

# Discrimination by Design: The DEI Logic No One Wants to Face

By Theodore Dalrymple

One of the things that most surprises me about proponents of diversity, equity, and inclusion as a guide to policy, especially in universities where intelligent people are supposed to abound, is that positive discrimination, which is an inevitable corollary of DEI, entails negative discrimination. You cannot, after all, discriminate in favour of some without discriminating against others.



This is not a very difficult thought: on the contrary, it is obvious. The question then becomes: Why do so many people seem to take no notice of it when they claim to be offended by discrimination against people of any kind?

It is a good idea, when arguing against a policy with which

you disagree, to think of the best that can be said for it. In the case of DEI, it would go something like the following.

In an unequal society, some young people start off with many more advantages than others, and disadvantaged young people are often congregated together in recognizable social groups. If a young person from such a group nevertheless does well at school, though not as well as someone from a more advantaged group, it is reasonable to suppose that has not only as much ability as the advantaged person but has shown more grit in overcoming his disadvantages. Therefore, he is to be preferred as a candidate where there is a competition for limited places, and in preferring him to the more advantaged candidate, moreover, the disadvantaged group from which he comes will be aided to rise to parity with the more advantaged group.

This all presupposes a theory of history, society, and human psychology that is simplistic to the point of coarseness, but it has a certain demagogic appeal. It appeals most, however, to a certain class that has grown ever larger: that is to say, the administrative bureaucratic class. It gives it the right, and the duty, to develop and impose endless procedures.

It is no coincidence, as Marxists used to say, that this policy was followed, if not invented, by the Soviets. A “correct” social background, which is to say a proletarian or peasant background, became necessary for admission to institutions of higher learning which, combined with a vast expansion in numbers and the imposition of strict ideological uniformity, soon led to a steep decline in quality. Only for those studies of direct application to the development of weaponry were criteria of strictly proven ability and achievement adhered to. Considerations of social—or more accurately, political—engineering were otherwise paramount.

Now it so happens that I was reading recently the two books about the Soviet Union in the 1930s by the French Nobel-prize

winning author, [André Gide](#): "Return From The USSR" and "Revisions to My Return from the USSR," dating from 1936 and 1937 respectively.

Gide, like most French intellectuals, was a sympathizer, one might almost say an unthinking sympathizer, with the Soviet Union, but even though he was treated like royalty when he went there in 1936, he returned something of a critic, particularly of the lack of intellectual freedom. His first book was severely criticized by other writers and intellectuals almost as an act of treason to the cause, to which he replied, much better informed, in his second book, in which he criticized the Soviet Union much more severely—and accurately.

His description of Soviet bureaucracy is of particular interest in our time, bearing in mind the huge, even grotesque, overgrowth of bureaucracy in universities (but not only in universities). Here is what Gide wrote:

"Some claim that Stalin himself has become a slave to this bureaucracy, initially created to manage, then to dominate. There is nothing more difficult to get rid of than a sinecure, or than good-for-nothings of no personal worth. Already in 1929, Ordzhonikidze [the prominent Soviet politician and old friend of Stalin, like him a Georgian, who was either murdered or committed suicide in the year of Gide's second book] was startled by this 'colossal number of useless people' who wish to know nothing of real socialism, and work only to prevent its success. 'People who don't know what to do and of whom no one has any need are put into the administration,' said Ordzhonikidze. But the more incapable they are, the more Stalin can count on their conformist devotion; for they owe their good situation only to his favour. They are, it goes without saying, warm supporters of the regime. In serving Stalin's good fortune, they are serving their own."

If we replace "who wish to know nothing of real socialism, and work only to prevent its success" with "who wish to know

nothing of independent scholarship, and work only to prevent its being carried out," and replace Stalin with the university president or trustees, the analogy is very close.

In 1936, [Pravda](#) itself, not exactly a stern critic of the Soviet system, alluded to the fact that 14 percent of the employees of mechanized farms were bureaucrats (better paid than farm workers). By the standards of modern American universities, this was astonishingly efficient. [Stanford](#), for example, has 17,529 students but 18,369 administrative staff, or about eight administrators for every member of the teaching staff. Ordzhonikidze would be turning in his grave, but Stalin would be whooping with delight. He always believed that the West was doomed, and here is proof.

What is true of universities is true of other institutions, particularly, but not only, state or public ones. This does not mean that all the good-for-nothings are personally dishonest. The human mind is capable of persuading itself of anything and then of forgetting that such persuasion was ever needed. I have myself listened to senior bureaucrats say that they are passionately committed to such-and-such a department, and then, the following week, argue with equal conviction for the imperative need to shut it down forthwith. Their intellectual convictions derive from the orders they receive from on high and are required to carry out, rationalizing them at once as they carry them out so that they do not have to feel bad about themselves.

Man is not so much the rational animal, as the rationalizing one.

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