

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Affirmative Action & Quotas

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Sandel, M. J. (1997, December 1). Picking Winners. *The New Republic*, 217(22), 13–16.

Rachels, J. (1997). Coping with Prejudice. [Chapter 13]. In *Can Ethics Provide Answers? And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (pp. 199–212). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Questions

1. Affirmative action refers to promoting the education and employment of members of groups that are known to have previously suffered from discrimination, like women and African Americans in the United States. One common method of affirmative actions is the use of quotas.
For instance, American universities used to require that certain percentages of their admitted students be women, African American, and so on. Similarly, many European countries like Norway and Germany now require businesses to have a certain percentage of women serve on their executive boards.
According to Michael Sandel, what is the real reason why affirmative action difficult to defend? How is Sandel's rejection of the compensation argument and his support the diversity argument illustrate the difficulty of defending affirmative action?
2. What is "heightism"? Why does James Rachels present this issue?
3. According to Rachels, what four circumstances must hold in order to justify the imposition of quotas on a decision-making process?
4. How is Rachels' defense of quotas different from Sandel's?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.