

Earl Raab

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FROM RACISM TO FACISM

Some of you may have seen the San Francisco Chronicle story this past week about discrimination against ugly people. Several studies show that if people are physically good-looking, teachers and employers are biased towards them.

"The thought that the good-looking constitute a privileged caste that enjoys advantages solely because of external attributes appears to many researchers as undemocratic and unjust." One psychologist explained the reason for his studies: "As with any other form of discrimination, you have to determine that it's occurring before you can take any steps to combat it."

What are the steps that can be taken "to combat it"? It's probably frivolous to suggest that, as a matter of affirmative action, society should provide free cosmetic surgery for anyone who is less than ornamental. There would still be people adjudged less good-looking than others. That could only be avoided if we provided face masks or cloning procedures which would turn everyone into an identical Robert Redford or Madeleine Carroll (well, you can propose your own standards). But then we'd have to wear identifying numbers, and there is a prevailing prejudice against certain numbers.

No, the only way to fight such fascist prejudice would be through law and education. There would be buttons saying "Ugly is Beautiful." The law would prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex or lack of pulchritude. And then would come the pressure for quota hiring: each employer would have to hire a certain percentage of eyesores.

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There is a certain logic fulfilled by these concerns about prejudice against the less sightly. The premise of that logic is that it is unfair for luck to play any part in our lives -- and government should do something about it.

There were also serious concerns expressed not long ago by some Harvard scholars about the fact that some people were born less intelligent than others, through no fault of their own. Society should make amends for such unlucky handicaps by equalizing results. Thus, a less intelligent person would not be required to score as high as others on employment tests.

If you think that sort of thing is ludicrous, you should pause to count all the ways in which society seems to be moving in the direction of removing luck from our lives, and equalizing results by one device or another.

There's a profound difference between racism and facism. Racism says that you should prefer certain people not because of the traits they have, but because of their ancestry, whatever their individual traits. (Then some imaginary group traits are invented, as Hitler did for the Jews, and some Americans did for the Blacks.) Racism ignores individual and real traits. Facism, however foolish it may be, is based on real traits.

A facist prefers to look at some individuals because of perceived beauty. A mindist prefers individuals who are more intelligent. A lengthist prefers tall people over short people. Why not? Almost all of us are born with some characteristics which are disadvantageous in the normal world; and almost all of us are born with some traits which are advantageous. The business of our personal lives is to non-self-piteously manage with the jagged individual pattern each of us gets. That's the excitement of it. It's not up to government to try to smooth over all those personal differences. It's not up to government to provide equality of achievement, but rather to provide equality of opportunity to achieve.

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The campaign against facism is not as funny as it sounds. The perversion of anti-racism into anti-facism and such isms, portends the kind of total social control which is incompatible with freedom. The Jews would not be allowed to survive in such a world.