

COMPETITION VERSUS COOPERATION

edited by Richard T. Nolan (2008)

Based upon the following resources (and others you might discover), comment on, or respond to, the following:

1. Competition in most human activities is valued very highly in American culture. How might this value be beneficial or detrimental to the whole culture and its individuals.
2. Are you aware of any religious spokespersons dealing with “competition versus cooperation”? Are you aware of religious bodies at various levels (national, local) that intentionally compete with each other? If so, what are their respective competitive goals? Is such competition valuable or not? Justify your assessment.
3. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and the Qur’an, how are issues of competition and cooperation among and between human beings treated? Do the sacred literatures of some other religious traditions include corresponding understandings?
4. In the course of one month, comment on the various types of competition and cooperation that you have come across in the news media. Are there competitive activities that would be better as cooperative? Are there cooperative activities that would benefit from competitive qualities?
5. Comment on the various types of competition and cooperation in which you engaged in the course of one month. Which do you experience as beneficial, and why? Which do you experience as detrimental, and why?
6. What might one’s sense of personal identity have to do with cooperation and competition?

See <http://www.philosophy-religion.org/living/5.pdf> /.

“COMPETITION”

Encyclopedia of Psychology [Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2nd ed. Gale Group, 2001.]

Psychologists have long been in disagreement as to whether competition is a learned or a genetic component of human behavior. Perhaps what first comes to mind when thinking of competition is athletics. It would be a mistake, however, not to recognize the effect competition has in the areas of academics, work, and many other areas of contemporary life. This is especially true in the United States, where individual rigor and competition appear to be nationalistic qualities Americans cherish and praise. It has often been suggested that the American capitalist-driven society thrives because of the spirited competition for a limited amount of resources available.

Psychologically speaking, competition has been seen as an inevitable consequence of the psychoanalytic view of human drives and is a natural state of being. According to Sigmund Freud, humans are born screaming for attention and full of organic drives for fulfillment in various areas. Initially, according to this view, we compete for the attention of our parents-seeking to attract it either from siblings or from

the other parent. Thereafter, we are at the mercy of a battle between our base impulses for self-fulfillment and social and cultural mores which prohibit pure indulgence.

Current work in anthropology has suggested, however, that this view of the role of competition in human behavior may be incorrect. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), one of the great philosophers of the seventeenth century, is perhaps best remembered for his characterization of the "natural world," that is, the world before the imposition of the will of humanity, as being "nasty, brutish, and short." This image of the pre-rational world is still widely held, reinforced by Charles Darwin's seminal work, *The Origin of Species*, which established the doctrine of natural selection. This doctrine, which posits that those species best able to adapt to and master the natural environment in which they live will survive, has suggested to many that the struggle for survival is an inherent human trait which determines a person's success. Darwin's theory has even been summarized as "survival of the fittest"-a phrase Darwin himself never used - further highlighting competition's role in success. As it has often been pointed out, however, there is nothing in the concept of natural selection that suggests that competition is the most successful strategy for "survival of the fittest." Darwin asserted in *The Origin of Species* that the struggles he was describing should be viewed as metaphors and could easily include dependence and cooperation.

Many studies have been conducted to test the importance placed on competition as opposed to other values, such as cooperation - by various cultures, and generally conclude that Americans uniquely praise competition as natural, inevitable, and desirable. In 1937, the world-renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead published *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples*, based on her studies of several societies that did not prize competition, and, in fact, seemed at times to place a negative value on it. One such society was the Zuni Indians of Arizona, and they, Mead found, valued cooperation far more than competition. For example, the Zuni held a ritual footrace that anyone could participate in, the winner of which was never publicly acknowledged and, in fact, if one person made a habit of winning the race, that person was prevented from participating in the future. After studying dozens of such cultures, Mead's final conclusion was that competitiveness is a culturally created aspect of human behavior, and that its prevalence in a particular society is relative to how that society values it.

Compare with "EVOLVING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS FOR COOPERATION" at

http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~cushman/publications/publications/Stevens_etal_2005.pdf

See also "Psychology Of Cooperation - Democracies Put Aside Personal Gain To Work Toward Common Good" submitted by [News Account](#) on 6 March 2008 - 5:20pm. [Science & Society](#) at

http://www.scientificblogging.com/news_releases/psychology_of_cooperation_democracies_put_aside_personal_gain_to_work_toward_common_good

Brief articles on competition and cooperation are available in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2007).