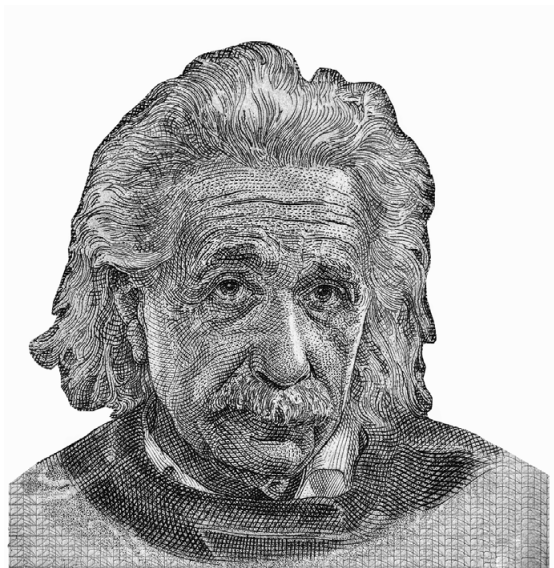


### Are You Too Smart to Think Wisely?

adapted from a blog by Eva M. Krockow Ph.D.

- 1 What do Albert Einstein and Arthur Conan Doyle have in common? They both were ground-breaking geniuses, of course! Einstein spearheaded modern physics and Conan Doyle created brilliant fiction. However, their astronomical IQ isn't the only similarity. Despite their incontestable intelligence, they held seriously misguided beliefs about major aspects of life. Einstein was a firm believer in socialism and refused to recognise the failure of the Soviet Union. Conan Doyle believed in fairies and thought his own wife could talk to spirits.



- 2 If Einstein and Conan Doyle were so very clever, how could they possibly hold such mistaken beliefs? It seems like a high IQ alone is not predictive of wise decision making and overall life success. In fact, brain power may often contribute to severe reasoning mistakes, and here is why.
- 3 IQ tests only measure analytic skills and the speed with which we solve verbal or numerical problems. However, an increasing number of scientists suggest that things aren't quite so simple. Perhaps analytic intelligence is only one dimension of intelligence, which does not reflect the entire breadth of skills required for successful decision making? What about practical intelligence, which describes pragmatic life skills such as the ability to plan a multi-legged journey? And then there is creative intelligence, which refers to the ability to think outside the box and imagine alternative solutions. These types of intelligence appear to be important for wise decision making as well.
- 4 People within the normal IQ range doubt their own judgements and are therefore more 21 the idea that they can make mistakes. Above-average geniuses, on the other hand, frequently fail to consider the possibility of errors, with a tendency to stubbornly believe they're always right, thereby leaving them particularly vulnerable to common biases.
- 5 A particularly powerful bias affecting intelligent people is the confirmation bias (also called myside-bias), which can be described as a tendency to

produce justification or make decisions that are most desired by seeking supportive arguments for their own opinion and neglecting any criticism or counter-evidence. By applying their intelligence in a one-sided, biased manner to justify their own ideas and theories, the analytic skills of a genius can therefore serve to perpetuate mistakes.

- 6 Mere hunches made by intelligent people can be surprisingly accurate. This is because many clever people have expert knowledge in their fields of interest, and expert knowledge is usually associated with automatic, gist-based reasoning and a more holistic understanding of the topic. Despite high accuracy rates, however, experts are not infallible.
- 7 **24** Let's think of the human brain as a car engine, with high IQ equating to engine power. While cars with powerful engines inevitably drive faster than others, they don't necessarily end up in the right place. Obviously, their destination will depend just as much on steering as on speed. For example, driving the latest Ferrari might help you overtake the neighbour's old VW Beetle, but it is unlikely to prevent you from getting stuck in a dead-end, from going round in endless circles, or from shooting off a cliff. Similarly, a quick-wired brain might help you process information faster and find a quicker solution. However, if the direction of your reasoning is influenced by dangerous biases, your errors are likely to be only aggravated by your speed of thinking.
- 8 I am certainly familiar with the flaws of the highly intelligent. Not only am I tragically inept when it comes to operating new washing machines or TVs (or any electric appliance, really), I also keep falling for the ever-multiplying health and beauty myths spread by women's magazines all over the world. Note to self: If you come across a face cream that's supposed to remove spots and wrinkles while giving you a natural-looking tan and making your nose look smaller, it's probably a scam!
- 9 So how can you avoid foolish mistakes fuelled by your own intelligence? Open-mindedness, continuous self-questioning and a willingness to change one's mind are key factors for making wiser choices.

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