

[Common Error No. 18](#) [1]

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18. "Positive discrimination is needed to make good to minorities the effects of past exploitation or discrimination."



This is the crux of the case for 'affirmative action.' But to discriminate in favour of some groups has to involve unfairly discriminating against others. Although it is called "positive discrimination," it still means giving positions and jobs to those less qualified than other applicants. Since no one alleges that the other applicants have personally committed discrimination, they are being treated unfairly. This practice pigeon-holes people into ethnic and minority boxes, rather than treating them on their individual merits.

Given open access in university applications, some groups seem to gain more places than their proportion of society would suggest; maybe their culture values education and study more than others do. To allow others entry on lower qualifications discriminates against them. If people are to be discriminated against because of something done by a group their ancestors might have belonged to, there are no limits, nor any indication as to how far back this should go. To the Romans, perhaps?

What is needed is not positive discrimination, with its unsavoury flavour of racial classification and quotas, but open opportunity for people of all groups. Instead of giving preferred places to those whose race, sex, sexual or religious preference have been discriminated against in the past, we should be making sure that we extend to all the choices and the opportunities which were more restricted in previous times. We should be creating an open society, not one where advancement depends on membership of whatever minority groups are sufficiently powerful or fashionable to command preference.

Positive discrimination perpetuates racism and dignifies it with legal claims, whereas the open society overwhelms it by being blind to a person's background. It should matter more where a person is going, rather than where they came from. It should be individual merit, not ethnic quota, which determines advancement.

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[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>