Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

This is not an IQ test [1]

Written by **Ben Southwood** [2] | Tuesday 3 December 2013

Boris Johnson's recent CPS speech [3], which among other things discussed intelligence and inequality, has caused such a storm that David Cameron [4] and George Osborne [5] were forced to distance themselves from his comments. There is an interesting point to be made about how distressingly and obnoxiously ugly this "everything is offensive" aspect of modernity is, where people are punished for neo-blasphemy either by the mob [6], or even by laws against heresy [7]. These heresies needn't be correct, and indeed can often be repellent, but the manner of their repression is so depressing and generally grim. But I don't want to make this point. I don't even want to talk much about how misguided the IQ ignorers are, as Tom Chivers has already made this point [8], in his excellent Telegraph blog post.

Instead I want to just point out how different the "IQ test" (three trick questions) Boris was given live on LBC radio [9] was to an actual intelligence measure.

> "A man builds a house with four sides of rectangular construction each side with southern exposure. A big bear comes along. What is the colour of the bear?"

Supposed answer: white, because you can only have four south-facing walls if you're in the Arctic.

> "Take two apples from three apples and what do you have?"

Supposed answer: two, because you've taken two apples.

> "I went to bed at eight in the evening last night and I wound up my clock and set my alarm to sound for nine o'clock in the morning. How many hours sleep did I get?"

Supposed answer: one, since wind-up alarm clocks do not discriminate between am and pm.

These questions are ridiculous, meaningless ambiguities and the third one might even be incoherent (how can you wind it until 9am if it doesn't recognise the distinction between am and pm?). I'd guess they are more likely to test knowledge of the questioner's intention than anything like g (what scientists in the field

call general intelligence).

Have these people seen any actual IQ tests that are used in real research? For example Raven's Progressive Matrices [10], where one must discern a pattern from matrices of simple diagrams, or any of the many different tests used in Wechsler's Adult Intelligence Scale [11], or for developing minds, Wechsler's Intelligence Scale for Children [12].

Funnily enough, I highly suspect that the correlation between answering those "lateral thinking" questions and life outcomes is much weaker than that between IQ measured on the WISC or WAIS. And this linkage, which articles in the Guardian and Observer have not so much disputed (though letters have [13]) as attempted to associate with badness (see Andrew Rawnsley here [14]), is pretty important [15]. In fact, it usually trumps upbringing [16] when it comes to children born out of wedlock [17], income [18], number of weeks worked [19] and many other indicators of well-being. Noticing these, and not condemning greed as Worse Than Hitler (TM) should not make Boris himself Worse Than Hitler (TM).

And I didn't even mention what brave and good policies London's mayor has on housebuilding [20], migration [21], and London transport [22]!

blog comments powered by Disqus [24]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/miscellaneous/this-is-not-an-iq-test

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/miscellaneous/this-is-not-an-iq-test
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5918
[3] http://www.cps.org.uk/events/q/date/2013/11/27/the-2013-margaret-thatcher-lecture-boris-johnson/
[4] http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/02/david-cameron-boris-johnson-iq
[5] http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/01/george-osborne-boris-johnson-iq
[6] https://twitter.com/edwestonline/status/407872961228443650
[7] https://twitter.com/edwestonline/status/407853432775528449
[8] http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tomchiversscience/100248255/on-boris-johnson-and-intelligence-its-not-clever-to-

pretend-iq-doesnt-matter/
[9] http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/03/boris-johnson-fails-live-iq-test
[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raven%27s_Progressive_Matrices
[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wechsler_Adult_Intelligence_Scale
[12] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wechsler_Intelligence_Scale_for_Children
[13] http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/01/borisconi-iq-top-cornflake-packet
[14] http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/01/boris-johnsons-views-like-brave-new-world-dystopia
[15] http://i.imgur.com/OhcK7xv.png
[16] http://www.mega.nu/ampp/murray_income_iq.pdf
[17] http://i.imgur.com/DC3EBYw.png
[18] http://i.imgur.com/UBHgq4x.png
[19] http://i.imgur.com/4ijewTW.png
[20] http://www.building.co.uk/boris-pledges-to-double-housebuilding-in-london/5064057.article
[21] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10404421/Boris-I-am-the-only-British-politician-who-will-admit-to-being-pro-immigration.html
[22] http://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tube-to-run-all-night-at-weekends-on-five-lines-from-autumn-2015-london-underground-reveals-8953898.html
[23] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[24] http://disqus.com