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What Happens to People in a Competitive Society

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In this book, author Svein Olaf Thorbjørnsen probes the question: What is at stake for human beings in a society dominated by competition, particularly economic competition? Is competition endemic to human nature? Does it preserve the dignity and intrinsic value of the human being? Does it secure better living conditions? In a way, the answer to these queries is a simple "yes." It can allow for superior satisfaction of fundamental needs; legitimate self-love and self-realization; and encourage positive feelings upon mastering a skill. At the same time, however, competition can also contribute to a strong materialistic self-interest and support classicism, social ranking, and elitism: other human beings become only means to a personal success, thus jeopardizing fellowship and collaboration. In a hyper-competitive environment, some of the same positive human values mentioned above—self-love, self-realisation, individuality, and freedom—can be viewed to pose a threat to the realisation of one's potential and to one's true humanity. These competing, contradictory aspects of competition are presented and discussed from perspectives across varying disciplines, from social anthropology and economics to history, ethics, philosophy and theology.

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