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*Winners Take All* Reaction

The major issue discussed in *Winners Take All* is the economic concept win-winism. Win-winism, as defined in *Winners Take All*, teaches that life is not competitive, but rather cooperative. It is a perspective in which proposed solutions for problems are beneficial for all (Giridharadas 37). Throughout the book, Giridharadas uses many examples of people he refers to as “winners,” and the solutions they have created. He uses the examples to argue that win-winism is problematic because winners believe they need to be a driving force for change and thus the solutions they propose are self-centered and include their biases.

Repeatedly, Giridharadas criticizes the solutions that winners propose because the solutions only concern the winners’ interests. He argues that while it is fine that winners wish to separate their losses from others’ successes, it is possible that their solutions and ideas conflict with the needs of common people. Rather than producing an indirect solution in the form of a new company or investment, winners need to directly acknowledge the underlying issue that fosters the problem. Giridharadas questions, “What if the elites simply need to part with more of their money in order for every American to have, say, a semi-decent public school?” (Giridharadas 51). He cautions that win-winism may also be dangerous because it allows winners to reframe every problem into something that can be solved with a simple solution rather than a solution that requires one to attack a systemic issue (Giridharadas 64). Similarly, winners who

were aboard Summit at Sea, a selective MarketWorld cruise, were shocked to hear Edward Snowden say that when he has an idea of how to fix something, he simply does it with a limited amount of resources and is not concerned with promoting his ideas to investors so that he can be praised. Snowden, unlike the winners in MarketWorld, fights the system and does not mind that he may lose in the end (Giridharadas 79). Overall, Giridharadas believes that win-winism is radical and problematic due to its self-centered nature.

Winners may mean well in their solutions and may believe that they are assisting others, but until they acknowledge and fight the systems that lead to societal problems to begin with, they will never present a permanent solution. Companies such as Uber and Airbnb were created for common people to make extra money outside of their occupation. If one has a car, they can drive others around through rideshare companies such as Uber and Lyft. In the same regard, if one has an extra room, they can rent it out to those visiting the area. These companies sound beneficial on the surface, and for those utilizing the service, they are convenient. Companies like these will never help with the underlying issue of poverty, however; how would one drive others when they cannot afford a vehicle? How would one rent a room to others when they cannot afford a room to live in? These companies are solutions for those who are not impoverished, and leave the impoverished to help themselves.

Heather Jacobs struggles to make ends meet. She works for a corporate massage chain where if there are not many clients in a certain time frame, she only receives minimum wage with less hours than normal (Giridharadas 55-56). Her husband is a part-time student and delivery driver, and she needs to pay her credit card debt from massage school tuition. She would benefit from anxiety reducing medicine, but cannot afford it (Giridharadas 57). After hearing

stories such as hers, Vinod Khosla, a venture capitalist, created a company that would help people like Heather stabilize their finances. Not without charging a large sum of money, of course. Giridharadas expresses concern that instead of charging people like Heather \$260 a year to help her, a winner should repair the systems that make people poor in the first place (Giridharadas 59). Again, Giridharadas condemns winners for their self-centered thoughts and actions.

Winners seem to believe that they are to present a solution or that they are the solution; they do this so that people do not recognize them as the root of the problem (Giridharadas 94). If they are creating solutions, how could they possibly be the problem? MarketWorld does a phenomenal job teaching winners that they are not the issue and that they do not contribute to systemic flaws that lead to issues. MarketWorld fosters a mindset that includes doing more good but not less harm, giving back but not taking less, and joining the solution but not recognizing that you may be a part of the problem (Giridharadas 155). With this mindset, winners are not likely to change their views or actions. They want to be remembered for doing well for society, so they propose temporary solutions. They propose such things as universal health care, but not through public means, and financial support for college, but not free college (Giridharadas 239). Through these examples, winners are contradictory in the actions they take and how they say they want to help others.

Giridharadas and I share similar thoughts about winners' opinion on social stratification. MarketWorld believes that people who are poor are simply lacking links to information and markets (Giridharadas 140). While it is true that the absence of social capital has an impact on those who are poor, it is not the only problem. The theory that creating links between people and

information or capital lacks critical analysis of other reasons for poverty. Other reasons for social stratification include race, labor conditions, caste, and education. It is much more difficult for someone at the bottom of the social hierarchy to climb from poverty when they lack the characteristics needed to be a winner. In his essay "Wealth," billionaire Andrew Carnegie wrote that though stratification and inequality are not desirable, they are beneficial for progress (Giridharadas 161). This influences winners to disregard things like stratification because they just figure they are necessary. Instead of disregarding stratification and inequality, winners need to address how they accumulated their wealth and power and if it was just (Giridharadas 172). Unless winners have truly been at the bottom of the social stratification pyramid, they will not understand the hardship.

In my Sociology 101 course, we were assigned a project in which each student was given a social class. We were told how much money our family received each month and then we had to use that money to support an adult and two children. The project was specific in that we needed to pay the bills, buy a car, buy or rent an apartment or house, and determine how much the grocery bill would cost each month based on current prices from a grocery store. I was assigned the lower class. It was extremely difficult to allocate money to different necessities, especially to make sure that the children would have a better life than the adult had. My family would never have been able to afford something such as \$260 a year to stabilize their finances. Since I have completed the project, I feel as though I understand poverty and social stratification much more. While it is easy to look at the impoverished and detail "solutions" that will either help people make more money or stabilize their finances, it is much more difficult for the solution to be successful if it costs the person money to begin with. Unless one has certain

characteristics such as higher education, a certain race or gender, and savings, it is difficult to move up. Giridharadas and I both believe that unless inequality is examined and attacked from its roots, no solution will prove successful.

Giridharadas was critical toward the winners in MarketWorld, but I do not believe he presented a conclusion. He insisted multiple times that winners are selfish and that the solutions they invent are biased. He also denounced how winners do not want to believe that they are part of the problem, but rather want to believe that they are the solution or they are to solve the problems. From the book, I was able to gather that Giridharadas believes winners in MarketWorld are too afraid to admit that they may be the root of some of the problems society faces and that winners are afraid to relinquish even a small amount of their money to directly help those in need. While I agree with Giridharadas, it did not seem as though he gave a constructive solution to how winners should behave. If winners were willing to simply let go of their money, they would. I believe Giridharadas should have had a proposal for what can be done instead of only criticizing what has been done so far.

Other than stratification, I did not know much about economics or win-winism. I had no pre-existing thoughts about win-winism as I had never heard of it in an economic context, so there was nothing for Giridharadas to change my views on. In fact, I have never understood economic concepts, so the book was difficult for me to understand at times. After reading the book, however, I feel as though I will question and think critically about the companies I support because of the problematic nature of win-winism. The book was insightful on how winners impact others and how even though they believe they are solving problems, they are only

benefitting few people other than themselves. I now see the injustice that winners both ignore and create. Finally, I feel more equipped to talk about economic injustice in general.

While I learned quite a bit from the book, I still have many questions. First, I question why I have never heard of win-winism before. It appears that the concept is not new, but I was unaware of it. Is that simply because companies do not want to speak about it, or that I do not follow economics? I also wonder what students such as I can do to combat win-winism. Is this only something that winners can fix, or can others, even the government, do something about it? Finally, I am curious if there are winners that recognize that win-winism may be problematic and if so, what are they doing to stand against it? The book focused on winners who were not attacking systemic issues, but I feel as though there has to be winners that are.

Overall, *Winners Take All* was insightful. I learned a great deal about a concept I had never heard of, and I appreciate that I am now able to speak intelligently about the subject. The book has already led me to be more conscious about the companies I support as well as to be more conscious of how systemic problems can be solved. Though Giridharadas did not provide a constructive solution, I believe I will continue to think of solutions. Win-winism is both radical and problematic, and *Winners Take All* provided many examples to prove it.

Works Cited

Giridharadas, Anand. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. Vintage Books, 2019.