite specific ways. If individuals were rewarded for success only by prestige, then no conclusions of any importance would follow. It would only follow (granting his other assumptions) that the children of people respected for their achievements would be more likely to win respect by achievements of their own—an innocuous result even if true. It may be that the child of two Olympic swimmers has a greater than average chance of achieving the same success (and the acclaim for it), but no dire social consequences follow from this hypothesis.

The conclusion that Herrnstein and others find disturbing is that wealth and power will tend to concentrate in a hereditary meritocracy. But this follows only on the assumption that the rewards of successful achievement must be wealth and power (not merely respect) and that these (or their effects) must be transmittable, that is, allowed to be passed on from parents to children. The issue is confused by Herrnstein's failure to isolate the specific factors crucial to his argument, and his use of the phrase "income (economic, social, and political)" to cover "rewards" of all types, including respect as well as wealth. It is confused further by the fact that he continually slips into identifying "social standing" with wealth. Thus, for example, he writes that, if the social ladder is tapered steeply, the obvious way to rescue the people at the bottom is "to increase the aggregate wealth of society so that there is more room at the top"—which is untrue if "social standing" is solely a matter of acclaim and respect. (We overlook the fact that even on his tacit assumption, redistribution of income would appear to be an equally obvious strategy.)

Consider then the narrower assumption that is crucial to his argument: not just that transmittable wealth and power do presently accrue to mental ability, but that they must for society to function effectively. If this assumption is false and society *can* be organized more or less in accordance with the "socialist dictum," then nothing is left of

Herrnstein's argument (except that it will apply to a competitive society in which his other factual assumptions hold). But, Herrnstein claims, the assumption is true. The reason is that an individual's ability "expresses itself in labor only for gain" and people "compete for gain—economic and otherwise." People will work only if they are rewarded in terms of "social and political influence or relief from threat." All of this is merely asserted; no justification is given.

What reason is there to believe the crucial assumption that, because people will work only for gain in (transmittable) wealth and power, society cannot be organized in accordance with the socialist dictum? In a decent society, everyone would have the opportunity to find interesting work, and each person would be permitted the fullest possible scope for his talents. Would more be required—in particular, extrinsic reward in the form of wealth and power? Only if we assume that applying one's talents in interesting and socially useful work is not rewarding in itself, that there is no intrinsic satisfaction in creative and productive work, suited to one's abilities, or in helping others (say, one's family, friends, associates, or simply fellow members of society). Unless we suppose this, then even granting all of Herrnstein's other assumptions, it does not follow that there should be any concentration of wealth or power in a hereditary elite.

For Herrnstein's argument to have any force at all we must assume that people labor only for gain, and that the satisfaction found in interesting or socially beneficial work or in work well-done or in the respect shown to such activities, is not a sufficient "gain" to induce anyone to work. The assumption, in short, is that without material reward, people will vegetate. For this crucial assumption, no semblance of an argument is offered. Rather, Herrnstein merely asserts that if bakers and lumberjacks "got the top salaries and the top social approval,"\* in place of those now at the top of the social ladder, then "the scale of I.Q.'s would also invert," and the most talented would strive to become bakers and lumberjacks. This, of course, is not an argument, but merely a reiteration of the claim that, necessarily, individuals work only for extrinsic reward. Furthermore, it is an extremely implausible claim. I doubt very much that Herrnstein would become a baker or lumberjack if he could earn more money that way.

Similar points are made in the commentary on Herrnstein's article in the November, 1971 *Atlantic*.\*\* In this response he merely reiterates his belief that there is no way "to end the blight of differential rewards." Repeated assertion, however, is not to be confused with argument. Herrnstein's further contention that "history shows . . ." in effect concedes defeat. Of course history shows concentration of wealth and power in the hands of those able to accumulate it. One thought Herrnstein was trying to do more than merely expound this truism.

If we look more carefully at what history and experience show, we find that, where free exercise is permitted to the qualities of ruthlessness, cunning, and the other ingredients of "success" in competitive societies, then those who have these qualities will rise to the top and will use their wealth

\* He does not specifically mention this assumption, but it is necessary to the argument.

\*\* Note again Herrnstein's failure to distinguish remuneration from social approval, though the argument collapses if the only reward is approval.

and power to preserve and extend the privileges they attain. They will also construct ideologies to demonstrate that this result is only fair and just. We also find, contrary to capitalist ideology and behaviorist doctrine, that many people often do not act solely, or even primarily, so as to achieve material gain, or even so as to maximize applause. As for the argument (if offered) that "history shows" the untenability of the "socialist dictum," this may be assigned the same status as an argument made in the 18th century that capitalist democracy is impossible, as history then showed. Evidently, from the lessons of history we can reach only the most tentative conclusions about basic human tendencies.

Suppose that Herrnstein's crucial and unargued claim is incorrect. Suppose that there is in fact some intrinsic satisfaction in employing one's talents in challenging and creative work. Then, one might argue, this should compensate even for a diminution of extrinsic reward; and "reinforcement" should be given for the performance of unpleasant and boring tasks. It follows, then, that there should be a concentration of wealth (and the power that comes from wealth) among the less talented. I do not urge this conclusion, but merely observe that it is more plausible than Herrnstein's if his fundamental and unsupported assumption is false.

The belief that people must be driven or drawn to work by "gain" is a curious one. Of course, it is true if we use the vacuous behaviorist scheme and speak of the "reinforcing quality" of interesting or useful work; the belief may also be true, though irrelevant to Herrnstein's thesis, if the "gain" sought is merely general respect and prestige. But the assumption necessary for Herrnstein's argument is that people must be driven or drawn to work by the quest for wealth or power. This obviously does not derive from science, nor does it appear to be supported by personal experience. I suspect that Herrnstein would exclude himself from the generalization, as already noted. Thus I am not convinced that he would at once apply for a job as a garbage collector if this were to pay more than his present position as a teacher and research psychologist. He would say, I am sure, that he does his work not because it maximizes wealth (or even prestige) but because it is interesting and challenging, that is, intrinsically rewarding; and there is no reason to doubt that this response would be correct. The statistical evidence, he points out, suggests that "if very high income is your goal, and you have a high I.Q., do not waste your time with formal education beyond high school." Thus, if you are an economic maximizer with a high I.Q. don't bother with a college education. Few follow this advice, quite probably because they prefer interesting work to mere material reward. The assumption that people will work only for gain in wealth and power is not only unargued, but quite probably false, except under extreme deprivation. But this degrading and brutal assumption, common to capitalist ideology and the behaviorist view of human beings, is fundamental to Herrnstein's argument.

**T**HERE ARE OTHER IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS in Herrnstein's argument, more peripheral, but still worth noting. He invariably describes the society he sees evolving as a "meritocracy," thus expressing the value judgment that the characteristics that yield reward are a sign of merit, that is, positive characteristics. He con-

siders I.Q. specifically, but of course recognizes that there might very well be other factors in the attainment of "social success." One might speculate, rather plausibly, that wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority, willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on. Furthermore, these less endearing traits might well be as heritable as I.Q., and might outweigh I.Q. as factors in gaining material reward. Such qualities might be just the most valuable ones for a Hobbsean war of all against all. If so, then the society that results (applying Herrnstein's "syllogism") could hardly be characterized as a "meritocracy." By using the word "meritocracy" Herrnstein begs some interesting questions and reveals implicit assumptions about our society that are hardly self-evident.

Teachers in ghetto schools commonly observe that students who are self-reliant, imaginative, energetic and unwilling to submit to authority are often regarded as troublemakers and punished, on occasion even driven out of the school system. The implicit assumption that in a highly discriminatory society, or one with tremendous inequality of wealth and power, the "meritorious" will be rewarded, is a curious one indeed.

Consider further Herrnstein's assumption that in fact social rewards accrue to those who perform beneficial and needed services. He claims that the "gradient of occupations" is "a natural measure of value and scarcity," and that "the ties among I.Q., occupation, and social standing make practical sense." This is his way of expressing the familiar theory that people are automatically rewarded in a just society (and more or less in our society) in accordance with their contributions to social welfare or "output." The theory is familiar, and so are its fallacies.

To assume that society's rewards go to those who have performed a social service is to succumb to essentially the same fallacy (among others) involved in the claim that a free market leads to the optimal satisfaction of wants. In fact, when wealth is badly distributed, a free market will tend to produce luxuries for the few who can pay, rather than necessities for the many who cannot. Similarly, given great inequalities of wealth, we will expect to find that the "gradient of occupations" by pay is a natural measure, not of service to society but of service to wealth and power, to those who can purchase and compel. The ties among I.Q., occupation, and social standing that Herrnstein notes make "practical sense" for those with wealth and power, but not necessarily for society or its members in general.

The point is quite obvious. Herrnstein's failure to notice it is particularly surprising given the data on which he bases his observations about the relation between social reward and occupation. He bases these judgments on a ranking of occupations which shows, for example, that accountants, specialists in public relations, auditors, and sales managers tend to have higher I.Q.'s (hence, he would claim, receive higher pay, as they must if society is to function effectively) than musicians, riveters, bakers, lumberjacks and teamsters. Accountants were ranked highest among 74 listed occupations, with public relations 4th, musicians 35th, riveters 50th, bakers 65th, truck drivers 67th, and lumberjacks 70th. From such data, Herrnstein concludes that society is wisely

"husbanding its intellectual resources"\* and that the gradient of occupation is a natural measure of value and makes practical sense.

Is it obvious that an accountant helping a corporation to cut its tax bill is doing work of greater social value than a musician, riveter, baker, truck driver, or lumberjack? Is a lawyer who earns a \$100,000 fee to keep a dangerous drug on the market worth more to society than a farm worker or a nurse? Is a surgeon who performs operations for the rich doing work of greater social value than a practitioner in the slums, who may work much harder for much less extrinsic reward? The gradient of occupations that Herrnstein uses to support his claims surely reflects, at least in part, the demands of wealth and power; a further argument is needed to demonstrate Herrnstein's claim that those at the top of the list are performing the highest service to "society," which is wisely husbanding its resources by rewarding accountants and public relations experts and engineers (e.g., designers of anti-personnel weapons) for their special skills. Herrnstein's failure to notice what his data immediately suggest is another indication of his uncritical and apparently unconscious acceptance of capitalist ideology in its crudest form.

If the ranking of occupations by I.Q. correlates with ranking by income, this could be interpreted in part as indicating an unfortunate social bias leading able individuals toward occupations that serve the wealthy and powerful and away from work that might be more satisfying and socially useful. This would certainly seem at least a plausible assumption, but one that Herrnstein never discusses, given his unquestioning acceptance of the prevailing ideology.

There is, no doubt, some complex of characteristics conducive to material reward in a stable capitalist society. This complex may include I.Q. and quite possibly other more important factors, perhaps those noted earlier. To the extent that these characteristics are heritable (and a factor in choosing mates) there will be a tendency toward stratification in terms of these qualities. This much is obvious enough.

Furthermore, people with higher I.Q.'s will tend to have more freedom in selection of occupation. Depending on their other traits and opportunities, they will tend to choose more interesting work or more remunerative work, these categories being by no means identical. Therefore one can expect to find some correlation between I.Q. and material reward, and some correlation between I.Q. and an independent ranking of occupations according to their intrinsic interest and intellectual challenge. Were we to rank occupations by social utility in some manner, we would probably find at most a weak correlation with remuneration or with intrinsic interest, and quite possibly a negative correlation. Unequal distribution of wealth and power will naturally introduce a bias toward greater remuneration for services to the privileged, thereby causing the scale of re-

\* Misleading. Herrnstein states: "society is, in effect, husbanding its intellectual resources by holding engineers in greater esteem and paying them more." But if he really wants to claim this on the basis of the ties between I.Q. and social standing that his data reveal, then he should conclude as well that society is husbanding its intellectual resources by holding accountants and PR men in greater esteem and paying them more. Quite apart from this, it is not so obvious as he apparently believes that society is wisely husbanding its intellectual resources by employing most of its scientists and engineers in military and space R-and-D.

muneration to diverge from the scale of social utility in many instances.

From Herrnstein's data and arguments, we can draw no further conclusions about what would happen in a just society—unless we add the assumption that people labor only for material gain, for wealth and power, and that unless offered such a reward they would rather vegetate than seek interesting work suited to their abilities. Since Herrnstein offers no reason why we should believe any of this (and there is certainly some reason why we should not), none of his conclusions follow from his factual assumptions, even if these are correct. The crucial step in his "syllogism" in effect amounts to a bare assertion that the ideology of capitalist society accurately expresses universal traits of human nature, and that certain related, implicit assumptions of behaviorist psychology are correct. Conceivably, these unsupported assumptions are true. But once it is recognized how critical their role is in Herrnstein's argument and how insubstantial their empirical support, any further interest in this argument would seem to evaporate.

I have assumed so far that prestige, respect, and so on might be factors in causing people to work (as Herrnstein implies). This seems to me by no means obvious, though, even if it is true, Herrnstein's conclusions clearly do not follow. In a decent society, socially necessary and unpleasant work would be divided on some egalitarian basis, and beyond that people would have, as an inalienable right, the widest possible opportunity to do work that interests them. They might be rewarded ("reinforced") by self-respect, if they do their work to the best of their ability, or if their work benefits those to whom they are related by bonds of friendship and sympathy and solidarity. Such projections are commonly an object of ridicule—as it was common, in an earlier period, to scoff at the absurd idea that a peasant had the same inalienable rights as a nobleman. There always have been, and no doubt always will be, people who cannot conceive of the possibility that things could be different from what they are. Perhaps they are right, but again one awaits a rational argument.

In a decent society of the sort just described—which, one might think, becomes increasingly realizable with technological progress—there should be no shortage of scientists, engineers, surgeons, artists, craftsmen, teachers, and so on, simply because such work is intrinsically rewarding. There is no reason to doubt that people in these occupations would work as hard as those fortunate few who can choose their own work generally do today. Of course, if Herrnstein's assumptions, borrowed from capitalist ideology and behaviorist belief, are correct, then people will remain idle rather than do such work unless there is deprivation and extrinsic reward. But no reason is suggested as to why we should accept this strange and demeaning doctrine.

**L**URKING IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE OVER Herrnstein's syllogism is the matter of race, though he himself barely alludes to it. His critics are disturbed, and rightly so, by the fact that his argument will surely be exploited by racists to justify discrimination, much as Herrnstein may personally deplore this fact. More generally, Herrnstein's argument will be adopted

by the privileged to justify their privilege on grounds that they are being rewarded for their ability and that such reward is necessary if society is to function properly. The situation is reminiscent of 19th century racist anthropology. Marvin Harris notes:

*Racism also had its use as a justification for class and caste hierarchies; it was a splendid explanation of both national and class privilege. It helped to maintain slavery and serfdom; it smoothed the way for the rape of Africa and the slaughter of the American Indian; it steeled the nerves of the Manchester captains of industry as they lowered wages, lengthened the working day, and hired more women and children.\**

We can expect Herrnstein's arguments to be used in a similar way, and for similar reasons. When we discover that his argument is without force, unless we adopt unargued and implausible premises that happen to incorporate the dominant ideology, we quite naturally turn to the question of the social function of his conclusions and ask why the argument is taken seriously.

Since the issue is often obscured by polemic, it is perhaps worth stating again that the question of the validity and scientific status of a particular point of view is of course logically independent from the question of its social function. But each is a legitimate topic of inquiry, and the social function takes on a particular interest when the point of view in question is revealed to be seriously deficient on empirical or logical grounds.

The 19th century racist anthropologists were no doubt quite often honest and sincere. They may have believed that they were simply dispassionate investigators, advancing science, following the facts where they led. Conceding this, we might nevertheless question their judgment, and not merely because the evidence was poor and the arguments fallacious. We might take note of the relative lack of concern over the ways in which these "scientific investigations" were likely to be used. It would be a poor excuse for the 19th century racist anthropologist to plead, in Herrnstein's words, that "a neutral commentator . . . would have to say that the case is simply not settled" (with regard to racial inferiority) and that the "fundamental issue" is "whether inquiry shall (again) be shut off because someone thinks society is best left in ignorance." The 19th century racist anthropologist, like any other person, is responsible for the effects of what he does, insofar as they can be clearly foreseen. If the likely consequences of his "scientific work" are those that Harris describes, he has the responsibility to take this likelihood into account. This would be true even if the work had real scientific merit—in fact, more so in that case.

Similarly, imagine a psychologist in Hitler's Germany who thought he could show that Jews had a genetically determined tendency toward usury (like squirrels bred to collect too many nuts) or a drive toward anti-social conspiracy and domination, and so on. If he were criticized for even undertaking these studies, would it be sufficient for him to respond that "a natural commentator . . . would have to say that the case is simply not settled" and that the "fundamental issue" is "whether inquiry shall (again) be shut off because someone thinks society is best left in

\* *Op. cit.*, p. 106.

ignorance?" I think not. I think that such a response would have been met with justifiable contempt. At best, he could claim that he is faced with a conflict of values. On the one hand, there is the alleged scientific importance of determining whether in fact Jews have a genetically determined tendency toward usury and domination (an empirical question, no doubt). On the other, there is the likelihood that even opening this question and regarding it as a subject for scientific inquiry would provide ammunition for Goebbels and Rosenberg and their henchmen. Were this hypothetical psychologist to disregard the likely social consequences of his research (or even of his undertaking such research) under existing social conditions, he would fully deserve the contempt of decent people. Of course, scientific curiosity should be encouraged (though fallacious argument and investigation of silly questions should not), but it is not an absolute value.

The extravagant praise lavished on Herrnstein's flimsy argument and the widespread failure to note its implicit bias and unargued assumptions\* suggest that we are not dealing simply with a question of scientific curiosity. Since it is impossible to explain this acclaim on the basis of the substance or force of the argument, it is natural to ask whether the conclusions are so welcome to many commentators that they lose their critical faculties and fail to perceive that certain crucial and quite unsupported assumptions happen to be nothing other than a variant of the prevailing ideology. This failure is disturbing, more so, perhaps, than the conclusions Herrnstein attempts to draw from his flawed syllogism.

Turning to the question of race and intelligence, we are granting too much to the contemporary investigator of this question when we see him as faced with a conflict of values: scientific curiosity versus social consequences. Given the virtual certainty that even the undertaking of the inquiry will reinforce some of the most despicable features of our society, the authenticity of the presumed moral dilemma depends critically on the scientific significance of the issue that he is choosing to investigate. Even if the scientific significance were immense, we should certainly question the seriousness of the dilemma, given the likely social consequences. But if the scientific interest of any possible finding is slight, then the dilemma vanishes.

In fact, it seems that the question of the relation, if any, between race and intelligence has very little scientific importance (as it has no social importance, except under the assumptions of a racist society). A possible correlation between mean I.Q. and skin color is of no greater scientific interest than a correlation between any two other arbitrarily selected traits, say, mean height and color of eyes. The empirical results, whatever they might be, appear to have little bearing on any issue of scientific significance. In the present state of scientific understanding, there would appear to be little interest in the discovery that one partly heritable trait correlates (or does not) with another partly heritable trait. Such questions might be interesting if the results had some bearing, say, on hypotheses about the physiological mechanisms involved, but this is not the case. Therefore the investigation seems of quite limited scientific interest, and the zeal and intensity with which some pursue or welcome it

cannot reasonably be attributed to a dispassionate desire to advance science. It would, of course, be foolish to claim, in response, that "society should not be left in ignorance." Society is happily "in ignorance" of an infinitude of insignificant matters of all sorts. And, with the best of will, it is difficult to avoid questioning the good faith of those who deplore the alleged "anti-intellectualism" of the critics of scientifically trivial and socially malicious investigations. On the contrary, the investigator of race and intelligence might do well to explain the intellectual significance of the topic he is studying, and thus enlighten us as to the moral dilemma he perceives. If he perceives none, the conclusion is obvious, with no further discussion.

As to social importance, a correlation between race and mean I.Q. (were this shown to exist) entails no social consequences except in a racist society in which each individual is assigned to a racial category and dealt with not as an individual in his own right, but as a representative of this category. Herrnstein mentions a possible correlation between height and I.Q. Of what social importance is that? None, of course, since our society does not suffer under discrimination by height. We do not insist on assigning each adult to the category "below six feet in height" or "above six feet in height" when we ask what sort of education he should receive or where he should live or what work he should do. Rather, he is what he is, quite independent of the mean I.Q. of people of his height category. In a non-racist society, the category of race would be of no greater significance. The mean I.Q. of individuals of a certain racial background is irrelevant to the situation of a particular individual, who is what he is. Recognizing this perfectly obvious fact, we are left with little, if any, plausible justification for an interest in the relation between mean I.Q. and race, apart from the "justification" provided by the existence of racial discrimination.

The question of heritability of I.Q. might conceivably have some social importance, say, with regard to educational practice. However, even this seems dubious, and one would like to see an argument. It is, incidentally, surprising to me that so many commentators should find it disturbing that I.Q. might be heritable, perhaps largely so. An advertisement in the *Harvard Crimson* (November 29, 1971), signed by many faculty members, refers to the "disturbing conclusion that 'intelligence' is largely genetic, so that over many, many years society might evolve into classes marked by distinctly different levels of ability." Since, as already noted, the conclusion does not follow from the premise, it may be that what disturbs the signers is the "conclusion that 'intelligence' is largely genetic." Why this should seem disturbing remains obscure. Would it also be disturbing to discover that relative height, or musical talent, or rank in running the 100 yard dash, is in part genetically determined? Why should one have preconceptions one way or another about these questions, and how do the answers to them, whatever they may be, relate either to serious scientific issues (in the present state of our knowledge) or to social practice, in a decent society?

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Noam Chomsky's books include *Syntactic Structures* (Humanities Press), *American Power and the New Mandarins* and *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom* (Pantheon).

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\* See the correspondence in the *Atlantic*, November, 1971.



## This Land is Their Land

“Welfare is a problem for taxpayers—welfare for the rich. In a recent year 500 large growers in California’s Imperial Valley received \$12 million in farm subsidies—or \$24,000 each. Meanwhile 10,000 poor, landless residents of the Valley received less than \$8 million in welfare payments—or \$800 each. George Thayer, a California almond grower, told the committee: ‘I believe we have created the worst welfare system of all times—the welfare system for the corporate farm.’”

*The wheat field is ten miles long. There’s a machine — one colossal machine — harvesting the wheat, rumbling toward the setting sun on tracks which keep it from compacting the soil. A helicopter sprays pesticide on the adjacent soybean field. Another helicopter circles, scanning crop conditions, transmitting data to a computer. Two men sit in a bubble-topped control tower, watching the instrument panels which surround them. The lengthening shadows of three giant skyscrapers—skyscrapers filled with cattle—fall on the men. In these nearly fully-automated structures they (the cattle) are fed various chemicals, fattened, killed, processed, and packed into cylinders for shipment by monorail to the Cities, which are, presumably, where all the people are.*

**T**HIS IS A PICTURE OF THE AMERICAN farm in the year 2015, as sketched by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) specialists. To them it is irresistibly appealing: ten whole miles filled with great amber waves of grain. Yet the implications of their vision are chilling: environmental ruin, nutritional famine, wrenching social dislocation. Who will own this futuristic farm? What will be its economic and environmental costs, and who will pay them? The government’s crystal-gazing agronomists cannot be relied upon for answers. But already, at every link in America’s economic food chain, vast transformations are at work which provide some exceedingly disturbing clues. We can begin with an implausible assertion and a surprising fact.

by Larry Casalino