

Mirror-Image Racism



Amanda Blanc, CEO of Aviva

by Theodore Dalrymple

Nothing could better illustrate or be emblematic of the earnest suicidal frivolity of the West than the decision of the first female chief executive of the British insurance and pension company Aviva, which has assets of more than \$420 billion under management, that the appointment to all senior positions of white men must “be signed off by her”: in other words that there must be a presumption against them—unless, I suppose, they can prove themselves to her to be thoroughly emasculated and in tune with her ideology. She told a parliamentary committee that there is “no non-diverse hire at Aviva without it being signed off by me and the chief people officer.”

A photograph of her in a newspaper shows her looking very smug, as if she had found her way to Jesus, or at least to a pharaonic salary—rather as had done the first female chief

executive of the giant British bank the National Westminster, who was disgraced by the blatantly political decision of her staff to deny Nigel Farage a bank account.

The chief executive's command of English seems not to be quite consonant with her salary, for she said, in that mixture of Newspeak and *langue de bois* that we have now come to expect from the nomenklatura class, that she wanted to "make sure that the process followed for that recruitment has been diverse, has been properly done." People who left school in 1925 at age 14 used to speak better English than this; what she meant is not that the process should have been diverse, but that the candidates chosen should have been diverse, in the technical sexist and racist meaning of the word.

She is too cloth-eared to realize the implications of the word "non-diverse," with its condescending assumption that to be anything other than a white male must be vulnerable and therefore in need of a bureaucratic leg up, so to speak, from the likes of her. As to the "chief people officer" of whom she spoke, only someone ignorant of Orwell, or utterly without imagination, could use it without a shudder. *Human resources* is bad enough, as if people were to be mined like diamonds on the Transvaal Rand, but a *chief people officer* (no doubt abbreviated to a CP0) is one stage worse.

One might naively have supposed, or hoped, that companies nominally answerable to their shareholders chose senior staff according to their ability to do their job, not according to some ideologically preconceived demographic pattern, supposedly reflecting the demographic pattern of the population as a whole.

Of course, the demographic features to be taken into account have to be chosen for their supposed relevance, for human populations have an almost infinite number of possible demographic features—intelligence, for example. I presume that not even the chief executive of Aviva would want 15 percent of

the directors of her company to have an IQ of 80 or below (though it might make life easier for her), or that 25 percent of the directors should have a criminal record or be obese, with of course the correct proportion of obese criminals, or that 1 percent of her staff should be aged over 90. Clearly, the chief people officer would have quite a lot of extra work to do if staff were to mimic the demographic features of the population in all possible ways; and the only way to ensure it would be to employ the entire population at the same salary. No one could then sue for discrimination. Borges' story about a map of the world so accurate that it was the same size as the world comes here to mind.

Clearly, then, characteristics have to be chosen from among innumerable others, if any demographic pattern is to be imposed at all. Presumably they are to be chosen in the same way that the World Wildlife Fund chooses which species of animal to protect, namely the animals that are supposedly in some kind of danger of extinction. (The WWF has not yet, so far as I am aware, chosen to protect the brown rat, the cockroach, or the bluebottle fly, as being already adequately present in the world.)

The characteristics of human groups to be protected as endangered species are protected must be considered relevant in some way; and if you are a racist, as the chief executive of Aviva is a racist, no doubt without realizing it or wanting to be one, then race will be considered a relevant characteristic in choosing senior staff. Thus, anti-racism turns 180 degrees and becomes mirror-image racism, and the old joke, that the cop did not care what kind of communist the anti-communist protester was, becomes expressive of an important truth. Unless we are careful, we become what we oppose.

The suicidal frivolity of the West is demonstrated by the fact that no one would apply to a professional sports team the criteria that the head of a giant company (and certainly not

she alone) thinks important. The reason for this is obvious: Professional sports teams are concerned only to find the best athletes so that they can win. The spectacle of sport is thus too important in our moral economy to be harmed by the imposition of quotas, but the pensions of 15 million people—of which Aviva has at least partial care—can justifiably be harmed by such quotas. So long as there is good quality sport for people to watch, the fate of their pensions does not matter. All they need is enough for junk food and a sofa from which to watch a giant screen.

It seems that there are all too many chief executives of companies and heads of other institutions and organizations (Harvard, for example) who would like to play the role of Rosa Parks, though with the satisfaction not only of helping to oppose injustice and bring about a more just society, but also to receive vast salaries and pensions for doing so. This is a mediocrities' charter.

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