

**AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION.  
ECONOMIC STUDIES. VOL. IV. NO. 2.  
PERSONAL COMPETITION; ITS  
PLACE IN THE SOCIAL ORDER AND  
EFFECT UPON INDIVIDUALS; WITH SOME  
CONSIDERATIONS ON SUCCESS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649532339

American Economic Association. Economic Studies. Vol. IV. No. 2. Personal Competition; Its Place in the Social Order and Effect upon Individuals; With Some Considerations on Success by Charles H. Cooley

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**CHARLES H. COOLEY**

**AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION.  
ECONOMIC STUDIES. VOL. IV. NO. 2.  
PERSONAL COMPETITION; ITS  
PLACE IN THE SOCIAL ORDER AND  
EFFECT UPON INDIVIDUALS; WITH SOME  
CONSIDERATIONS ON SUCCESS**



*AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION*

84237

# ECONOMIC STUDIES

VOL. IV. No. 2.

PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY  
PRICE, \$2.50 PER YEAR

## PERSONAL COMPETITION

**Its Place in the Social Order and Effect upon Individuals;  
with some Considerations on Success.**

BY

**CHARLES H. COOLEY, Ph.D.**

---

*APRIL, 1899*

---

PUBLISHED FOR THE  
**AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION**  
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK  
LONDON: SWAN SONNENSCHEIN & CO.

028705-8, 5,

### CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE.
I. THE FUNCTION OF PERSONAL COMPETITION,.....	78
II. THE INTENSITY OF COMPETITION, .....	84
III. THE RELATION OF COMPETITION TO ASSOCIATION,.....	95
IV. CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS,.....	114
V. SUCCESS AND MORALITY,.....	123
VI. COMPETITION AND SYMPATHY,.....	146
VII. RESTLESSNESS, INSECURITY AND STRAIN,.....	157
VIII. INDIVIDUALITY, SELF-RELIANCE, EARNESTNESS, .....	164
IX. THE STANDARD OF SUCCESS, .....	167

## **PERSONAL COMPETITION.**

**Its Place in the Social Order and Effect upon Individuals; with some Considerations on Success.**

## PERSONAL COMPETITION.

---

I propose to discuss Personal Competition with no special reference to industry or commerce, but rather with a view to the part that it plays in social life as a whole, and to the effect it has upon the character and happiness of men. With this purpose I shall consider its function, its intensity, its relation to association, the conditions of personal success, the bearing of success upon morality, the effect of competition as regards sympathy, contentment and individuality; and finally, the standard of success. Of course the discussion of these subjects is very far indeed from exhaustive: my aim is to give a concise and connected view of principles and to suggest, at least, their application to existing social conditions.

Some of the matters treated are of a sort concerning which many people feel strongly, upholding conflicting views with a common vehemence. I cannot expect to reconcile these differences, which rest as much upon temperament and point of view as upon intellectual grounds; but I hope that discerning readers will find in what I say evidence of a painstaking desire to see the truth and to state it fairly.



## I.

### THE FUNCTION OF PERSONAL COMPETITION.

The function of personal competition, considered as a part of the social system, is to assign to each individual his place in that system. If "all the world's a stage," this is a process that distributes the parts among the players. It may do it well or ill, but, after some fashion, it does it. Some may be cast in parts unsuited to them; good actors may be discharged altogether and worse ones retained; but nevertheless the thing is arranged in some way and the play goes on.

That such a process must exist can hardly, it seems to me, admit of question: in fact I believe that those who speak of doing away with competition use the word in another sense than is here intended. Within the course of the longest human life there is necessarily a complete renewal of the persons whose communication and coöperation make up the life of society. The new members come into the world without any legible sign to indicate what they are fit for, a mystery to others from the first and to themselves as soon as they are capable of reflection: the young man does not know for what he is adapted, and no one else can tell him. The only possible way to get light upon the matter is to adopt the method of experiment. By trying one thing and another and by reflecting upon his experience, he begins to find out about himself, and the world begins

to find out about him. His field of investigation is of course restricted, and his own judgment and that of others liable to error, but the tendency of it all can hardly be other than to guide his choice to that one of the available careers in which he is best adapted to hold his own. I may say this much, perhaps, without assuming anything regarding the efficiency or justice of competition as a distributor of social functions, a matter regarding which I shall offer some suggestions later. All I wish to say here is that the necessity of some selective process is inherent in the conditions of social life.

It will be apparent that, in the sense in which I use the term, competition is not necessarily a hostile contention, nor even something of which the competing individual is always conscious. From our infancy onward throughout life judgments are daily forming regarding us of which we are unaware, but which go to determine our careers. "The world is full of judgment days." A and B, for instance, are under consideration for some appointment: the experience and personal qualifications of each are duly weighed by those having the appointment to make, and A, we will say, is chosen. Neither of the two need know anything about the matter until the selection is made. It is eligibility to perform some social function that makes a man a competitor, and he may or may not be aware of it, or, if aware of it, he may or may not be consciously opposed to others. I trust that the reader will bear in mind that I always use the word competition in the sense here explained.

There is but one alternative to competition as a means of determining the place of the individual in the social system, and that is some form of *status*, some fixed, mechanical rule, usually a rule of inheritance, which decides the function of the individual without reference to his personal traits, and thus dispenses with any process of comparison.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to conceive of a society<sup>2</sup> organized entirely upon the basis of the inheritance of functions, and indeed societies exist which may be said to approach this condition. In India, for example, the prevalent idea regarding the social function of the individual is that it is unalterably determined by his parentage, and the village blacksmith, shoemaker, accountant or priest has his place assigned to him by a rule of descent as rigid as that which governs the transmission of one of the crowns of Europe. If all functions were handed down in this way, if there were never any deficiency or surplus of children to take the place of their parents, if there were no progress or decay in the social system, making necessary new activities or dispensing with old ones; then, there would be no use for a selective process. But precisely in the measure that a society departs from this condition, that individual traits are recognized and made available, or social change of

<sup>1</sup> The principle of length of service, so widely recognized in making promotions, is an example of a form of *status* unconnected with inheritance.

<sup>2</sup> As there has been much discussion concerning the meaning of this word it may be well to say that I use it, with conscious vagueness, to mean a totality of social relations. I also use the terms "social order" and "social system" in the same sense.