

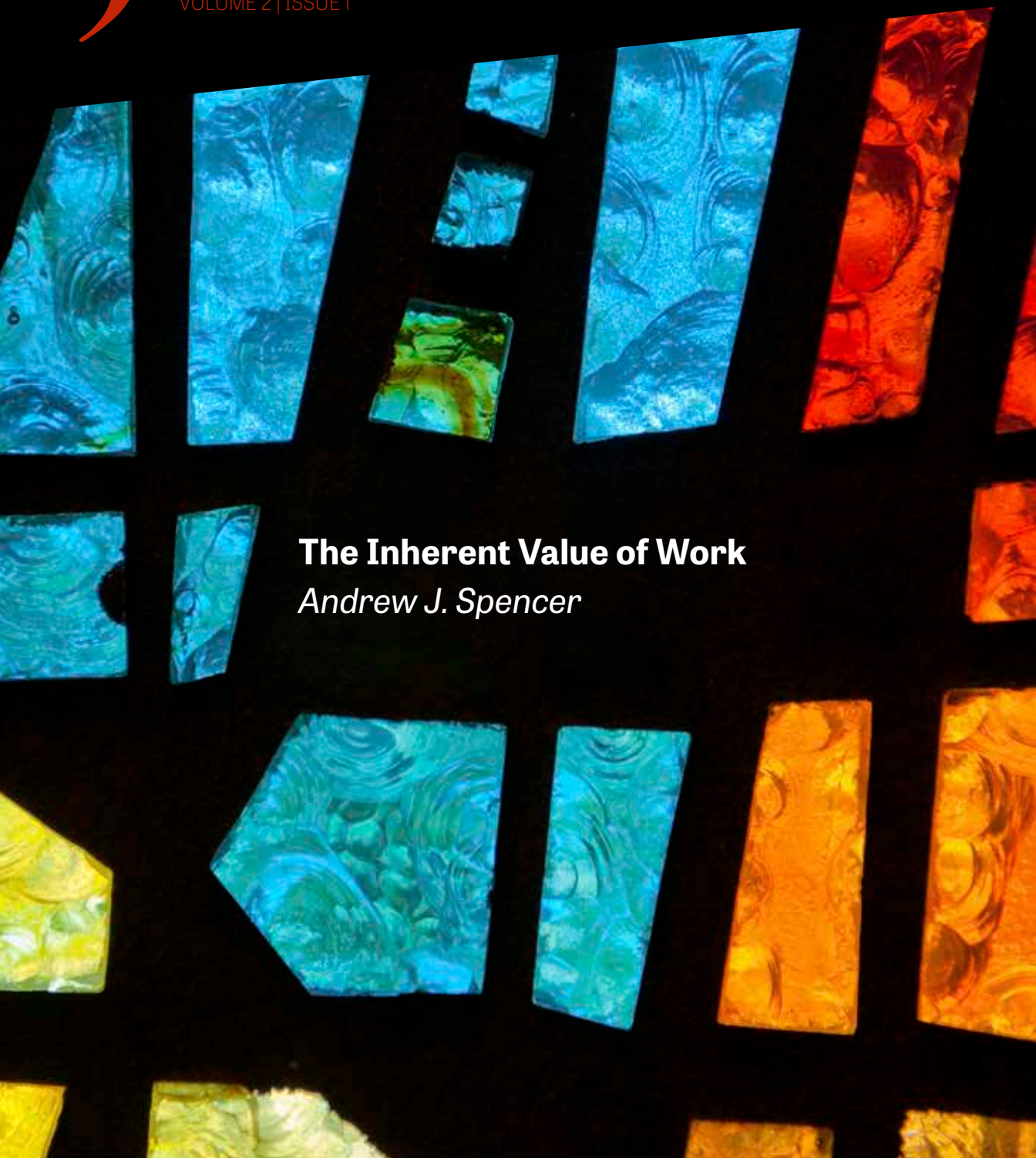
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## **The Inherent Value of Work**

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## *The Inherent Value of Work*

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**Abstract:** In recent scholarship and popular discourse, there has been an explosion of interest in the topic of faith and work. The revival of this age-old discussion has helped to revitalize a Christian understanding of the vocation and ministry through daily labor. While the faith and work conversation is healthy and has benefited many people, it suffers from an insufficient value system. This essay argues that work should be seen as having primarily inherent value. Work is not intrinsically valuable: it has no value in and of itself. Nor does it have purely instrumental value. Instead, work is valuable inasmuch as it serves the common good and reflects the moral order of the created order. This three-tiered value system is drawn from Augustine, but has most recently been championed by C. I. Lewis. Ascribing inherent value, rather than intrinsic or instrumental, to work enables individuals to balance several vocations and adjudicate between ethically acceptable and unacceptable vocations.

Key Words: Value theory, faith and work, inherent value, C. I. Lewis, Augustine, vocation

### Introduction

In his 1972 book, *Working*, Studs Terkel begins with a startling description of the purpose of his book and the nature of work. He writes, “This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations.”<sup>1</sup> But he goes on to note that the book is “about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash . . .; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.”<sup>2</sup> For Terkel the reality falls far short of the ideal, but there is an ideal for which people earnestly yearn. For Terkel’s subjects, work is instrumentally necessary to earn a living but lacks deeper

1. Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974): xi.

2. *Ibid.*

value. He interviews dozens of workers and mostly finds out how unhappy they are. The accounts are poetic, rich, and raw. His work is powerful, but it leaves the reader longing for a better ending. It conveys the deep human longing to find value in work.

Forty years later, the situation is not much different. For many Americans, work is only good for the money it brings in. According to a survey from Pew Research in 2010, 87% of Americans cited the income from their jobs as a primary reason to work. Less than half felt they were working for the greater good.<sup>3</sup> This points to a purely instrumental understanding of work. In other words, work is mainly good because it serves a utilitarian purpose. The discussion of work, even as it is being carefully worked through by the ongoing Faith and Work movement, tends to suffer from an insufficient theory of value. Christians are seeking to revitalize a robust vision of the value of daily work, but the vocabulary for value theory being used is insufficient.

In contemporary discussions, the value of work tends to be discussed as either intrinsic or instrumental.<sup>4</sup> Intrinsic value is based on the nature of the work itself. Instrumental value is value based on the good derived from work. This article argues that such a two tiered value structure is insufficient, and that a three tiered set of values is necessary to understand the value of work as dependent upon its relational goodness in comparison to its proper function in giving glory to God. A category for inherent value, which is value dependent on the fulfillment of a purpose by an object in relation to another object, should be added for a more complete theory of value. To adequately discuss the value of work, Christians should clearly differentiate between intrinsic, inherent, and instrumental value.

To get at this thesis, first this essay will define and discuss value theory, outlining a three-part system of value which resonates with that apparent in the theology of St. Augustine of Hippo. Second, this essay will compare descriptions of work in Scripture against the categories of value. Third, this essay will show how ascribing inherent value to work enables an individual to balance several vocations and allows for adjudicating between ethically acceptable and unacceptable vocations.

3. Paul Taylor, *America's Changing Workforce: Recession Turns a Graying Office Grayer* (Pew Research Center, 2009), 16, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/americas-changing-workforce.pdf>. See also Paul Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic): 24–25.

4. R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 11.

## **Toward an Augustinian Theory of Value**

The topic of value theory is complex. There are nearly as many systems of value proposed as there are scholars who have written on the topic. Even between systems that seem to agree in principle, there are differences in vocabulary that can confuse the discussion.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to understand value through a biblical worldview and describe the schema of value in significantly different ways. Finding a key to the important ethical category of value can be difficult for a Christian, particularly since many philosophical systems seem to disallow the existence of God.

Thankfully Augustine provides an early Christian foundation for value theory. In *The Nature of the Good*, Augustine argues God is good in a unique way. Since he is the Creator, he is distinct from the creation.<sup>6</sup> Thus his goodness is a higher goodness than that possessed by created things. Creation is good, but it has a goodness derived from its relationship to the Creator.<sup>7</sup> The degree of derived goodness of an object is determined by its fulfillment of the purpose for which God designed it.<sup>8</sup>

This resonates with a commonly accepted division in value theory between intrinsic and extrinsic goods.<sup>9</sup> Intrinsic goodness describes the goodness native to an object for its own sake.<sup>10</sup> This is an immutable, final value that Augustine attributes to God alone.<sup>11</sup> For his part, Harvard scholar C. I. Lewis, a pragmatist

5. For example, even in edited volumes there is often a wide range of terms used for similar values. The text of various essays in the *Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* use the term “intrinsic” in multiple different ways and use synonyms (e.g., “final value”) at times to refer to a particular subset of intrinsic value. Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). The primary purpose of this essay is not to create final, absolute definitions or assert a particular meaning for terms used by others, but to argue for applying three distinct categories for value with the definitions offered here, whatever one decides to call them.

6. The emphasis on Creator-creature distinction has led to accusations of dualism from some. Elaine H. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 99. Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, *Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 79. However, Bradley Green has since qualified this to indicate he is a hierarchical dualist, thus affirming the Creator-creature distinction without devaluing the created order. Bradley G. Green, *Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine: The Theology of Colin Gunton in Light of Augustine*, *Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology* (Eugene Pickwick Publications, 2011): 132.

7. Augustine, “The Nature of the Good,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Edmund Hill and John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990): 1.

8. *Ibid.*, 8.

9. Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, ed. Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 29–30.

10. Clarence Lewis defines intrinsic value as “that which is good in itself or good for its own sake.” Clarence Irving Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1946): 382.

11. Augustine, “The Nature of the Good,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, 1.

philosopher who was not a theist, recognizes a category for intrinsic value, but argues, “All value in objective existents is extrinsic.”<sup>12</sup> Extrinsic goodness is non-final value ascribed to an object based on its relationship to a set of qualities.<sup>13</sup> Thus, extrinsic value refers to goodness that is due to attributes that come from outside the object itself.

Most discussions of the value of work allow only intrinsic value or a single type of value in the extrinsic category, namely instrumental value. This limitation is unhelpful for understanding the true value of work, particularly from a Christian perspective.<sup>14</sup> At least two types of extrinsic goodness are indicated. The first type of extrinsic values are inherent values, which are, according to Lewis, “those values which are resident in objects in such wise that they are realizable in experience through presentation to the object itself to which they are attributed.”<sup>15</sup> Goodness of an object is thus due to qualities in the object itself in relationship to some external set of values. A second type of extrinsic value is instrumental value, which is dependent solely on the utility of an object to a subject.<sup>16</sup> In the instrumental view, goodness of an object is dependent on how well it fulfills a desired end.

There is both distinction and connection between categories of instrumental and inherent value. For example, a painting may be beautiful and representative of artistic excellence but serve no practical purpose. Thus the painting would have inherent value, but little instrumental value.<sup>17</sup> The value of such a painting is primarily derived from its ability to delight the viewer and testify to the excellence of the painter. Its value is relational. In contrast, a dust mop may

12. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 432. Lewis’ main goal was to combat the influence of skeptical philosophies by arguing for a rational, objective ordering in the world. This is why Lewis is helpful for developing a Christian value system, though he is not himself a believer. E. Paul Colella, “Human Nature and the Ethics of C. I. Lewis,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 302.

13. Ronnow-Rasmussen, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, 32.

14. *Ibid.*, 29.

15. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 391. The term “inherent” is Lewis’ own. He used the term to describe a value category between intrinsic value (which requires a supernaturalist worldview) and instrumental value (which references the utilitarian worth of objects). The distinction between the two categories is fine, much like the difference between red and maroon: to the artist, it is quite important; to the weary husband shopping with his wife, it may seem numbingly trivial. Using the term “inherent” is helpful to prevent the confusion that might result if one used the terms *intrinsic*<sub>1</sub> and *intrinsic*<sub>2</sub> to refer to the categories here labeled as “intrinsic” and “inherent” value, respectively. For example, Sahotra Sarkar, *Biodiversity and Environmental Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 52-58.

16. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 391.

17. It might be argued that even the painting would have some utility if it were used to momentarily feed a fire or stop the draft around a door. This, however, is not the primary purpose of the painting and would reflect little inherent value.



have mainly instrumental value, inasmuch as it is good for cleaning the floor of the art gallery. However, if it is leaned next to the painting there would be no comparison between their beauty and, and it would give little or no attestation to the artisanship of the manufacturer.<sup>18</sup> This is especially true for objects that have been hastily and inexpensively made with only utility in mind. On the other hand, a staircase in the same art gallery may have significant instrumental and inherent value simultaneously if it is both artistically excellent and useful for transiting between levels. There is both continuity and discontinuity between these two types of extrinsic value.

Augustine's concept of goodness is helpful for discussing intrinsic value and both types of extrinsic value. In his discussion of the use and enjoyment of things in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine differentiates between objects that are to be 'used' and those that are to be 'enjoyed.' Those things that are to be enjoyed have intrinsic value, "For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake."<sup>19</sup> This underived value is attributed only to God.<sup>20</sup> Created objects, which have inherent value inasmuch as they are rightly ordered to God's design, are only to be used. As Oliver O'Donovan writes, "Augustine's position . . . is that one 'uses' an object that is in itself 'for use' (*utendum*) and enjoys an object which is in itself 'for enjoyment' (*fruendum*). To break with the objective order in which this distinction is rooted is vicious and perverse."<sup>21</sup> The Creator is to be enjoyed and the creation is to be used. To do otherwise is to sin.

In contemporary discussions, the term "use" generally has a negative connotation, reflecting only instrumental value being ascribed to an object. This is particularly troublesome when the use of humans is considered. However, as O'Donovan explains, "Our 'use' of other people must be understood to promote our welfare as well as theirs."<sup>22</sup> Thus using an object, human or otherwise, in Augustine's terms indicates that it must be appropriately valued in light of its relationship to God, and the use of it should enhance that relationship rather than detract from it.

As compared with intrinsic value, which can be ascribed only to God with his divine aseity, inherent value belongs to objects in proportion to the degree to which they are properly related to God. There is still goodness in things with inherent value, but it is not the highest good, and it is derived from the ordering

18. One might argue that the dust mop might properly attest to the quality of a brand and thus have some inherent value. The limited relation to its maker reflects a minimal inherent value.

19. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 4.4.

20. *Ibid.*, 5.5.

21. Oliver O'Donovan, "Usus and Fructio in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982): 368.

22. *Ibid.*, 371.

of the nature of the object to God. This reflects the distinction between Creator and creature. The Creator alone has intrinsic value. The creation has a degree of inherent value as it fulfills its purpose in bringing glory to God. In Augustine's calculus, these lesser goods should be used and not enjoyed.

Objects with inherent value may be used to glorify God, who is the only object with intrinsic value, and the only object that should be enjoyed. As Augustine writes about creation in *Confessions*, "Your works praise you that we may love you, and we love you that your works may praise you."<sup>23</sup> God's works have inherent value and may also have instrumental value. In both cases they may be used or abused according to Augustine's definitions.<sup>24</sup> However, an object may have instrumental value despite being deficient (though not entirely lacking) in inherent value. Augustine supports this when he shows how God used Satan to prove Job's righteousness.<sup>25</sup> Thus the Devil's disordered being, with its diminished goodness, has instrumental value to God greater than his inherent value. There is a difference between these two lesser types of value. Likewise an object improperly used is being abused, as the staircase from the example above would have been abused if it was employed for committing murder by pushing someone down it.<sup>26</sup> It may have instrumental value for that improper use, which would be divorced from the inherent value connected to its ordered usefulness. Its instrumental and inherent value is misaligned in an instance when the staircase is misused. Goodness is inherent to the created order because it was created by the highest good and its inherent value is proportional to its ordering to God, but it is also instrumental as it may be used or abused.

Augustine's system of value was largely derived in response to the dualism of the Manicheans. Therefore, he focuses on the value in the material world; in other words, physical objects can have value. In the contemporary, materialistic age, the ascription of value to physical objects is generally non-controversial. It is another thing, however, to ascribe good to an intangible object such as work. However, ascribing value to intangible objects is currently accepted to the point that courts assign monetary value to customer relationships in family law cases.<sup>27</sup> Closer to daily life, intellectual capital is typically granted value. Thus

23. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, *Vintage Spiritual Classics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998): 13.33.

24. Indeed, in his *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, Augustine writes: "Everything that has been created, then, has been created for the use of human beings, because reason uses with judgment everything that has been given to human beings." Augustine, *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990): 30.

25. Augustine, "The Nature of the God," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, 32.

26. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.4.

27. E.g., Robert F. Reilly, "Family Law Valuation of Customer Intangible Assets," *American Journal of Family Law* 28.3 (Fall 2014): 130–42.

having a doctor examine a broken leg is valued much more than an inspection by a barber. The patient is likely to pay more for the expertise of the doctor in setting the bone than for the barber's efforts, even if the end result is identical. There is, then, some inherent value in the knowledge the doctor possesses that enables him to work redemptively on the patient, diagnose more fully, and perhaps prevent some avoidable complications.

Paul Stevens' proposal that work is both intrinsically good and extrinsically good is a step in the right direction, but it does not provide a separate category of value for ultimate, immutable good.<sup>28</sup> Applied in Augustine's terms, this would mean we could both enjoy and use work. However, according to Augustine, to enjoy something is to love it for its own sake, which would put it as the ultimate concern over God.<sup>29</sup> This would be idolatry, which is not what Stevens intends.

Although he classifies work as a good in and of itself, Stevens recognizes the need to differentiate between good and bad work. Accordingly, he defines "good" work as the expenditure of "purposeful energy that brings glory to God and serves our neighbor."<sup>30</sup> "Bad" work, therefore, "deconstructs creation, abuses our neighbor, and does not bring glory to God."<sup>31</sup> He goes on to describe good work as being a means of spiritual growth, being communal, and unfolding the potential of creation.<sup>32</sup> These are helpful descriptions and accurately represent work that honors God. They are also consistent with the idea that work must be rightly ordered to God to have value, which tends to undercut the idea that work is a good in itself. Instead, as represented by the category of inherent value, work is good as it is rightly ordered to God.

As proposed in this essay, a three category system of values has support from philosophically developed value systems, relates to an Augustinian understanding of ordered goods, and has benefits for developing a balanced view of the goodness of work. It also aligns with the image of work as it is represented through the narrative of Scripture.

### **Inherent Value of Work in Scripture**

Scripture does not give a clear categorization of work or vocation as described in contemporary terms. Indeed, the three categories described above are extrabiblical, much like Augustine's account of value. This, however, does not diminish the value of using such extrabiblical categories to provide a framework for biblical concepts, much as theologians do when describing the moral, civil, and ceremonial categories

28. Stevens, *Work Matters*, 11.

29. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.4.

30. Stevens, *Work Matters*, 17.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, 18–20.



of the law in the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup> Such categories are helpful and, as long as they do not impose improper order on Scripture, are beneficial for developing and promoting understanding.

Based on Scripture, there is reason to believe that work has inherent value as defined above. First, in the beginning work was entirely good. Indeed, the events of the six days of the creation narrative are witness to the triune God working. The maker God created the universe by the power of his word and recognized its goodness verbally (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Second, even before the entry of sin into the world, God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and gave him the task of cultivating and keeping the earth (Gen 2:15).<sup>34</sup> Contrary to John Sailhamer and Umberto Cassuto, work was not introduced to the created order because of sin.<sup>35</sup> Rather, both the particular task of tending the Garden and the general duty to work were perfectly oriented to God and therefore entirely good; the inherent value was perfectly aligned with its instrumental value.

That pristine character of work did not remain for long, however. When Eve was deceived by the Serpent and convinced Adam to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1–6). It was at that point God cursed the created order, making work difficult. In one sense, work remained good, but it was able to be distorted. No longer was there a complete overlap between the inherent and instrumental value of

33. David W. Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013): 56–63.

34. In recent scholarship, three main options are recognized for the appropriate translation of the words *דבא* and *שמר* in Gen 2:15. The traditional and most common view is an agricultural view that Adam was placed in the Garden in order to “cultivate and keep” it. The agricultural interpretation of Gen 2:15 is supported by the vast majority of Bible scholars throughout history along with contemporary scholars such as Calvin Beisner and Richard Bauckham. Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation, Sarum Theological Lectures*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010): 21–22, 106–07; E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1997): 127. More recently, two alternative translations of Gen 2:15 have become increasingly popular. The most common recent theological interpretation of Gen 2:15 reads *דבא* and *שמר* as “serve and protect.” This is a view held by Loren Wilkinson, Richard Young, and Steven Bouma-Prediger. Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care, Engaging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001): 74; Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation*, ed. Loren Wilkindon, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991): 287; Richard A. Young, *Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions* (Nashville: B & H, 1994): 163. A second recent interpretation renders *דבא* and *שמר* as “worship and obey.” This variant translation appears to have originated with Old Testament scholar Umberto Cassuto and brought into popularity by John Sailhamer, but is the least common of the three options by far. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press Hebrew University, 1978): 122; John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, ed. Frank Ely Gaebelien and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976): 44.

35. Neither Sailhamer nor Cassuto gives a well-supported basis for their rejection of work, but rather they assume that the references to work in Gen 2:5 and 2:15 are foreshadowing of the curse of work at the fall in Gen 3:23. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 102, 22–23; Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, 40–41, 45.

work. Instead, the created order was bent out of alignment. Work became difficult, with thorns and thistles infesting the ground (Gen 3:17). This was intended to point humanity to the need for a redeemer that would restore all things.<sup>36</sup> After this point in salvation history, there is evidence that some forms of work are sinful. For example, prostitution is a form of work declared sinful. Although the wages of prostitution could feed a family as well as the profit from agriculture could, money obtained through sex-work was unacceptable as an offering to God.<sup>37</sup> (Deut 23:17–18). When spiritual death entered the world, it became possible for work to be either evil or good (cf. Ps 28:4–5).<sup>38</sup> As Augustine argues, it became possible for something otherwise good to be diminished in value because it no longer fulfills its purpose.<sup>39</sup> It may still fulfill a utilitarian purpose, but work done wrongly is no longer used but abused.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the depravity in the world, there is clear evidence in Scripture that work itself is not irredeemable. Just as the Godhead did work in creating the world, so Jesus worked during his time on earth. He was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter (Mk

36. Most English translations of Gen 3:17 read, “cursed is the ground because of you.” Both the KJV and NKJV read, “cursed is the ground for your sake.” There is a subtle difference between the two. The Hebrew is indeterminate. I have not found a focused treatment of this subtle difference in any commentary. Seeing human sin as the cause of the curse is clearly found in the text, but the implications of the curse pointing humanity back to the need of a Savior is an implication of the KJV/NKJV reading. I prefer the KJV/NKJV reading because it implies both human cause and divine purpose. Augustine seems to support this reading in his commentary. Augustine, *On Genesis against the Manichees and, on the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1990): 2.20.30. Also, Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction 2.4–5* and *Homilies on Genesis*, 17.40–41, cited in Andrew Louth and Marco Conti, *Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001): 94–95.

37. Commentators are divided as to whether Deut 23:17 and 23:18 both pertain to ritual prostitution, or whether there are separate commands prohibiting both ritual prostitution and using money from sex-work for vows. Neither arrangement undermines the assertion that at least sex-work done as worship to a false god is sufficiently ill-oriented to negate its inherent value. For more on the debate see Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976): 301–02; Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996): 949; John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009): 1:497.

38. Commentaries consistently note the comparison in Ps 28:4–5 between God’s good work and the works of the wicked. The works of the wicked are disordered, opposed to community, and destructive. Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1906): 1:247–48; Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014): 276.

39. Augustine, “The Nature of the Good,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, 4–6.

40. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 4.4.

6:3).<sup>41</sup> He did miracles, which the Synagogue leaders classified as work. They thus accused him of violating the Law because of the redeeming work he did (Cf. Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11). However, Scripture tells us that Jesus did not sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15). Since Christ worked without sin during his life on earth, work as a category cannot be sinful; to argue otherwise creates a Christological problem. Rather, as fully God and fully man, Christ did work that was properly oriented to God’s purposes; thus the instrumental and inherent value of the deeds were perfectly aligned. Jesus’ work was entirely good.

In addition to Christ’s example, Paul’s letters encourage Christians to do godly work. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul urges the thief to stop doing dishonest work and “work with his own hands” to be able to meet the needs of others (Eph 4:28).<sup>42</sup> Although both stealing and honest labor can be taxing, one has greater value than the other because it is rightly oriented toward God. Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, Paul urges the Christians to do honest work to provide for themselves.<sup>43</sup> For Paul, work is a necessary part of the Christian life as long as it serves the purpose of meeting needs and glorifying God. Indeed, Paul instructs slaves not to work merely to please humans or to gain materially. Instead,

41. There is some debate about the nature of the Marcan declaration of Jesus as a carpenter. Most scholars accept the fact that Jesus was both a carpenter and, as seen in Matt. 13:55, the son of a carpenter. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975): 222; Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014): 241–42. Early in Christian history, Celsus, a detractor of Christianity, argued that Jesus’ vocation of carpenter made him unworthy to be revered. However, in Jewish society the role of carpenter was familiar and honorable within society. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): 171; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974): 201–02. Complicating the issue, Metzger notes there is a textual variant that imports the Matthean formulation into Mark, but the committee indicated A-level confidence in the variant that identifies Jesus as carpenter. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994): 75–76.

42. Thielman argues this is likely referring to agricultural workers whose incomes fluctuated according to the season and may have had to steal or rely on the dole to get by between seasons. Thus honest, manual labor which ran contrary to social norms was preferable to dishonest gain. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010): 315–16. This notion resonates with Gal 6:10. Cf., Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013): 388–89.

43. Behind the text there are a range of potential concerns. One commentator suggests that this verse is Paul’s counter cultural assertion that, contra Cicero, manual labor was good. It also served the purpose of putting the Christians in good standing with the culture since they were not dependent upon their neighbors. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014): 296–99. Others suggest the eschatological predictions of immediate *Parousia* led to converts quitting their jobs. Paul was thus urging them to support themselves. William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995): 104–07. Another commentator argues that Paul’s exhortation was intended to direct the Christians’ efforts toward glorifying God, not outshining their neighbors. Gary Steven Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012): 170–71. Yet another commentator believes Paul is speaking against the patron system common in Roman culture. Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): 208–12. It is clear there is no consensus other than that Paul is affirming the value of manual labor, which was generally viewed as socially stigmatizing. He is thus affirming the inherent value of work, even if it is socially unappreciated.

work is to be done explicitly for God's sake (Col 3:22–24).<sup>44</sup> Work, then, has potential to be entirely good and thus to be inherently valuable.

There is further evidence of the potentially undefiled nature of human work. First, Paul depicts the redemption of all creation in Romans 8:18–23. The “setting free from bondage to corruption” (8:21) seems to imply the repealing of the curse that God placed on the earth.<sup>45</sup> The futility of creation, where it resists human attempts at cultivation, will be ended and creation will be freed to glorify God. In Isaiah's description of the New Heavens and New Earth in Isaiah 65:17–25, there is an absence of frustration in work.<sup>46</sup> Workers will receive the fruit of their work, and labor will be purposeful. When the created order is restored, work too will be redeemed, and thus it will become consistently good and inherently valuable because it will be necessarily rightly ordered to God.

### **Practical Implications of Inherent Value**

Inherent value as a category has implications for all of life, because it honors the Creator-creature distinction by providing a means of establishing non-instrumental, non-final value for objects. This effectively creates a middle road for Christians to understand objects as meaningful apart from their utility without giving them status as ultimate or necessary. As defined in this paper, inherent value, as a category, is useful for many areas of life. It provides for rightly valuing the created order and for weighing end-of-life choices. It also has benefits for advancing the conversation on the doctrine of vocation along two fronts by providing a framework for balancing a variety of diverse vocations and giving a value structure that permits evaluation of the moral quality of vocations.

### **Balancing Diverse Vocations**

When work is viewed as an intrinsic good instead of an inherent good, then it bears pursuing over other, lesser goods. This could cause the neglect of other legitimate

44. Paul's discussion of the slave-master relationship toward the end of the household code in Col 3:22–4:1 is revolutionary. Beyond the startling significance of doing work for God's sake instead of for personal benefit, the master's responsibility to be just and fair because of God's lordship over all indicates an ontological egalitarianism with functional differentiation that has implications for all of Christian life. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996): 252–60; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 308–17. Note also the resonance between Paul's notion of doing work for the sake of something else (Col 3:23) and Augustine's discussion of using an object to gain enjoyment of God. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, 33.37.

45. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 321; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998): 435.

46. It is not entirely clear from Isaiah 65 whether the prophet is describing the Millennium or the final fulfillment, since he references young men dying at age 100. (v. 20) However, if the chapter is referring to the Millennial Kingdom instead of the final restoration of all things, it only makes the redemption of work more imminent. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 652–62.

vocations, such as parent, church member, and neighbor. If intrinsic value is also ascribed to these other vocations, then some means of comparing the relative values of these self-contained goods must be maintained. The new value system for selecting between various good vocations, each with intrinsic value, would tend to rely upon a utilitarian calculus. Thus, for instance, the intrinsic good of being a nurturing parent might be weighed as more pleasant than the intrinsic good of being an excellent employee because a child is more likely to return affection than a boss is to praise work done well. In this example, therefore, the intrinsic goods of various vocations become effectively merely instrumental.<sup>47</sup>

Other options for choosing between differing vocations exist, if they are all intrinsically valuable. For example, one might cast lots, divide time equally, or do whatever is closest at hand. All of these means would be valid if there were final value ascribed to each of the available vocations. However, such an arbitrary prioritization seems to undermine the moral order evident in creation. Thus, work cannot be described as having intrinsic value.

### **Moral Evaluation of Vocations**

In contrast, if work is purely of instrumental value, then the end is all that matters and not the work itself. There must be something of intrinsic worth that a worker pursues as the end of the chain of instrumental goods. The instrumental means of obtaining that intrinsic good is less morally significant than the good itself. This leads to the possibility that ethically unacceptable vocations may be viewed as good because they accomplish the same goal as another vocation. If work is viewed purely instrumentally, then the vocation of the prostitute is equal in value to that of the computer engineer, provided both achieve the same good of earning money to sustain life.

In an article on the decriminalization of prostitution, one sociologist argues that sex-work should be viewed as any other work. According to her argument, the problem with prostitution is not that it is inappropriate work but that it is stigmatized. The criminal nature of sex-work prevents prostitutes from reporting assaults and robberies.<sup>48</sup> Another study recommends decriminalizing some forms of prostitution because the authors allege prostitution reduces the incidence of sexual violence, thus providing societal benefit.<sup>49</sup> The major thrust of this argument is that if all laws about prostitution were removed from society, it would diminish the violence

47. Adler addresses this difficulty by describing all values in a Cost-Benefit Analysis as merely preferential or prudential. Such a simplification is necessary if all values are esteemed equally and reflects the danger of reflected if all vocations are viewed as having intrinsic value. Matthew D. Adler, "Value and Cost-Benefit Analysis," in *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, ed. Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 318.

48. Jacqueline Comte, "Decriminalization of Sex Work: Feminist Discourses in Light of Research," *Sexuality & Culture* 18.1 (2014): 202–04.

49. Scott Cunningham and Manisha Shah, *Decriminalizing Indoor Prostitution: Implications for Sexual Violence and Public Health* (The National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014): 1–54.



issues related to prostitution.<sup>50</sup> This perspective is valid if all work, including the work of prostitution, is judged merely by its outcome. However, since prostitution is prohibited by Scripture (Lev 19:29; 21:9), the work could be said to have some value but not value that accords with God's design for the world. There are different ways of evaluating the instrumental value of prostitution, but the fact remains that being good at being a prostitute falls short of making sex-work truly valuable.

Inherent value as a category for work resolves both sets of difficulties. By viewing work as valuable inasmuch as it is aligned to God, the problems of overvaluing of work and difficulty in prioritizing one vocation against others are resolved. Inherent value sees the goal of all of life to do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Value is found in the object for which the work is done, not the work itself. Seeking work that is inherently valuable instead of instrumentally valuable resolves the question of morality about different sorts of work.

## **Conclusion**

There has been a great deal of helpful dialog about the doctrine of work and vocation in Christian circles in recent decades.<sup>51</sup> This has helped to break down the sacred/secular divide. It has been helpful in enabling Christian men and women to find meaning in their vocations, whether in the home, in the church, or in the marketplace. Much good has been accomplished through this discussion, but there remains a weakness in terminology to help provide a precise way of describing the value of work.

This essay has argued that work should be described as having inherent value, which is a distinct category from intrinsic and instrumental value. This adjective places the value of work in relation to the designer of work, namely God himself. It recognizes the instrumental benefits of working, which are also good, but which can be obtained through unrighteous forms of work. The greatest benefit of understanding work as having inherent value is that it provides a framework

50. Kathleen N. Deering et al., "A Systematic Review of the Correlates of Violence against Sex Workers," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 5 (2014): 52–54.

51. This is by no means a new topic, as it is explicitly evidenced in Dorothy L. Sayers' work in the early Twentieth Century. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London, U.K.: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1952). However, work and vocation are topics that have sprung up with renewed vigor in recently years as this bibliography attests: William C. Placher, ed. *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014); Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality*; Timothy J. Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012); Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011); Stevens, *Work Matters*; Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002); Hugh Welchel, *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow, 2012); Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

for evaluating the morality of vocations. Seeing work as merely instrumentally valuable fails to provide that framework.

Discussions of vocation that ascribe intrinsic value to work can be helpful, but as seen in Stevens' writing, it creates difficulties of description with regard to good and bad work. His explanation is still beneficial, as are others that use similar terminology, but there is a need for more precise language that both ennobles work and leaves room for ethical evaluation.

Inherent value, when applied to work, fits with the biblical characterization of work. It is both corruptible and redeemable. It does not seem to have value in and of itself, and it is not good merely for its ends. Work that is rightly ordered toward God within the created order is valuable because it honors him. This is the category of inherent value. It permits distinguishing the vocations of priests from prostitutes. It provides the ethical schema that allows assigning moral value to vocations, pointing people toward the qualified goodness of work within the moral order of creation.