

UNITED WISDOM

Competing with someone who is not taking part

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *“envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self”*

Francis Bacon, “Of Envy,” sentence fragment.

What this article is about

Seeing someone else's new work can make our own seem obliged to become larger, more visible or faster. Sometimes comparison reveals an interesting solution. Sometimes there really is a shared competition, a limited number of contracts or an employer's selection. Yet there is also a contest that exists only in one participant's thoughts: the other person pursues their work, has promised nothing and may not know that each publication has become a new score. The distinction matters for choosing the next action accurately, not for prohibiting ambition. We can want more, feel disappointed and take another's skill seriously while remaining responsible for our task. Through two hypothetical former classmates, we examine what is known, what can be learned, where actual competitive conditions apply and what cannot be demanded of another person. These questions concern ordinary safe work; they cannot replace responses to discrimination, threats, professional misconduct or circumstances requiring specialist help.

I. A table filled in by one person

Dmitry is preparing a small photographic series for a local exhibition. His former classmate Alexander publishes a large new project. In this hypothetical scene they are not entering the same contest, seeking the same contract or comparing results by agreement. Nevertheless, Dmitry postpones his exhibition: what he has seen seems to require doubling his series. Another Alexander publication changes the plan again. The actual viewer of Dmitry's exhibition has received nothing yet, while the task has already expanded several times. This invented scene describes no mechanism shared by everyone. It highlights the moment when someone else's event begins directing our time without considering its benefit.

Dmitry's table may contain two names, but it is not yet a shared table of results. He selected the measures himself: numbers of photographs, venue size, frequency of publications. Alexander may have worked on a different question, in another form and with different responsibilities. Uncertainty neither diminishes Alexander's work nor proves that it was easy. It

only limits the conclusion. A larger project does not establish that Dmitry's small series is insufficient for its viewers. That judgment requires examining its own purpose, quality and conditions of display, rather than putting two numbers together and declaring the larger one better.

The absence of agreement does not eliminate all competition. Two photographers may independently seek the same paid opportunity without talking to one another. Then the scarce resource is real. The question is whether that situation exists now. Without a shared selection, a personal story of winners and losers adds an unstated rule to the facts. If selection exists, its conditions matter, while competition between applications remains distinct from a right to interfere in another's life. The former can arise without a rival's personal consent; the latter does not follow from it. This boundary matters when useful comparison becomes a demand on someone.

II. What the comparison is actually about

The phrase “he is ahead again” conceals several possible questions. Dmitry may want to handle light better, gain access to a venue, earn equipment money or hear viewers' responses. These are different tasks, and Alexander's large project answers them differently. A well-organized sequence of images is available for close study, for instance. The author's payment may remain unknown from the publication. A venue's reputation does not explain what Dmitry will learn by enlarging his series. While these meanings are fused, every achievement by the other person requires a general surge of effort. Naming the question lets him identify which material can answer it and what it does not contain.

Dmitry discovers that he was chiefly interested in two adjacent photographs: one changes how the other is perceived. He can examine that observation in his own series without trying to surpass Alexander in volume. He rearranges several prints and considers whether the intended transition remains. The change may work, fail or remain unclear. None of these outcomes establishes which person is more successful overall. There is, however, a specific piece of work to show a willing colleague. A useful check requires neither disparaging Alexander nor diminishing his achievement, nor refusing to learn anything as proof of independence. The other's work retains its significance, while Dmitry gains a separate question.

Sometimes comparison reveals a wish for recognition that rearranging photographs cannot satisfy. Naming it is more honest. Dmitry wants particular editors to notice him; he does not yet know how they encounter new contributors. That is a reason to study public submission rules, prepare suitable material or ask about the conditions through an appropriate channel. It does not justify demanding explanations of Alexander's personal connections or asking him to stop publishing. A wish can be understandable and strong while the proposed action still needs

examination. Comparison helps when it opens an accessible question, rather than making another person responsible for advancing one's career.

III. Unknown conditions remain unknown

A public result rarely shows its entire preparation. The exhibition date, author's name and published project contents may be known. The number of contributors, restrictions on display, preparation time and tasks deferred may not be. Filling these gaps with a convenient story is tempting: someone arranged everything for Alexander, so his result does not count; or he did everything alone, so Dmitry's limitations are inexcusable. Both versions exceed the available information. If conditions matter to a shared selection, verifiable information and an appropriate procedure are needed. In personal comparison, uncertainty should remain explicit, rather than becoming an accusation or an order to oneself.

Dmitry knows his own conditions more fully: available evenings, printing costs, a promised date, participants' consent to use their images. This does not mean he must publicly justify himself to Alexander. The information serves a decision Dmitry actually makes. Enlarging the series requires more expenditure and new agreements; it may improve the idea or disrupt the agreed exhibition. Its content and the real possibility of meeting promises should determine that judgment. Respect for another's result can coexist with acknowledging one's limits. A limit does not establish lesser human worth, while it does not excuse failing to inform people honestly when a deadline or promised scope changes.

Comparison is particularly inaccurate when it joins different stages. Someone's publicly finished project is set against a draft not intended for viewing yet. The discrepancy then seems like final defeat, although one material has undergone more checks. That does not guarantee that the draft will eventually be as good. It simply needs assessment as a draft: what has been found, what difficulty remains, who could see it and why. Dmitry benefits more from checking the transition between photographs than from declaring the whole series defeated by another's completed exhibition. The appropriate stage of assessment allows genuine weaknesses to emerge without turning incompleteness into a final verdict.

IV. Envy as a subject of reading, not a label

In “Of Envy,” Francis Bacon connects the passion with comparing oneself with another and notices the proximity of comparison among people from the same circle. For this scene, that is a historical prompt to ask why a former classmate became the measure of Dmitry's progress. The essay also contains prejudices about groups of people, discussion of witchcraft and tactics for redirecting others' hostility onto third parties. We do not adopt those. Its fragment offers no modern diagnosis or grounds for classifying Dmitry as a destructive type. A particular observation can be discussed separately from the entire historical evaluation of the passion and from moral judgment of the reader.

Dmitry may say that his acquaintance's success upsets him. That describes a feeling; it neither authorizes damaging another's work nor proves an inability to be a friend. What follows the upset can be examined separately: postponing his exhibition, checking Alexander's page while printing, repeating an unsubstantiated rumour. Actions create consequences for which responsibility and correction become possible. If a rumour has already been passed on, resolving to stop feeling envy is insufficient; he should, where possible, correct the statement with those who heard it. If nothing like that happened, no misconduct should be invented for a moral lesson. Feeling and completed action remain different subjects of discussion.

Not every unpleasant comparison is envy. Someone may have noticed unfair contest conditions, exclusion from access or an authorship violation. Calling that complaint envy avoids examining its grounds. Before a moral judgment, ask what specifically happened, who was affected and what evidence supports the violation. The article's ordinary questions can clarify a personal task but do not replace professional procedures or protection from threats. Even in the safe scene, a word for the feeling is optional. Dmitry can simply notice that another's news changed his decision and examine whether the change serves his work and the promises already made.

V. Learn from the work while leaving its author a life

Studying a publicly displayed sequence and following an author's every movement are different actions. In the first, Dmitry approaches material available for viewing and can identify the solution that interests him. In the second, he gathers information about a person that his composition does not require. Even a public post grants no unlimited right to reuse an image, reveal personal circumstances or obtain a conversation. Access for viewing and permission to use must be distinguished. If his own project involves quotation or reproduction, the relevant conditions need checking. Wanting to learn does not replace them or make the author a permanently available adviser.

Dmitry selects one episode relevant to his idea: a transition from an overall space to a small object. He describes its role, then seeks a solution in his own materials. Simply repeating someone else's order may not suit different photographs and may conceal his own subject. The check therefore concerns its relation to the task, rather than visible similarity that can be demonstrated. If a specific idea or form has been taken from another's work, its origin should be acknowledged where appropriate and permission checked separately. Acknowledging influence does not reduce responsibility for the new material or automatically make borrowing lawful or successful.

Learning this way can end in rejecting the discovered technique. Dmitry realizes he needs a different sequence: an introduction to the place, then changing light. The other's example clarified his question, although nothing similar will appear in the finished series. That is neither defeat in a contest nor evidence that he has nothing to learn. The criterion was how the solution fitted the particular content. The opposite outcome is possible too: the transition helps but needs another form and clear acknowledgment of influence. Either way, he works with material rather than seeking proof of superiority over its maker. That distinction matters when admiration is already mixed with irritation.

VI. Actual competition needs actual conditions

Suppose Dmitry and Alexander later apply independently for the same exhibition grant. Limited places create competition regardless of personal agreement. Dmitry may seek a place, prepare a strong application and consider the published criteria. He need not yield simply because he wants to leave one-sided comparison behind. The aim can now be stated precisely: submit his work by the deadline and take part in a particular selection. Alexander's publication count does not replace the programme's requirements, while imagined overall precedence does not enlarge the application. If the organizers' decision is opaque, that is a separate problem which cannot be explained through an applicant's inner attitude alone.

In Encheiridion XIX, Epictetus proposes avoiding contests whose outcome is outside one's control; XXV discusses the price of access to honours. His strict Stoic position prompts a question about a chosen contest's cost, but does not require refusing modern competitions. A jury's decision is indeed outside an applicant's sole power. Preparing an eligible application can still matter: offering the work a chance, clarifying material, fulfilling an intention. The article promises no victory through the right attitude and does not render payment, access or injustice insignificant. The contemporary boundary is to knowingly accept the known conditions or choose another path, while retaining the possibility of addressing rule violations.

If Dmitry participates, honesty also concerns his methods. A substantive critique of public work can be appropriate in a suitable context. Presenting speculation about personal circumstances as grounds for judging an application, using confidential information or

obstructing another's eligibility is not. Suspected violations require facts and an appropriate procedure, rather than rumours disguised as concern for fairness. After the result, he can acknowledge disappointment and find out what feedback is available. Losing a particular selection does not establish losing at life; winning gives no right to demand that the other person recognize the winner's superiority outside that event.

VII. Return time to one’s own work

Dmitry notices that he checks Alexander's latest posts before sorting his own photographs. He can change the order: a defined part of his work first, then a limited review of professional material. This is a proposal for a hypothetical safe scene, not a proven way to manage feelings. It helps only insofar as it preserves needed time without disrupting duties to monitor the field or answer people. If viewing is necessary for work, its purpose should be defined rather than all attention to others being called weakness. Time is reclaimed through choices between accessible actions, not a promise never to compare oneself with anyone again.

Marcus Aurelius in III.IV limits idle consideration of others' affairs while retaining attention to them for the common good. That distinction fits this task better than prohibiting interest in people altogether. Dmitry needs to follow participants' consents, exhibition conditions and information affecting the shared display. He need not guess Alexander's opinion of his success. Yet the historical section also invokes invulnerability to external evil and acceptance of fate's allotment. We do not turn that ideal into a demand to overlook harm or quietly accept injustice. What we draw from it is a question about attention's purpose, not a promise that every external event will stop hurting.

The new order needs a subject for checking. By evening, for instance, Dmitry selects twelve photographs and records two unresolved compositional difficulties. If an hour browsing others' pages produces none of this, he can examine what took the time and whether access needs organizing differently. If the work is done while disappointment remains, that does not invalidate the whole result. Changes in action and feeling need not coincide immediately. The trial can be reduced, stopped or discussed with a suitable person; it should not become endless accounting of every minute. Serious distress and health concerns need separate attention that a short editorial exercise cannot replace.

VIII. Conversation cannot enrol someone retroactively

Dmitry may want to tell Alexander that comparison has become difficult. Before talking, he should understand his request: a brief answer about a technique, an ordinary meeting or an opportunity to express his experience. These are different invitations. Alexander may decline, not know the answer or suggest another time. The message should not turn his earlier publications into culpable acts if no promise or violation existed. He need not diminish his work, hide good news or explain his life fully to ease someone else's comparison. Friendship can nevertheless allow a kind request for a suitable way of talking, provided it can actually be declined without punishment.

Alexander's response need not confirm the desired story. He may say he never regarded Dmitry as a rival. That clarifies his position but does not eliminate actual competition in a programme they both entered. He may willingly discuss composition without wanting to discuss income. Consent to the first question does not extend to the second. Dmitry can thank him for the available answer and continue independently. If no conversation happens, silence cannot be recorded as proof of arrogance or admission of secret rivalry. The unknown remains unknown; Dmitry's decision about his series still requires grounds in its content and conditions.

Existing obligations between them need separate discussion. A joint project may require agreeing on a date, access to materials and acknowledgment of authorship. This concerns the actual organization of shared work, rather than comforting one participant. Discomfort with comparison does not authorize ignoring a promise; the other's success does not transfer all responsibility to them. Scope may be honestly revised with willing participants. A new joint task may also be declined if the earlier format was too demanding. The decision should keep its actual grounds and consequences visible, without presenting personal rivalry as shared agreement or using conversation to secure submission.

IX. A result one can call one’s own

Dmitry's original exhibition becomes an independent task again when its criteria are defined without obligatory comparison with Alexander. The series should convey the chosen change in the place, retain its agreed scope and be ready for the promised display. These criteria allow checking and conversation with others. They may prove too narrow or mistaken, requiring substantive revision. But they do not shift automatically after each person's news. That allows the work to finish and its result to be seen. A result of one's own does not imply absence of influences, viewers or social conditions. It means being able to explain why particular decisions were made and which consequences one is responsible for.

Comparison may return after the display: Alexander received more responses; another venue attracted more notice. Dmitry may consider this information when relevant to the next task. He

may need to establish whether prospective viewers received the invitation. Then the question concerns methods of inviting, not two authors' overall worth. Responses may be few, with the reason still unknown. Accessible information can be gathered, or the question left open. The display cannot honestly be declared nonexistent because someone else's was larger. Finished material, completed agreements and viewers' actual responses remain separate events, even when expectations were disappointed and the next step requires change.

Leaving a one-sided contest requires no reduction in wishes. Dmitry may choose a more complex project, submit another application or learn from a strong author. The difference lies in the grounds for choosing and respect for another's boundary. A large task has its own purpose and acceptable cost; a competition has real conditions; a request allows refusal; a comparison has a stated subject and a limit on conclusions. These distinctions guarantee neither calm, recognition nor victory. They make a decision clearer and permit correction when an action stops serving the work. The other person continues their life while one regains the ability to define a next result without requiring someone to fall behind.

What this means in practice

1. Name the event without a score. Record what the other person did and what you actually know about it. Identify unknown conditions separately. In the hypothetical scene, this is a new publication, not an established decision to overtake Dmitry or judge his exhibition.

2. Check for a shared selection. Is there a specific scarce opportunity, published rules or existing mutual obligations? If so, state your task within those conditions. If not, do not attribute consent to a personal contest. Actual structural competition should not be denied merely because no conversation occurred.

3. Choose one useful question. Which solution in the other's work relates to your material? What can be checked appropriately without gathering unnecessary personal information or using another's material without permission? If the answer concerns recognition or access, study the relevant conditions instead of enlarging work solely for a number.

4. Define the nearest result. Name a small completed portion of your task, a time for it and a visible sign of completion. Account for resources and promises. Remaining disappointment does not cancel completed work; completed work does not justify denying serious distress or a need for other help.

5. Reconsider after acting. Compare the result with your chosen task, not the next person's news. What became clearer, what remains unknown, what cost proved unacceptable? The exercise may be stopped. It is neither a guaranteed winning strategy, a diagnosis of feelings nor a substitute for specialist procedures concerning violations and threats.

Key quotation

> *“in relation to some common good”*

Marcus Aurelius, III.IV, fragment in Meric Casaubon’s English translation. The phrase qualifies attention to others’ affairs; it promises no immunity to harm.

Connections between traditions

Context	Question discussed	Limit of application
Bacon, “Of Envy”	How an acquaintance becomes the measure of one's progress	Prejudices, witchcraft and redirecting hostility onto others are rejected
Epictetus, Encheiridion XIX, XXV	A contest's outcome and participation's cost	No demand to refuse all contests or treat access as insignificant
Marcus Aurelius, III.IV	The purpose of attending to others' affairs	No prohibition of interest in people and no denial of external harm

Three distinct historical contexts suffice for this article's distinctions; they do not form one teaching. Contemporary competition conditions, consent and the exercise are editorial proposals.

Primary sources

1. Francis Bacon, The Essays Or Counsels, Civil and Moral, Project Gutenberg 575, complete “Of Envy,” displayed lines 264–291. The file's particular print edition has not been independently established. An eleven-word English fragment at line 277, its own Russian rendering and bounded commentary are used. The entire essay was actually read; its prejudices and manipulation tactics are rejected.

2. Epictetus, Encheiridion, George Long translation in Project Gutenberg 10661, complete XIX and XXV within actually read continuous XIX–XXV. The particular print edition and date remain unestablished. This article uses paraphrase and commentary only, without a literal quotation; strict Stoic valuation of externals does not replace contemporary material conditions.

3. Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Meric Casaubon's English translation, edited Project Gutenberg 2680 transcription, complete III.IV, lines 238–244. Editorial note 1261–1265 was read: comparison with 1634/1635 editions, corrections and omitted alternatives make this distinct from a facsimile. A seven-word fragment at line 238, its own Russian rendering and commentary are used. This file's numbering is retained.

Historical text, translation and editorial apparatus are distinguished. Short fragments and paraphrase establish neither worldwide legal clearance, complete source import nor exercise efficacy.

Tags

comparison, competition, rivalry, others’ success, own task, envy, attention, autonomy, consent, boundaries, learning, influence, authorship, public work, uncertainty, selection conditions, fairness, promises, responsibility, creativity, photography, exhibition, recognition, resources, time, feedback, choice, Bacon, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius

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