<u>RELIGION</u>

On the Use of the Self:
The Economic Implications of Theological Anthropology

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For Margot:

Thank you for showing me the profundity of uselessness
and helping me situate my own work in the order of things.
Your entry into the world showed me both why this project matters
and why I needed to put it down.

"Now that knowing means nothing,
now that you are more born
than being, more awake
than awaited…
and I saw you storming forth…
into this afterlife among us living"
-Kevin Young

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Relatedly, the basic contours of this project can be traced back to my first seminar at Vanderbilt with Ellen Armour. In the first week of her Theological Anthropology course (my first at Vanderbilt), I drew on the ungrounded criticisms I had heard for so long and suggested that Augustine was unduly anxious about his embodied status. We rightfully spent the next hour unpacking why this suggestion was so misguided, and I have never been able to un-hear or escape her push toward a more gracious reading of *The City of God* since that memorable class.

I also owe a special word of thanks to Bruce Morrill, whose encouragement and advice throughout this project were both cautionary and energizing. Bruce pushed me when I needed it, warmed me of some dangers along the way, and cheered me on the whole time. I will forever remember his simple instructions: "Write about whatever puts a fire in your belly."

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Introduction

The usual cowardly caveats apply. I am not an Augustinian scholar. My Latin is sketchy and altogether inadequate to read Augustine in the original. I do not 'keep up' with the continuous flow of Augustinian scholarship. That, I dare say, would be beyond the ken of any single human being, even one whose life was dedicated solely to the works of Augustine.

Jean Bethke Elshtain
Augustine and the Limits of Politics

The How and Why of This Project

I think it fitting to begin by echoing Jean Bethke Elshtain's sentiments in this introduction's epigraph, with which she began *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*. Those caveats, I believe, are more true for me than they were for Elshtain. As such, I am as surprised as anyone else that I ended up writing a dissertation on Augustine, and I therefore think it worth naming both how I arrived at this topic and my goals for this project. To the extent that I understand it, I arrived here by charting and tracing two different paths, both of which converged on the recent appropriation of Augustine's theological system for contemporary political questions.

The first of those paths I traced, which ultimately led me to Augustine and this particular topic, was contemporary theology's engagement with economic issues. A slow, careful reading of the first volume of Marx's *Capital* clarified for me the relationship between labor and other contemporary economic issues (mass inequality, the racist history of American capitalism, the negative impact of the ways in which the American political system is financed, the expensive nature of healthcare, land removal, the mis-use of natural resources, the psychic and moral effects of debt, etc.). I have thus been particularly interested in the ways contemporary theology has taken up labor-related questions. Those thinkers have, to be certain, clarified and nuanced much of my own thinking. But I found that so much of that discourse depends on particular renderings of divine transcendence and social

trinitarianism that I find problematic. As such, I have been on the hunt for helpful resources through which I might develop an alternative to address the question of labor that preserves a classical theology of transcendence and the god-world relation.

The second path that ultimately led me to write a dissertation on the economic implications of Augustine's theological anthropology was my interest in political theology, which ultimately led me to the recent Augustinian resurgence. I found, in both Augustine and political Augustinianism, a helpful way of thinking about faithful Christian engagement with contemporary political structures.[1] These thinkers recognize in Augustine a way to name the unjust, ideological, and idolatrous shortcomings of both structures and individual practices. At the same time, they use Augustine to strike a balanced vision that avoids what I take to be three generally unhelpful ways of articulating Christian political life: (1) abstracted retreat wherein one altogether fails to articulate the political implications of the Christian faith; (2) the unrealistic attempt to posit and develop a uniquely Christian, isolated political system or practice; and (3) the utopic tendencies of much contemporary, progressive theological discourse. Political Augustinianism—and Augustine himself, for that matter—offers a more realistic, difficult path through which those hoping to be counted amongst the city of God must travel, and I find that to be very exciting indeed.

To date, however, little work has thoroughly examined the resources in Augustine's theological system for questions of contemporary economic life. As a result, scholarship regularly endorses a

[1] I am thinking, in particular, of the following works: Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Paul Griffiths, "Secularity and the Saeculum," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14–32; Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of City of God 19," in *Bonds of Imperfection*, ed. Joan Lockwood O'Donovan and Oliver O'Donovan (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2003), 48–72; Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: Reading the City of God," in *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), 107–30.

vision for political life devoid of any notion of political economy.[2] Without an adequate analysis of the crucial role that capitalism plays in structuring contemporary politics and American life, we severely misrepresent the nuanced mechanics, pressures, and needs for structuring a faithfully Christian sketch of public life. The basic goal of this dissertation is to begin remedying that gap by extending the recent work of political Augustinianism into the economic sphere in order to sketch a Christian anti-work ethic.

To some extent, then, this dissertation is an attempt to connect the dots between these two threads: contemporary theology's address to labor and political Augustinianism's lack of engagement with economic issues. That is, I want to draw on the resources of Augustine and political Augustinianism in order to sketch an alternative treatment of labor in contemporary theology.

Such an account, I think, intervenes in three distinct areas: economic criticism, economic theology, and Augustinian studies. This book, I hope, will clarify the crucial role that religious frameworks can and should play in deliberations over the distribution of goods in shared public space, and, in so doing, re-orient the means through which religion takes up economic questions so as to sketch a more particular ethical intervention and a more faithful theological vision. At the same time, I hope this dissertation pushes Augustinian studies toward a more-detailed engagement with issues of political economy—an area I believe to be drastically under-explored in the recent resurgence and appropriation of Augustine's thought. Such an approach would entail a critical analysis of contemporary economic life and a practical vision of life in the *oikonomia* that resists both escapism and any over-estimation of the possibilities of just economies. That is, I am attempting to sketch a

[2] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Zone Books, 2017); Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, 1 edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2000); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2003).

mode of faithful Christian existence that promotes a particular form of engagement with contemporary economics so as to re-imagine a moral response to economic injustice.

What I am Not Saying

In attempting to make use of Augustine's theological system for contemporary economic questions, I am neither assuming nor implying any continuity between late antique Roman economies and contemporary capitalism. If there is one thing scholars concerned with the late antique Roman economy agree on, it is the profound lack of evidence through which they might definitively substantiate competing theories and claims.[3] As historians Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller note, "We know little in detail about the economy of the Roman world. There are no government accounts, no official records of production, trade, occupational distribution, taxation. A systematic account of the Roman economy is therefore beyond our reach."[4] It also seems that the Romans' self-understanding regarding their economic practices is as distinct from our own context as are the structural, practical pieces that made up the larger Roman economy. Economic historian Gloria Vivenza writes that "the Romans, like the other ancients, lacked a systematic view of economics, either as an abstract theory or as an activity independent of politics."[5]

And yet certain characterizations can be established, certain practices deduced, and certain models or assumptions theorized, even if in piecemeal fashion.[6] Insofar as historians can tell, the

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[3] Walter Scheidel, "Approaching the Roman Economy," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2; Gloria Vivenza, "Roman Economic Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27.

[4] Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, Second edition (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 71.

[5] Vivenza, "Roman Economic Thought," 25.

[6] See Garnsey and Saller's *The Roman Empire* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) for a helpful overview and thematic treatment of the Roman economy and its study.

Roman economy largely depended on organic fuels, agriculture, and household production. The Romans seem to have appropriated certain Near Eastern, Hellenistic, and Hellenic economic features such as urbanization, market exchange, taxation, chattel slavery, and monetization.[7] The Roman economy was vastly under-developed, which means that the vast majority of the population survived around a basic subsistence level.[8]

Economic activities beyond the confines of the household tended toward two primary modes of relationality: market exchange (i.e. trade) and relations of domination (i.e. tribute, rent-taking, and slavery).[9] The Roman economy was deeply constrained and directed by the broad ecological and technological contexts of the Roman empire.[10] Archeologist Andrew Wilson rightfully notes that the Roman economy's "available energy budget in each year was a fraction of the solar radiation emitted in that year that could be captured, principally via photosynthesis."[11] This was an economy distinctly not funded by the exploitation of fossil fuels.

While most production and consumption occurred within the household, the labor power through which the economy was sustained is not altogether unfamiliar to constituent members of contemporary capitalist societies. Historian Dennis Kehoe argues there were three primary modes of

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For an excellent chronological survey of the development of the Roman Economy, see *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[7] Scheidel, "Approaching the Roman Economy," 1.

[8] Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire*, 71.

[9] Scheidel, "Approaching the Roman Economy," 8.

[10] Scheidel, 10.

[11] Andrew Wilson, "Raw Materials and Energy," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 151.

labor operative in the Roman economy: farm-tenancy, wage labor, and slave labor.[12] Walter Scheidel has persuasively argued that slaves were not merely present in the Roman empire; rather, the empire itself depended on a slave mode of production, which means that the economy's very survival and extension depended on a deeply integrated system of enslavement, slave-trading, slave production, and slave control.[13] As such, "slave labor occupied a central position in the creation, management, and consumption of elite wealth and social power."[14] In this sense, American economic history is not as vastly removed from the Roman economy as we might like to imagine.[15]

That said, my strategy here does not depend on articulating any analogy between these two vastly different economies and modes of economic thought. I am simply suggesting that some of the theological and ethical principles salvageable from Augustine's analysis of the commonwealth (which I will eventually demonstrate contains certain economic elements) can and should inform our own relationship to the ways in which we collectively produce, distribute, and use wealth in contemporary society. I am thus trying to articulate the economic implications of a certain theological ethic operative in a host of Augustine's texts. The labor structures operative in the Roman empire are, to be sure, vastly different than those that operative in contemporary capitalism, but such a historical gap need not preclude either an appropriation of Augustine's theorization of the nature of productive activity or the theological implications of properly relating to one's work.

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[12] Dennis Kehoe, "Contract Labor," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 115.

[13] Walter Scheidel, "Slavery," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89.

[14] Scheidel, 107.

[15] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, Reprint edition (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

What Hath Wall Street to Do with Chalcedon? Gesturing Toward A Method

Christian theology has a long, fraught history that has helped to form, stabilize, and protect oppressive ideologies and material structures. There can and should be no contesting that claim. This project, however, is premised on the notion that this need not necessarily be the case. In *The Politics of God*, Kathryn Tanner writes, "One simply finds oneself believing as one does, despite the horrible history of actions perpetrated in the name of those beliefs, and one is pushed thereby to hope that such a history is not their necessary effect."[16] This project is funded by that very hope. Christian theology, it must be said, is not innocent in the formation of oppressive histories. At the same time, I aim to demonstrate here that that history is not the inevitable outcome of—it is neither logically nor necessarily connected to—Christian theology. Quite the opposite, in fact. I will argue that a logically consistent doctrine of theological anthropology contains within it (even if implicitly) a vision of work that stands in fundamental tension with the operative assumptions of capitalism and its theologically-grounded history. As I will show, a careful line of argumentation from classical theories of transcendence, divine agency, creation, and theological anthropology need not lead to oppressive socio-economic structures.

Economic Formalism

Demonstrating the possibility of such alternative futures necessitates a brief investigation of some basic theological principles and rules by which those principles should be developed. Tanner extends her methodological reflections and highlights their economic function in *Economy of Grace*, where she articulates the notion of "economic formalism." Her thesis is that Christian theology has an economic vision for the entirety of life. That vision provides an alternative to capitalism's present

[16] Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), ix.

system, and it suggests a practical program for change. It is important to note, though, that Tanner is not suggesting that theology and economics be compared on theological grounds, as though we should compare and contrast capitalism's divinities with the God of Christianity or highlight the generally religious nature of contemporary economic thought. Rather, she compares the two on economic grounds by highlighting and analyzing the ways in which each system imagines the production and distribution of goods.

Tanner develops her own methodology in contradistinction to those she sees operative in the field. One strategy she aims to avoid is theology's aim to enhance Christian values, as this stresses individual approaches to a structural problem.[17] This path offers no vision for production, distribution, or exchange. She also avoids claiming that every Christian doctrine, even when not uttered in economic terms, is said to have economic implications. Whether it be the assertion of self-worth in the midst of poverty or an eschatology that makes possible bearing up under the weight of capitalist discipline, this strategy ultimately gives the impression that Christian doctrines are not fundamentally economic. Her approach is different in that she uses doctrinal claims to make economic matters—understood to be of a different key altogether—more livable.[18]

Tanner thus proposes a formal analysis like that of structuralism. In thinking of her own preference for treating the relation between money and grace, she writes, "An account of the relationship between the two is developed…by attending to the respective ways that grace and money are organized or distributed in human life; the two can be compared along those lines—they belong in the same universe of discourse—even if the meanings or references of the terms have nothing to

[17] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 3.

[18] Tanner, 4.

do with one another."[19] Comparison is made possible by the specificities of the object's own field. She illustrates this insight by pointing to golf. One can only understand the economic assertions surrounding golf if one first understands golf's relation to other sports like monster truck racing or professional wrestling. Each field of reference has to define its own particular ends and concerns, as these give the heart of that discourse its shape and meaning.[20]

This methodology enables Tanner to claim that the entirety of the Christian story is an economic vision. It is a system of production and circulation of goods that begins with God in creation and extends outward through redemption. Tanner argues that the Christian gospel is a narrative of God as the highest good being constituted by God's own Trinitarian exchanges; God aims to create and give the world by transferring the greatest degree of itself to the world possible.[21] That is, the entire narrative of Christianity can be read as "an account of the production of value and the distribution of goods, following this peculiar noncompetitive shape."[22] God creates the world in a noncompetitive vision, and God creates the world such that it can become a noncompetitive economy to the highest degree possible.[23]

Theologizing in Public

In "The Judgment of the World," Rowan Williams enquires into the workings of a scripturally informed imagination. The Scriptural world, he explains, is a historical one from which meanings are

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[19] Tanner, 10.

[20] Tanner, 20.

[21] Tanner, xi.

[22] Tanner, 27.

[23] Tanner, 29.

to be discovered and recovered in action and encounter with our own context. This process is intrinsic to the Church's critical self-discovery. The community following Jesus is given new roles in this process; they are invited to take on that narrative and place themselves in that drama.[24] Williams argues that Christians can only truly discover themselves by moving gracefully into conflict with the world and seeking conversion—"The bringing to judgment of contemporary struggles, and the appropriation of some new dimension of the transforming summons of Christ in his or her own life."[25] The dominant cultural systems we inhabit are simply too affective for us to remain neutral toward or to imagine ourselves being isolated from. Williams notes, "Christians in general and theologians in particular are thus going to be involved as best they can in those enterprises in their culture that seek to create or recover a sense of shared discourse and common purpose in human society," which he notes might look like political engagement or the arts.[26] Williams wants a Christianity that engages the public in a serious manner, and he thinks this public engagement would serve as a form of catechesis and judgment. "The Church judges the world; but it also hears God's judgment on itself in the judgment passed upon it by the world."[27] The entire process helps the Church to reveal just who it is to itself. Theology must equip us to engage with the world, responding to its tendency for accumulation and self-preservation by resisting the control of capital while we share a fuller vision of human understanding in art, science, and politics.[28]

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[24] Rowan Williams, "The Judgement of the World," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 30–32.

[25] Williams, 33.

[26] Williams, 37.

[27] Williams, 39.

[28] Williams, 42.

This is precisely why Paul DeHart has argued that the church is a community of witnesses whose visions cannot be proven or refuted. Its vision is manifest as an ongoing, lived experiment in history.[29] From within this perspective, theology enables a mode of witness in the present context. Though not an autonomous reality, this ongoing process of rediscovering Christ in light of an "ad hoc" engagement with the church's cultural context opens up a range of possibilities. DeHart argues that Christ is encountered precisely in the Church's willingness to allow its witness to be criticized by external sources and discourses, which must be read as a form of God's prior activity in the world. The Spirit is "already at work in the human production of meaning, opening up culture from within to enable a creative conjunction with the word of Christ as it makes its way through history."[30] The submission to external forms of testing is thus a mode of submitting to the judgment of God's living Spirit. As such, he argues, theology must function in terms of a "generous, liberal orthodoxy." DeHart constructively situates these themes around the image of the trial: the trial demands endurance, the trial entails submitting to a public of sorts, and the trial consists of testing our ongoing experiments. Theology has to be orthodox in its willingness to witness faithfully to the scriptures' identity of the resurrected one, and it must be liberal in its constant re-description and re-articulation of that resurrected one in correlation to various cultural contexts.

This project trades in such aspirations, particularly as I aim to propose economic principles to and for the broader public from a Christian theological perspective and social location. Such an approach is capable of taking seriously the economic realities in the public square and clarifying something of the Christian theological tradition to itself. It is in submitting to the broader public

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[29] Paul J. Dehart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 243.

[30] Dehart, 268.

evaluation of these theologically-grounded economic proposals that I hope to help Christianity clarify to itself what it means to work in times such as this.

Even as I develop a constructive theology of labor out of an Augustinian theological anthropology, though, this project is all too aware that such theological proposals are not capable of properly addressing and transforming the material problems listed above. The doctrinal investigations and economic proposals stemming from economic formalism will likely not map onto any economic structures or systems we are familiar with. We might not have seen anything historically with which to evaluate this theological economy, but that should not stop us from investigating. In fact, part of theology's role in relation to economy is to imagine alternatives to capitalism in its present form.[31] Theology, this approach insists, can open up the economic imagination so as to fund the creative investigation of alternatives.

Additionally, theologizing differently will not somehow fix the problem of labor within capitalism; assuming so depends on a category mistake. Rather, this sketch of work within Augustine's theological anthropology will point to a distinctly Christian vision of labor, highlight the dissonances between one Christian theological vision of labor and those of capitalism, and show the ethical requirements for implementing such a vision implicit in that doctrinal sketch. Implementing those changes will only be the result of additional political engagement and labor organization. This, however, should not conceal the import of helping Christianity clarify to itself what it means to work in times such as this.

[31] Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 2005, 32.

How I Read Augustine

Augustine is, to be sure, an over-burdened character. Given the massive amount of literature that posits drastically opposing views regarding Augustine's theological-political ethics and the historical and cultural distance between the North African bishop and myself, I am under no impression that I have "gotten Augustine right," as it were. I aim to follow a different path. As Charles Mathewes explains in *A Theology of Public Life*, "By using the phrase 'the Augustinian *tradition*,' I mean to draw guidance from Augustine's thought, without being trapped in the historical cul-de-sac of debates about what Augustine 'really meant'."[32] I have certainly labored to read Augustine with care and to take him at his word as best I can, but I am far more interested in a particular appropriation of Augustine toward theological engagement of economic issues than qualms of interpretation in Augustinian studies alone.

It is thus worth naming how indebted I am to Charles Mathewes and Rowan Williams in their reading of Augustine. I, in fact, came back to Augustine (arguably for the first time) through the scholarship of these two thinkers. Their impact on my own reading of Augustine will be evident throughout this dissertation. I will, however, try to clearly distinguish which ideas are offered in Augustine's theological works and which are of my own making.

Defining Some Terms

Before I can begin, it is important to get clear on precisely what I mean when I say "work." The underlying problem this project aims to address is not productive agency as such. Rather, I take issue with: (1) the way in which work is commodified and sold as labor in contemporary capitalism, and (2) the culture that has built up around that basic economic practice. I am thus problematizing

[32] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 19.

capitalism's work-ethics and power dynamics more than productive agency itself. I am, in fact, suggesting that Augustine offers us the resources for a very particular Christian understanding of how we ought to relate to and direct our own productive agencies—a Christian understanding which stands in stark contrast to the operative norms according to which one relates to and directs their productive capacities (i.e. labor and reproductive labor) in contemporary capitalism.

By "work," I mean productive agency. By "labor," I refer to the ways in which humanity's work is commodified and sold on the market in contemporary capitalism. This distinction is rather simple, though the lines between these two contexts of agency are blurred by what scholars regularly refer to as "reproductive labor." As those scholars note, reproductive labor refers to the mode of work in capitalism that is distinctly not commodified, though the economic system largely depends on this kind of work.[33] Scholars refer to reproductive labor as the unpaid, largely overlooked modes work that sustain and perpetuate both domestic life and the productive potential of the workforce. Such work has traditionally fallen on women (consider the ways in which activities like cleaning house, cooking, and caring for children have been so gendered and raced in American history). I take certain aspects of the productive agency that gets counted as reproductive labor in the context of contemporary capitalism to be inescapable. To think with Augustine about the question of work is to think in the context of a fallen world wherein work is toilsome and our own survival depends on certain forms of creative, productive agency. Even full automation cannot eradicate this. This, again,

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[33] See Mignon Duffy, "Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective," *Gender & Society* 21, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 313–36; Mignon Duffy, "Reproductive Labor," in *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Vicki Smith, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Reference, 2013); David Griffith, Kerry Preibisch, and Ricardo Contreras, "The Value of Reproductive Labor," *American Anthropologist* 120, no. 2 (2018): 224–36; Nicole Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38, no. 1 (September 11, 2009): 49–64; C. H. Browner, "Situating Women's Reproductive Activities," *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 4 (2000): 773–88; Lauren Clark, "Gender and Generation in Poor Women's Household Health Production Experiences," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1993): 386–402; Diane Elson, "Labor Markets as Gendered Institutions: Equality, Efficiency and Empowerment Issues," *World Development* 27, no. 3 (March 1, 1999): 611–27; Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100.

points to the import of context. I want to insist, with Augustine, that the context wherein one works (and the ways in which one undertakes work), matters. Cooking, housekeeping, and raising children can be wonderful, life-giving activities when undertaken in proper, equitable, just manners. Those same tasks can be oppressive when exclusively forced onto women and people of color.

I also engage with "post-work" discourse in the fifth chapter. I am most interested in developing an Augustinian "anti-work" ethic that contests the power-dynamics of contemporary capitalism in which work is directed and undertaken as well as the broad culture surrounding work in contemporary capitalist culture. I do so in order to sketch an alternative vision of work out of Augustinian theology. I have left Kathy Weeks' (the primary post-work theorist I engage with) use of "post-work" in place whenever writing in reference to her scholarship. Weeks regularly bounces between "antiwork" and "postwork" on a temporal scale, particularly in reference to "antiwork politics," "antiwork critique," and "postwork imaginaries." I take Weeks to understand "antiwork politics and critique" as a means of inaugurating a "postwork imaginary." The latter is a reference to a utopic society that is emphatically not arranged around productivism or work-centered identities. It will thus exist in the wake of a society built around productivist work-ethics (hence the post-work term). "Antiwork" describes her call for a non-normative, ethical relation to work within the larger system of contemporary capitalism. I thus follow Weeks in my use of "anti-work," because I am much less interested in the inauguration of that utopic society than I am with questions regarding the (im)possibility of just, equitable work within contemporary capitalism.

An Outline of the Argument

In brief, this project will argue (1) that Christian theology must re-imagine the ways in which it addresses today's pressing, labor-related questions, (2) that Augustine's theological anthropology (and the surprisingly unimportant role that work plays therein) offers us resources for re-imagining

the nature, function, and import of our work while still maintaining a classical doctrine of divine transcendence, and (3) that the re-imagined vision of work developed out of that Augustinian theological anthropology has profound implications for the ways in which we understand and undertake our work in a world marked as ours is by contemporary capitalism.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, we inhabit a culture that insists our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to a seemingly ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. The majority of Americans hate their work, and yet we continue working at dangerous rates given our deeply engrained work-ethics. This, along with a cluster of other labor-related problems (i.e. automation, wage depression, wage theft, the rise of a flexible labor force, a lack of worker representation, over-work, and productivism) has rightfully caused a host of thinkers to take up the question of work from a theological perspective. But standard forms of address tend to unfold according to a similar pattern, which I have entitled the "God as Worker" model. God, as an active agent, is said to work in creation and redemption much like the creatures created in God's image. Further, this line of argumentation goes, humans are invited to work like God and are said to have the capacity to participate with God's ongoing work in the world—establishing God's coming kingdom on earth.

The basic goal of chapter one is to contextualize these lines of address and identify a basic pattern through which contemporary theology tends to take up the question(s) of work. Such sketches, I argue, are based on too quick an appeal to divine modes of being and action, assuming they somehow provide models for ideal human action. As such, they contain problematic doctrinal assumptions and often fail to provide replicable or tangible proposals. Perhaps just as problematic, though, is the way in which they tend to assume and thereby reify an over-estimation of the potential for justice, happiness, and flourishing in and through work. In the first chapter, I articulate capitalism's

problematic work ethic, identify one common pattern that structures contemporary theological responses to the question of work (as noted above), and problematize that mode of response by way of Augustine's doctrine of transcendence. I do this in order to suggest that if theology is to coherently and faithfully address questions of work, it must begin the task from the vantage point of theological anthropology.

I begin to undertake such a task in the second chapter, where I analyze Augustine's theological anthropology and identify something of the nature of work. Augustine develops a theological anthropology wherein the human is classified as a particular sort of "animal" (fraught as Derrida reveals the sweeping category to be). We are created, we move, we have biological features, we grow, we reproduce, we satisfy our physiological needs by eating, and these features are essential to our survival. Human beings, much like other sorts of animals, have particular sorts of physical (food, clothing, shelter) and social (meaningful activity, identity, and community) needs that must be satisfied by way of a certain type of work and that give rise to a creaturely—or more precisely, animal—life. I aim to show that the beaver's work, to take but one example, has something to teach us about our own animal natures, creaturely work, and life before God. Drawing on Augustine's treatment of the human as well as recent animality discourses, I will thus posit that work is a basic animal function—it is neither uniquely human nor nearly as important as contemporary capitalism tends to imagine.

I conclude the second chapter by noting that work must be reimagined in light of the human's end (i.e. knowing and loving God). My basic task in chapter three is to articulate the role work should play in the life of the Christian given that worship is one's final calling. Before I turn to the question of work in particular, though, I develop an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment dyad, which I argue should serve as the foundation of an Augustinian economic theology. The most basic goal of chapter three is thus to develop an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to identify the relation between one's highest calling of worship (articulated in Augustinian

terms as the "enjoyment of God") and work (articulated in Augustinian terms as "using oneself"). Such a sketch provides me with the theoretical foundation and conceptual model through which the requirements for a just, Christian vision of work (in the fourth chapter) and a mode of relating to work in our contemporary context (in the fifth and final chapter) come into clear view.

Any proper "use" must be directed toward humanity's final calling, which Augustine speaks of in terms of "the enjoyment of God."[34] This does not, however, denigrate other forms of human agency and activity as much as it speaks of the end toward which they are to be directed. The self—and its work—can only be properly used, loved, and related to when placed in service of one's enjoyment of God. I conclude the third chapter by arguing that worship is therefore the lens through which the shape of the human's animality—its nature and place within the order of creation, its agency, and the purpose of its activities—comes into clear perspective.

If the end of the human being is knowing and loving God, then we must begin to rethink the productive agency of the human in terms of worship rather than work. Most basically, the goal of chapter four is to sketch what such a Christian vision of work—using oneself for the enjoyment of God—might actually look like. I begin with a brief analysis of Augustine's treatment of work in *De Opere Monachorum*, through which I argue that work can only ever make sense when positioned in service of humanity's love of God, marked as it must be by prayer and worship. Even in the midst of the emphatically non-central role labor plays in Augustine's theological anthropology (not to mention

[34] Do not think of a Kantian "means to an end" here. Augustine's terminology of use/enjoyment is much more aimed at recognizing that any earthly, creaturely good (good as it might be) is ultimately for the purpose of directing one towards its highest end in God. Proper use of the earth and its plants, animals, and other humans should be in service of our knowing God, which is emphatically not a manipulative, dominating phenomenon for Augustine. The earth is distinctly not "mine to be consumed" within this framework. Proper use would likely thus entail less "usage" (as we commonly hear that term now) given that all aspects of one's life need to be in service of humanity's highest calling of knowing and loving God rather than satisfying my own corrupted desires and aims. This is also a way of Augustine reminding us that no "misuse" of the world's goods can deliver the happiness we hope to find therein. We properly use such goods when we receive them as the good gifts from God that they are, treating them with the respect, dignity, and alterity they thus deserve. This is also one of the more-articulated nuances within Augustinian studies, and there is ample literature I will draw on to substantiate these nuances and distinctions.

the generally cursed nature of such modes of agency during our lives in the world), one's work can play a crucial role in their temporal progression toward the beatific vision when properly contextualized, related to, and directed.

I conclude chapter four by identifying some practical models for non-monastic work within Augustine's proposals. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are intrinsic to the life of the believer and provide something of a structure and framework of Christian existence. Rendered this way, the virtues become one mode of response to God's efficacious gift of transformative grace. In our lives in the world, we are being prepared for—made worthy of—what is to come in the new creation. Such a transformation funds alternative modes of being and doing in the world, even to the extent that basic activities can be redirected toward the love of God and others.

In the fifth and final chapter, I draw Augustine's understanding of the limits of social and political structures (as articulated in *The City of God*) into conversation with Kathy Weeks' feminist, post-work vision in order to articulate an Augustinian anti-work ethic, much of which is framed around Augustine's reading of Mary and Martha's competing agencies in Luke 10. The anti-work ethic I develop there is distinct from capitalism in its alternative understanding of, vision for, and mode of relating to work. Rather than ending work altogether, this approach would re-frame human agency to make possible the demands of a post-work vision within a theological framework. An Augustinian theological anthropology relativizes economic value and contests our over-estimation and valuation of productive agency in the economic sphere. More particularly, it spells out some practicalities for navigating contemporary economic life that avoids both any over-estimation of economic agency or justice and escapism (be they pessimistic or utopic in nature).

After I close chapter five, I develop an extended re-statement of what I have argued and the ways in which I have established that argument's constitutive elements. That is, I try to clearly state what I have argued, how I have argued it, and why it matters.

Chapter 1

Work and Its Discontents: On Contemporary Theology's Response to the Question of Work

According to economic theory, at least, the last thing a profit-seeking firm is going to do is shell out money to workers they don't really need to employ. Still, somehow, it happens….The answer clearly isn't economic: it's moral and political.

David Graeber
"On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs"

If we want to challenge the idea that theology and economics do belong in completely separate frames, the first thing we need to do, paradoxically, is to hang on to the idea that there really are *different ways of talking about human activity and that not everything reduces to one sovereign model or standard or value.*

Rowan Williams
"Theology and Economics"

Introduction

We inhabit a culture that insists our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to a seemingly ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. Studies show that the majority of Americans hate their work, and yet we continue working at dangerous rates given our deeply engrained work-ethics. These cultural assumptions regarding work, along with a cluster of other labor-related problems (i.e. automation, wage depression, wage theft, the rise of a flexible labor force, a lack of worker representation, over-work, and productivism) have rightfully caused a host of thinkers to take up the question of work from a theological perspective.

Such responses, I argue, tend to follow a basic pattern, which suggests that humanity's work-related problems can be addressed by imitating God's work.

The tasks of this first chapter are as follows: (1) articulate capitalism's problematic work ethic, to which a host of theologians are rightfully responding; (2) identify a common pattern that structures those contemporary theological responses to the question of work; and (3) problematize that mode of response by way of Augustine's doctrine of transcendence.

I begin this chapter by articulating some of the basic cultural assumptions regarding work, some of the demands placed on workers in relation to their work, and some of the overly-burdened ways in which we relate to our work in contemporary American society. In so doing, I will articulate what so many scholars of religions take to be a problematic set of theoretical and practical issues regarding our relation to contemporary work life.

After naming the problem with work, I then move to analyze contemporary theology's response to that problem in the second section. The aim of the second section of this chapter is to articulate and analyze three important, contemporary theological responses (those of Darby Ray, David Jenson, and Douglas Meeks) to the question of work. These responses, I argue, tend to unfold according to a similar pattern, which I refer to as the "God as worker" model. This second section is largely aimed at identifying the pattern, shedding light on its logic, and tracing some of its doctrinal implications. The prevalence and coherence of such a pattern is significant in that it demonstrates regular trends and assumptions that animate the ways contemporary theologians address labor-related issues.

In the third section, I articulate my first problem with the "God as Worker" model. I argue that proposals that follow the "God as worker" model are based on too quick an appeal to theories of divine being and action, which the authors assume provide a model for ideal forms of human action.

As such, they contain problematic doctrinal assumptions and often fail to provide replicable or tangible proposals.

In the fourth section, I articulate my second problem with the "God as worker" model, which has to do with its lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of "work." Work is typically rendered as an ontological good within this model; it is imagined to be one of the primary modes through which humans are said to image God. In contrast to this vision, I argue that "toilsome work" is a category only coherent in a life of sin, which will eventually be abolished. The broad category of work is thus mis-represented as an ontological good rather than a culturally determined mode of agency. When seen in this light, such proposals assume and thereby reify an over-estimation of the potential for justice, happiness, and flourishing in and through work.

I then conclude by identifying an alternative starting point from which theology must begin its address to the question of work: theological anthropology. If we are to think with Augustine and a classical theological schema wherein God is the transcendent cause (and final end) of all creatures, then the question of work cannot be properly addressed by identifying just modes of work in God's productive agency. Work is a creaturely issue, and we must therefore begin developing such an address by identifying the nature and function of work within a theological anthropology rather than any doctrine of God.

But first, why is work worth thinking about today?

Thinking About Work

The workplace has been changing for some time now. As economist David Weil recently noted in *The Fissured Workplace*, the nature, pressures, and payoffs of work have been drastically changing since the late 1970s, when capital markets dramatically increased pressure on companies to

focus on their core competencies alone.[1] This increased pressure led companies to cut costs by shedding non-essential employment. Ceding those non-essential tasks to third-party companies saves money on payroll and benefits alike. Avoiding quality dips (in service and products alike) requires companies to develop (and police) detailed standards for their contract workers, all of which increases the pressure and bureaucratic oversight on workers carrying out these non-essential tasks.[2] Taken together, these factors have created what Weil refers to as the "fissured workplace."

Such fissure certainly pays off for investors, companies, and consumers; hence its pervasiveness.[3] Anthropologist Karen Ho has noted that the drive for profit accumulation is nothing new in capitalism. She notes, "What is clearly unique in the recent history of capitalism in the United States is the complete divorce of what is perceived as the best interests of the corporation from the interests of most employees."[4] Operating with a lean core of employees and a flexible network of third-party contract workers often leads to new and improved products sold at lower and lower prices, but those gains come at serious social cost. Drawing on a vast supply of statistical evidence, Weil shows that American workers currently face an increasingly difficult workplace. Wages are falling, benefits are declining, employment is increasingly insecure, and these outcomes depend on new business structures that mitigate worker criticism and concern.[5] Productivity rose by 23% between 2000 and 2012, and yet real wages increased by only 0.5%. Pensions are falling, huge numbers of low-

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[1] David Weil, *The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 11.

[2] Weil, 11–12.

[3] Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009).

[4] Ho, 3.

[5] Weil, *The Fissured Workplace*, 15.

wage workers lack employer-provided health coverage, and the U.S. Department of Labor continues recovering record amounts of back and stolen wages from employers.[6]

The problematic nature of the fissured workplace raises interesting questions regarding our cultural assumptions about our work as well as our relationships to our work. In February 2019, Derek Thompson wrote about our uniquely American, obsessive relationship to work for *The Atlantic*.[7] Thompson begins by noting that famed economist John Maynard Keynes, in 1930, predicted that America would settle into a 15-hour workweek by the turn of the twenty-first century.[8] Given the rise of automation and automated technology, one has to wonder both why Keynes' prediction did not materialize and why the American workforce works so much more (and so much more obsessively) than other developed countries. Thompson argues that "workism" is the only coherent explanation—"the belief that work is not only necessary to economic production, but also the centerpiece of one's identity and life's purpose; and the belief that any policy to promote human welfare must *always* encourage more work."[9] And Thompson has some compelling data to support the claim. For instance, the US averages more hours worked per year than any other large country with comparable levels of production. We work more, take fewer vacations, retire later, and we do so while receiving less unemployment, disability, and retirement benefits than comparably rich nations.[10] This is particularly astounding given the absurd work hours that rich men—those statistically most able to work the

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[6] Weil, 16.

[7] Derek Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable," *The Atlantic*, February 24, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/.

[8] John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," in *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Martino Fine Books, 2012), 358–73; Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable."

[9] Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable," 1.2.

[10] Thompson, 1.4.

least—log on a weekly basis. Perhaps, then, as David Graeber's epigraph suggests, the drive for work is more emotional, cultural, or spiritual than it is economic.[11]

We tend to believe one's meaning is largely discoverable in and through one's work. But Thompson wisely notes that such a broad, if thin, cultural sentiment is a recipe for disaster. What form of self-actualization do we expect to see in a struggling cashier or unhappy barista forced to stay in their jobs by their economic precarity alone?[12] Perhaps the only thing more common than major news outlets insisting that millennials care more about meaning than income is an over-worked millennial experiencing severe anxiety and depression.[13] As Thompson notes, "There is something slyly dystopian about an economic system that has convinced the most indebted generation in American history to put purpose over paycheck."[14] It is no real surprise, then, that this approach to work has created a culture of burnout and exhaustion.[15]

The paradox of our insistence on working so much is that an alarming amount of working people hate their jobs. Gallup recently estimated that some 87% of employees are not "engaged" at

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[11] Thompson, 1.8.

[12] These two examples are not aimed at denigrating that class of individuals genuinely interested in working as cashiers or baristas. Having worked my way through a master's degree by making specialty coffee, I have met a host of individuals who had no interest in doing anything else with their working lives, and I have no desire to denigrate the good, meaningful work they do day in and day out. Rather, I am trying to point to the unfortunate lot who have no interest in their professional roles. These are those workers who were forced to take their job due to their economic precarity, be that immanent bill due-dates or a lack of qualification and opportunity for other, more interesting roles. That is, my primary problem is with the cultural pressure to flourish within such a "vocation," even when so many have so little interest in the hourly wage jobs they are currently working.

[13] John Bertino, "Five Things Millennial Workers Want More Than A Fat Paycheck," Forbes, accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/10/26/five-things-millennial-workers-want-more-than-a-fat-paycheck/; Karl Moore, "Millennials Work For Purpose, Not Paycheck," Forbes, accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/karlmoore/2014/10/02/millennials-work-for-purpose-not-paycheck/; Lauren Vesty, "Millennials Want Purpose over Paychecks. So Why Can't We Find It at Work?," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2016, sec. Guardian Sustainable Business, https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/sep/14/millennials-work-purpose-linkedin-survey; Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable," 2.6.

[14] Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable," 2.8.

[15] Erin Griffith, "Why Are Young People Pretending to Love Work?," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2019, sec. Business, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/26/business/against-hustle-culture-rise-and-grind-tgim.html.

work.[16] As anthropologist David Graeber noted in his telling *Bullshit Jobs*, recent polling revealed that "in the United Kingdom only 50 percent of those who had full-time jobs were entirely sure their job made any sort of meaningful contribution to the world, and 37 percent were quite sure it did not."[17] Perhaps even more confounding is the fact that these "bullshit jobs"—which Graeber defines as "a form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of the employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case"—tend to offer good working conditions and pay.[18]

This matters in that even if one can wash their hands of the structural inequalities stemming from everyday work, overcome the uphill battle of wage discrimination, and survive in a period marked by rising trends of wage theft, they are still likely to have to reckon with the simple insight that, more often than not, work makes us miserable.[19] We inhabit a culture that insists our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to a seemingly ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty. We hate this work, and yet we continue working at dangerous rates.

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[16] Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable," 1.4.

[17] David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, Reprint edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), 6.

[18] Graeber, 9–10; 14.

[19] Deborah Hardoon, "An Economy for the 99%," Briefing Paper (Oxford: Oxfam, January 2017); David Cooper and Teresa Kroeger, "Employers Steal Billions from Workers' Paychecks Each Year: Survey Data Show Millions of Workers Are Paid Less than the Minimum Wage, at Significant Cost to Taxpayers and State Economies" (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, May 10, 2017).

Putting God to Work

This cluster of work-related issues has, rightfully, caused a host of thinkers to take up the question of work from a theological perspective. I have chosen to address three important, influential texts that have helped to instantiate this pattern, and I have chosen these texts in particular because of the clarity of the authors' writing and argumentation as well as the diverse means through which they each instantiate that pattern. Darby Ray's *Working*, David Jensen's *Responsive Labor*, and Douglas Meeks' *God the Economist* each represent something of contemporary theology's address to economic issues. While they often phrase the problems to which they respond differently, these three authors largely take aim at the same cluster of issues. Their constructive proposals diverge significantly, but all three texts develop lines of critical argumentation that run in similar directions. That is, each of these three texts follow a similar pattern: they ground Christianity's engagement with economics in a particular vision of divine agency so as to counter contemporary labor-related problems. God, as an active agent, is said to work in creation and redemption much like the creatures created in God's image. Humans are invited to work like God and are said to have the capacity to participate with God's ongoing work in the world in order to establish God's coming kingdom on earth. I will briefly treat each of these varied proposals in order to demonstrate their overlap (even in the midst of their divergences) and demonstrate both the existence and nature of the pattern through which so many contemporary theologians address economic questions. Highlighting such a pattern enables me to frame the "God as worker" model as a norm for contemporary theology before problematizing the varied proposals through a singular line of critical argumentation.

In articulating the limitations of what I will call the "God as worker" model, I hereby hope to affirm these author's theological criticisms and critique their constructive proposals. Given the ways in which my interests and goals are so similar to the thinkers I engage with here, I see this line of criticism as a sort of thinking-with-them. I hope to take their work and proposals beyond their own

scopes and horizons so as to demonstrate what a more Augustinian (and classically transcendent) response to the problem of work requires in order to address those same concerns while avoiding the doctrinal pitfalls and implications that so often plague economic theological proposals.[20]

Darby Ray: Working

Darby Ray begins *Working* by identifying some of the work-related issues facing our contemporary world: work's fueling of consumerism; the rising demands of productivity; over-specialization; loss of creativity; poverty wages; disembodied practices; superficial identities; compromise of emotion; and work's overall dehumanization.[21] Our economic and cultural systems now depend on these improper, dehumanizing forms of work and work-related practices. Though we exist in a state of sin and economic disorder that denies the goodness of work and prohibits its effective purposes, Ray argues that work remains a fundamental good. She points to a great deal of potential in the act of working, even if the actualization of that potential requires a massive over-haul of our current economic and cultural norms.

When properly arranged and conducted, Ray argues, work helps give rise to self-esteem and self-respect. Work provides us (at least some of us) with what we need to survive, and it helps to demarcate social roles and distribute power.[22] Work properly arranged and undertaken would thus be a means of self-expression and an outlet for personal growth.[23] In such a scenario, work would be the

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[20] The shape and tone of this response is very much influenced by Charles Mathewes' *A Theology of Public Life*. See pg. 124 for his sketch of one such approach.

[21] Darby Kathleen Ray, *Working*, ed. David Jensen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 15–35.

[22] Ray, 12.

[23] Ray, 13.

activity of doing what we love so as to actualize ourselves.[24] We know this, she argues, because God is a good, patient, effective worker; human beings, being created in God's image, are called to work as God does.

The real force of Ray's constructive response to this cluster of work-related problems thus follows a pattern popular in much of contemporary economic theology: economic problems are identified and then criticized by way of an alternative economic model identified and grounded in God's very self. The theological solution to our work-related issues, this approach suggests, is to work more like God. It is no surprise, then, that Ray turns to the Bible, given that those texts speak of a God who works "with patience, precision, deliberation, and imagination."[25] The Bible speaks, Ray insists, of God as a worker whose work is always aimed at giving life and goods to those in need.[26] God's work thus stands in stark contrast to the forms (and demands) of labor familiar to us within capitalism. For example, God's work in creation and preservation is not driven by production quotas "but by a desire for self-expression, beauty, pleasure, and interrelation."[27] Within this model, God's work is said to be so essential to God's very nature that God is partially constituted by God's work. And why should humans hope for anything less?

Ray's correlation of divine and human work depends on a particular reading of the *imago dei*—human work is supposed to be an extension and imitation of God's work as self-expression.[28] She writes, "According to the sacred text of Genesis, human beings are created in the image of God. As

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[24] Ray, 14.

[25] Ray, 44.

[26] Ray, 104.

[27] Ray, 44.

[28] Ray, 108.

such, we can assume the centrality of work to human identity and action."[29] Humanity's purpose is thus said to be supporting God's creative, loving, and sustaining work.[30] The purpose of human work is to fortify God's work; the same values and motivations that characterize God's work should characterize ours. Within such a vision, humanity's work is one of the primary avenues through which we move into the life of God, which is generally characterized by a life of good work. Much like God's self-actualization is accomplished by means of God's work, so too should the human's. When properly arranged and conducted, work is the means through which we survive, but it is also the primary way we exhibit our creativity, self-sufficiency, interdependence, and cultivate compassion.[31] Our work, then, is both God's gift to us and our gift to the others we find ourselves in community with.[32] When carried out in this manner, our work properly images the forms of life-giving work we see in God.

Nonetheless, Ray goes some length to maintain a certain distance between God's work and human work. While the goal of humanity's work is to participate in God's work—we participate in God's providential rule through working in conjunction with one's calling—she is quite clear that speaking of co-creation with God does not "deny that God's work comes first and makes our work possible."[33] Ray thereby hints at the importance of not equivocating the two forms of agency she is analyzing, but it is not clear that the insight animates her broader treatment of work (in both the divine and human registers). In arguing that "we were created to work as God works and to support God's great work of creating, loving and sustaining the world in all its complexity and diversity," Ray frames human and divine work within a singular causal plane, such that the former can be said to coherently

[29] Ray, 45.

[30] Ray, 45.

[31] Ray, 67.

[32] Ray, 66.

[33] Ray, 102.

imitate the latter. Ray's *Working* is thus a prime example of the "God as worker" model in that it rests on the assumption that divine agency is itself the most coherent model through which we should respond to the problematic forms of work operative in capitalism. God works, so the argument goes, and God works in ways that are replicable by humans to the extent that economic programs can and should be developed around that ideal form of agency. This is why Ray ultimately proposes a sacramentality of work oriented around subsistence, selfhood, and service. Through our work "we can imitate and participate in God's work."[34]

David Jensen: Responsive Labor

David Jensen argues, similarly to Ray, that human activity is only ever carried out in response to God's prior work.[35] We can only understand the nature and purpose of work, Jensen suggests, when it is understood to be a response to God's prior acts. In *Responsive Labor* he thus articulates a vision of human labor that stems from the work of the triune God. Such a task is not without its risks, and Jensen is the first to highlight some of the potential pitfalls of treating God's agency and activity as work. That theoretical move could easily replicate modern theology's tendency to project human activity onto God, and Jensen clearly hopes to work his claims out otherwise. The task is also complicated, he explains, by the necessarily provisional character of theological speech: when "all god-talk is provisional," one might rightfully wonder how much workable content the explication of God's inner-Trinitarian life can offer.[36]

[34] Ray, 104.

[35] David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 41.

[36] Jensen, 44.

But Jensen ultimately thinks he is up to the challenge, and he legitimates moving forward by pointing to the economy of salvation. We can speak about God (and God's work) because God has made God's self known in the economy of salvation, all of which Jenson frames in terms of God's work.[37] Much like Ray, Jensen recognizes the way Scripture frequently represents God as a worker (of all different types of jobs), which is precisely why he argues that God's work consists of creation, redemption, and sanctification.[38] Rendered in this way, the Trinity is an ultimately practical doctrine in that it said to express God's work in the economy of salvation.[39] Within this narrative, human lives are taken, claimed, and blessed by God. Jensen thus insists that God is already working on our behalf well before we ever work, and God works so as to inform and shape our own work.

Jensen's most essential goal is to develop a theology of work that responds to the work God has done in Jesus Christ. He writes, "Good work is a dim reflection of the life and work of God for the world, a response that enables us by grace to live the communion that is God's very life."[40] He sees a host of practical suggestions for this task within this understanding of God's trinitarity, particularly given the operative, problematic work structures that so drastically contradict this Christian vision. That is, the inner life of God's triune self has direct implications for our business models and working arrangements, and the problems we are currently facing ultimately stem from their deviation from God's ways of working, distributing, resting, etc. After discussing the Cappadocian concept of *perichoresis*, for example, Jensen explains that "isolation in work is foreign to the triune God. Given the modern penchant for determining what belongs to oneself, one's work, and

[37] Jensen, 45.

[38] Jensen, 47.

[39] Jensen, 49.

[40] Jensen, 45.

one's nation, these strains of divine cooperation have a dissonant ring. As the divine life shakes us free from conceptions of work owned or wielded at others' expense, and of personhood embodied apart from others, theology points to a radical revision of work and workers."[41] Jensen locates within this Trinitarian model the import and value of shared labor, cooperative work, non-hierarchical work arrangements, play in work, distinctive work, and worker honor.[42] Put simply: "Trinitarian doctrine suggests that each person, regardless of age, ability, or status, has distinctive work to bring to the world. As God communicates Godself to us, God blesses creation with difference, and summons us to bring ourselves and our work as a response to that blessing."[43] The end goal of labor, Jensen explains, is communion with God. And the key to pulling that off lies in viewing human work as a response to God's work of creating, sustaining, and giving life. Therefore, any work we do for the sake of another ("building a house, selling clothes stitched with care, investing money responsibility with an eye to the common good, policing streets so that all might thrive in the city") can be seen in response to the work God's already done precisely because it is grounded in God's work for the world.[44]

Jensen argues for the legitimacy of characterizing God's agency as "work" and "labor" by pointing to Thomas' articulation of analogical language. He explains that an analogical approach does not entail a simple projection of something like human goodness onto God. Such a gesture would wrongly assume God's version of that goodness to simply be bigger and better than what we know in the human realm. Rather, the Thomistic, analogical approach urges us to see God as the very source

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[41] Jensen, 55.

[42] Jensen, 56–57, 60.

[43] Jensen, 53.

[44] Jensen, 65.

of goodness itself, which means that we only experience or manifest goodness by way of God's good distribution of goodness.[45] He follows Aquinas in arguing that our speech about God is indeed inadequate because we can never know God's essence. That limit, though, does not prevent us from speaking truthfully about God (and knowing that we are doing so). That is, we can speak truthfully of God even as we remain ignorant of the full meaning of that speech.[46] Jensen's treatment of labor as a response to God's creative activity also seems to follow Aquinas' understanding of causality, even as Jensen uses different terminology. Things in the world—i.e. our work—reveal something of God precisely because God is their cause. As such, we can truthfully speak of God using the same terms we by which we speak of our creaturely lives.[47] Why would labor be any exception?

Jensen fails to recognize, though, that such terms lose coherency when used equivocally. The implication of Aquinas' treatment of analogical language is that we cannot apply any term to God and creatures in the same way. As Brian Davies helpfully explains, "If they were so used, they would just lack content so far as they apply to God."[48] Jensen seems to turn to analogical language in order to substantiate the relation between divine and human agencies, but insists on a certain equivalence in the two modes of action, even after explicitly naming his desire to avoid such an outcome. When we apply terms to God and creatures alike, we must remember that those properties or attributes will

[45] This insight does not seem to animate Jensen's own treatment of divine work. Just after explaining the analogical concept, he goes on to write, "We can speak about God as Worker because God has revealed Godself in Jesus Christ as the One who is at work from the beginning as the Bearer of our salvation. God is the primary worker, and we respond to God's work." (Jensen, 46).

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, New edition (Notre Dame, Ind: Thomas More Publishing, 1981), Ia, 13. 2. I am indebted to Paul DeHart for clarifying this Thomistic insight to me.

[47] Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 64.

[48] Davies, 64.

differ in the ways they are exemplified or manifested.[49] Such a mandate leaves the reader wondering what good comes of referring to God's agency in terms of work and labor (which he does interchangeably) given Jensen's acknowledgement of the gap between human and divine agency.[50] To make the case for God's agency as work in analogical terms is already to insist that God's "work" is of an altogether different category from humanity's.

In fact, we can see in Jensen's text the extent to which this category of "labor" must be stretched when applied to God if it is to have any coherency at all. Jensen defines work as "any activity undertaken with a sense of obligation to oneself, others, one's community, and God."[51] But God's work does not even fit within such a schema. Even as broad and inclusive as the category has become, the Augustinian theological tradition insists it still cannot be properly attributed to God. From within such a theological schema, God has no need and therefore does nothing out of obligation.

To his credit, Jensen seems to understand the risks of grounding a theology of labor within divine agency, and he goes to great lengths to avoid the logical and doctrinal pitfalls that make such a proposal difficult. But Jensen fails to let Aquinas' analogical insight guide his treatment of God's work. He speaks of the risks of not speaking analogically, and then he treats divine and human "work" univocally. *Responsive Labor* thus belongs in a category with Ray's *Working*. Both texts unfold according to the "God as worker" model, wherein God is said to work in ways that are replicable by humans to the extent that economic activities and systems can and should be modeled around that divine agency.

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[49] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, trans. Anton Charles Pegis, 1 edition (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), I. 33. 6; Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 64–65.

[50] Jeremy Posadas, "The Refusal of Work in Christian Ethics and Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 330–61, https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12180.

[51] Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 3.

Douglas Meeks: God the Economist

Douglas Meeks identifies a problematic relationship between God and modern capitalism in one of the earliest and most formative texts of economic theology—*God the Economist*. In Meeks' telling, modernity brought about a drastic separation between theology and economics. In the wake of that split, economics staked out its own, supposedly autonomous arena, and theology has concerned itself with the human's internal life.[52] Modern economics takes the acquisition of wealth as the primary end of the human, and market logic is considered a complete system for the distribution of social goods, all of which has led to a host of problems. Meeks argues that once land, labor, and money are submitted to the logic of market exchange, all of society begins to be determined by that crude economic system. Within such an approach, "market logic" operates as an entirely distinct semantic field from theological discourse, which is why their divergent values are said to not come into conflict.

Against this operative approach, Meeks recognizes a constructive alternative in political theology, which sees through the illusory divisions of liberalism and enables him to articulate the often-overlooked theological visions of the market. Theology, Meeks argues, needs to articulate the crude God-assumptions on which this operative modern market depends.[53] Faithful theology, that is, must unmask the problematic forms of theo-logic operative in oppressive economic structures. Meeks therefore identifies the two-fold goal of his approach: "Theology would need, first, to unmake the claim that God is absent in the market economy by showing the presence of dominative God concepts in the ideology of the market society and, second, to point to the presence of the living God of Israel and of Jesus Christ in the struggle of those who suffer economic, political and cultural domination."[54]

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[52] M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 19.

[53] Meeks, 55.

[54] Meeks, 56.

That is, if Christian theology is to respond to the problematic forms of domination operative within our economic systems, it has to demonstrate the ways in which the economy of God is incompatible with market logic.

And that is exactly what Meeks sets out to do: articulate the disjunctions between market logic and the economy of God. He begins this process by redefining *economy*. The term historically has more meaning(s) than are typically intended within modernity, which has limited "economy" to the mechanics and exchange of goods in the marketplace. Over against these modern tendencies, Meeks prefers to define *economy* as "household management" due to the constitutive elements of the Greek term: *oikos* (house) *nomos* (law/management). He recognizes a fundamental connection between household and the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life.[55] Seen from this perspective, economy becomes a much more expansive reality; economy is the site of livelihood.

According to Meeks, God exists as a community of righteousness united in self-giving love, which makes "economist" a fitting title. Meeks thus uses the notion of the triune God as economist to critique the corrupted logic of the modern market. It is, after all, the neglect of God as economist that has led to a truncated understanding of the human and economics. He therefore positions *oikos* as the ideal conceptual framework through which to examine the relationship between God's economy and our operative economic systems.[56] He explains, "The household living relationships of the *oikos* are the institutional relationships aimed at the survival of human beings in society. *Oikos* is the way persons dwell in the world toward viability in relation to family, state, market, nature, and God. *Oikos* is the heart of both ecclesiology and political economy."[57]

[55] Meeks, 3.

[56] Meeks, 33.

[57] Meeks, 33.

Within this approach, the most powerful critique of market logic is a proper articulation of God's Trinitarian self as an economy of life and self-giving.[58] He writes, "The redemptive work of God has traditionally been referred to as God's economy. The relationship of the Triune God to the world has been called traditionally the 'economic Trinity.'"[59] Meeks terms this sort of theological thinking as *politico-economic theology*. He conceives of God *as* economist and subsequently frames his analysis of God's nature and activity in economic terms. God's economy is said to be God's life, work, and suffering for the life of creation, which is the ground of human economic activity. The Trinity can thus be understood as a tool for demythologizing crude market logic and any use of God concepts leading to domination.[60] For Meeks, "God's own economic work begins with those who have been excluded from the household," and so the ultimate analytical test for operative economic practices becomes whether or not everyone gets a seat at the table.[61] He too draws on Biblical metaphors, images, and narratives to highlight the "Great economic acts of God: the exodus, the creation, and the resurrection."[62] Meeks speaks of God as the Liberator Economist[63] (who brings us out of economy of bondage); Torah Keeper Economist[64] (that divine figure that participates with its follows in the liberating work of keeping Torah); Creator Economist[65]; and lastly, the Resurrection Economist[66] (the

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[58] Meeks, 70.

[59] Meeks, 29.

[60] Meeks, 9.

[61] Meeks, 43.

[62] Meeks, 77.

[63] Meeks, 78.

[64] Meeks, 83.

[65] Meeks, 89.

[66] Meeks, 91.

one who gives life to the dead). God's economic acts are said to be Eucharist and baptism, as these are the ways in which God's economy is made at home in the world. Redemption is then sketched as the praxis by which Christians learn how to participate in God's economic work.

Meeks thus contests a host of particular economic issues by turning to the alternative economic practice modeled in God. He explains that "each economic act [of God] calls forth corresponding economic acts on the part of God's own economist, the human being."[67] This approach can be most helpfully illustrated by analyzing Meeks' treatment of two different economic principles: property and labor.

Within modernity, exclusive property rights have become a fundamental assumption of social life and organization.[68] We tend to equate property with liberty, independence, and responsibility. Property promises some aspects of freedom, but Meeks reminds us that it also risks dehumanizing some and perpetuating mastery, particularly since some people remain dependent for their livelihood and well-being on others with excessive property.[69] This has led to the fateful notion that human beings possess themselves (and their labor capacity) as property. And that understanding raises its own set of issues when we remember that those forced to sell their labor in the market are denied the the fruits of their labor (theirs by property right).[70]

For Meeks, that vision stands in stark contrast to God's mode of possessing.[71] God is itself "a community of persons united in giving themselves to each other and to the world."[72] God owns by

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67 Meeks, 77.

68 Meeks, 108–9.

69 Meeks, 101, 106.

70 Meeks, 109.

71 Meeks, 114.

72 Meeks, 111.

giving rather than some form of self-possession. When viewed within this theological framework, "all property is obligated."[73] That is, property is obliged to meet the basic requirements of life and submit to God's command to love the neighbor.[74] The distinction is that of gift vs. commodity.[75] The first step to actualizing such a vision, Meeks explains, is to arrange for "equal right of access to means of labor, that is, the accumulated capital of society and its natural resources."[76] Secondly, income should be related to what one needs in order to thrive rather than what one earns by way of selling their labor power.

Meeks follows a similar line of thinking when addressing labor.[77] Market logic insists that the purpose of work is to earn money for spending on goods and services, and market mechanisms are said to be the best way to distribute work.[78] But this view overlooks the countless folks shut out of work by way of the market, and it fails to account for dehumanizing and underpaid forms of work so frequently operative within the market. Within the market system, workers are "separated by minute functions and tasks and the alienation caused by the social division of human beings by interest and class."[79] The drive for efficiency has led to obsessive forms of discipline and bureaucratic control.

Again, Meeks argues that this vision stands in stark contrast to God's trinitarian work. He explains that God's work is both distinctive and personal—each member contributes.[80] This is a

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[73] Meeks, 116.

[74] Meeks, 116.

[75] Meeks, 117.

[76] Meeks, 124.

[77] Meeks, 125.

[78] Meeks, 131.

[79] Meeks, 132.

[80] Meeks, 132.

cooperative work in that each aspect "coinheres in the work of the other members of the community."[81] No one person's work can be understood or completed apart from the work of the other members of the divine community. God's work is also equalitarian; no one member of the community elevates itself above the others.[82] Pointing to God's act of creation and Jesus's redemptive, kenotic entrance into humanity, Meeks argues that God's work is for the life of the community and always carried out in self-giving love.[83] In baptism, Christians "enter into the Triune Community's history with the creation and thus are called to cooperate with God's work of building the *basileia* household of justice and peace in which all creatures will find home."[84] That is, God's work makes possible a form of human work that corresponds to God's work in creation, redemption, and new creation.[85] Meeks argues that the solution to the problem of work is to model our work on God's work: all should have the right to work[86]; work should be properly incentivized[87] (i.e. done in solidarity with and on behalf of poor and oppressed others); work should be done in community[88]; and work should be equitable.[89]

There is no doubt that Meeks presented economic theology with a host of crucial insights: his redefinition of *oikonomia* reveals the breadth of issues economics touches on; he persuasively argues

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[81] Meeks, 133.

[82] Meeks, 133.

[83] Meeks, 148–49.

[84] Meeks, 149.

[85] Meeks, 150.

[86] Meeks, 151.

[87] Meeks, 153–54.

[88] Meeks, 154.

[89] Meeks, 155.

that theology and economics exist in a symbiotic relationship, noting that our understanding of God and our understanding of economy mutually influence each other; he demonstrates that market logic employs a number of God concepts to legitimize itself; he helps us hear the dissonance between the philosophical, anthropological assumptions of capitalism and those of Christianity; and he has framed the theological task in critical terms, calling us to unmask the idolatrous ideas that undergird so much of contemporary economic life. Nonetheless, Meeks establishes his constructive proposals by following this same basic pattern I have identified in Ray and Jensen alike: once an economic problem is articulated, its solution can be found within God's Trinitarian self and activity. In the "God as worker" model, the Trinity's interior life is the key to just and sustainable economic models precisely because God is envisioned as the sort of being whose agency and activities have directly translatable models for human economic institutions and practices.

To be clear, the problem here is not that Meeks has simply failed to consider the doctrine of transcendence and therefore cannot properly account for the nature of the God-world relation. Meeks, in fact, altogether rejects the idea of classical transcendence. He sees classical transcendence in irresolvable tension with the "human experience of immanence," and the doctrine is thereby said to create more problems than it solves. Meeks understands that the classically-transcendent God is characterized by its infinitude, immutability, indivisibility, immortality, impassibility, and self-sufficiency, but he argues that such a God does not go outside of itself or have relations with anything that is not itself; he believes such a God is logically incapable of doing so.

Further, Meeks sees this cluster of divine attributes legitimating a host of oppressive political and economic forces. He writes, "These attributes of infinite, immutability, immortality, aseity, and impassibility in their extremity describe the emperor, the ultimate property owner, whose divinity is

his expansive power to dispose property. They are the political attributes of domination."[90] The issue is worsened by the fact that these visions also lie at the heart of historical economic and property structures. The classical vision of a transcendent God is thus said to justify exclusive property rights, wage labor, and dominating relationships in the market.[91] Meeks goes so far as to note that "God as absolute 'owner of the world' is a theological key to Western politics down to the seventeenth century and in a hidden way remains a key to economics in our time." According to this model, the classically transcendent God ends up looking more like an absolute ruler of the world and Plato's maker of the universe than the God of Israel that sends Jesus Christ.[92]

Meeks is not wrong to worry about the vision of God he connects with his treatment of classical transcendence. A God incapable of loving creation who simultaneously legitimates all forms of social domination would not be good or loving and should be neither worshipped nor revered. But this vision of God and the "classical transcendence" Meeks aims to problematize would be largely unrecognizable to the classical theologians Meeks charges with positing such a view. That is, the argument depends on a misunderstood and mischaracterized form of transcendence which is then used to legitimate the very problems the doctrine, in its classical form, contests. As I will demonstrate below, Augustine would certainly defend the idea of God's immutability, indivisibility, immortality, impassibility, and self-sufficiency, but he would fail to see how such a reality prohibits the possibility of love or relationality.[93]

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[90] Meeks, 67.

[91] Meeks, 65.

[92] Meeks, 67.

[93] As I will explain below, I am following Kathryn Tanner's articulation of this classical model of transcendence. For both Tanner and Augustine, non-contrastive transcendence posits a God radically involved in the world, whose agency extends over every form of action as its source of being. This extreme form of divine involvement depends on a radical form of transcendence. It is important to note, though, that I have no interest in (or argumentative need) to conflate Augustine's understanding of love and relationality with the postmodern theologians I am engaging here. Even in granting distinctions in the ways both positions understand love and relationality, my main point is that I

Additionally, it is not as though the connections Meeks points to between the doctrine of transcendence and patterns of creaturely domination are logically or necessarily connected.[94] The connection, even if historically frequent, is accidental, and I think that distinction matters a great deal. Augustine's maintenance of classical transcendence, to take but one example, actually leads him to develop a radically different understanding of private property than what is envisioned in Meeks' history.[95]

For Augustine, God cannot possibly fall under the rules of that which God created. That is, God cannot logically be both the efficient cause of an interlocking order and a constituent member of that order.[96] This principle is all-too-often said to legitimate problematic forms of social relations, such as patriarchy, dualism, or even wage-labor and property ownership.[97] But, as Rowan Williams has demonstrated, such (problematic) forms of relationality are still only patterns within an overarching system which, it has already been noted, is said to be totally dependent on a God outside it. For Augustine, God, once again, does not fall within such a frame of reference, and God's transcendence, therefore, cannot logically be said to legitimate or give rise to dominating forms of social relationality.[98]

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do not take it as either logically self-evident or historically necessary that Augustine's vision of transcendence leads to the sorts of domination Meeks insists it does. And, as I will explain below, I think this Augustinian model of transcendence makes possible a compelling vision of immanent relationality.

[94] As Kathryn Tanner insightfully indicates, "One simply finds oneself believing as one does, despite the horrible history of actions perpetuated in the name of those beliefs, and one is pushed thereby to hope that such a history is not their necessary effect. In this book I attempt to show that such hope is well-founded and not an act of personal cowardice or deluded trust." See Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), ix.

[95] D.J. MacQueen, "St. Augustine's Concept of Property Ownership," *Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 8 (January 1, 1972): 187–229.

[96] Rowan Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," in *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), 67.

[97] Meeks, *God the Economist*.

[98] "God's action cannot *compete* with created agency, God does not have to overcome a rival presence, the creative power of God is not power exercised unilaterally over some other force, but is itself the ground of all power and all agency within creation." (Williams, "Good for Nothing?," 72)

When the doctrine of transcendence is properly understood, it offers a theoretical framework through which the very social practices Meeks takes aim at can be problematized. Meeks is, after all, correct that a doctrine of God can and should problematize domination in the political and social arena, but we need not conflate divine and human agencies in order to maintain that critical possibility. When properly understood, the doctrine of transcendence posits a God that is of an altogether distinct category from human being. In this sense, transcendence is not a spatial category as much as a categorical distinction; God cannot fall into the same category as the creatures God creates. In suggesting that the process of developing a progressive economic model out a coherent theological schema requires one to abandon classical transcendence, Meeks risks conflating divine and human agencies.[99]

Problem 1: Clarifying Transcendence (And Giving God a Break)

As I have now established, contemporary theology's forms of address to the problems of work operate according to a singular pattern, which I am referring to as the "God as Worker" model. Those proposals regularly suggest that our contemporary work-related issues stem from our failure to replicate God's work. A particular model of divine agency is subsequently articulated in ways that correlate to human labor, such that humans are said to work like and with God. This pattern, however, depends on the rejection, neglect, or misunderstanding of classical forms of transcendence. That

[99] It is also important to note that such a risk or insight would surely not come as any surprise to Meeks, who is quite committed to social trinitarianism and thus very much wants to ground ethical human practices in immanent trinitarian activities. Overcoming the categorical distinctions that prohibit such an approach is precisely the point of this theological gesture. It is that broader tendency that I hope to define as a risk due to its problematic doctrinal implications. This is important in that I am not accusing Meeks of some sort of logical slip-up, wherein these implications are buried beneath the logic of the text. This approach is quite intentional, and his entire economic theological system is very intentionally built on the gesture. Hence the magnitude of the risk if such an approach conflates divine and human agencies in a problematic manner.

classical doctrine, when rightfully understood, problematizes straightforward comparisons of divine and human agencies and thereby highlights the doctrinal binds such proposals work themselves into. In order to address the woes of capitalist labor by turning to divine agency, such proposals inadvertently mischaracterize the nature of divine agency as such. In this section, I will demonstrate that this basic pattern—treating God's agency in terms of labor in order to address work-related issues—is often based on too quick an appeal to divine modes of being and action, and proposals following that pattern regularly (but problematically) assume that those divine modes of being and action provide models for ideal human action.

My own constructive project is predicated on the assertion that this need not be the case. Classical transcendence does not envision a distant God altogether removed from economic questions, and we need not abandon such classical theological commitments in order to offer a meaningful word to work-related issues. A constructive theological response to the question of work can and should start with theological anthropology rather than the doctrine of God. Such an approach can avoid claiming that God works in the ways that we do while also enabling me to re-define the nature of work altogether. I will demonstrate these twin insights (rendering God's agency as labor is based on too quick an appeal to divine modes of being and action and thus violates a classical doctrine of transcendence; starting with theological anthropology enables a theological response to work-related problems which sidesteps the risks of claiming God works in the ways we do) in conversation with the Augustinian tradition.

While it does not make much sense from an Augustinian perspective to ground our theology of work in divine agency or being, Augustine would have little interest in speaking of such issues without any reference to God. One of the primary reasons I am drawing so heavily on Augustine's theological schema in this project is for that precise reason: Augustine's doctrine of God conditions

and frames the totality of his theological project.[100] In fact, it makes little sense at all to isolate any particular theological issue from the larger whole of Augustine's corpus. There can be no proper understanding of any individual issue, phenomenon, or notion in Augustine's thought that is not intrinsically and logically connected to his insistence on and belief in an eternal, self-generating God whose eternal life is itself the joy of all creation.[101] For Augustine, the love of God is the highest, ultimate, and final end of all created life, and this means that no idea, thing, or action can be properly valued or understood apart from its relation to that final end. The Augustinian tradition thus enables us to understand and articulate the theological significance of all facets of human agency in relation to humanity's ultimate calling—the love of God.

Augustine simultaneously offers us the resources to understand why God does not work in the ways humans do. Augustine thus offers us the potential to treat the issue of work within a larger, systematic theology, albeit through a different path than those typically trod in economic theology. As I will argue, the economic implications of such a system are vast, even if often under-articulated.

Is God a Worker?

Augustine speaks of God as the ultimate craftsperson in his commentary on Genesis, and he even points to a certain analogical relationship between divine and human forms of work. Divine and human agencies thus exist in important relation to one another. Yet Augustine also warns his readers of the dangers of improperly comparing the two:

> The obscure mysteries of the natural order, which we perceive to have been made by God the almighty craftsperson, should rather be discussed by asking questions than by making affirmations. This is supremely the case with the books which have been entrusted to us by

[100] Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

[101] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 76.

> divine authority, because the rash assertion of one's uncertain and dubious opinions in dealing with them can scarcely avoid the charge of sacrilege.[102]

Augustine is thus crucially aware of the dangers of collapsing these distinct modes of agency into a single causal plane, which is why he also speaks of a radical disparity between the two. That disparity, I argue, ultimately prohibits us from grounding a theology of work in divine agency. A basic, Augustinian doctrine of God helps to articulate some of the ways in which those modes of agency do not easily map onto each other.[103]

First, Augustine insists, God exists outside of time.[104] He writes, "You have made all eras of time and you are before all time, and there was never a 'time' when time did not exist."[105] This is why Augustine explains that all things are uttered simultaneously in God, in one eternal speaking.[106] He writes, "In that Word who is coeternal with yourself you speak all that you speak simultaneously and eternally, and whatever you say shall be comes into being. Your creative act is in no way different from your speaking. Yet things which you create by speaking do not all come to be simultaneously, nor are they eternal."[107] God's will is not created; it exists prior to creation, and nothing could be created until

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[102] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram Liber Imperfectus," in *On Genesis* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2004), 1.1; pg. 114.

[103] "We should understand God, if we can and as far as we can, to be good without quality, great without quantity, creative without need or necessity, presiding without position, holding all things together without possession, wholly everywhere without place, everlasting without time, without any change in himself making changeable things, and undergoing nothing." (*The Trinity* V. Prologue.2; pg. 230)

[104] It is similarly important to note that, according to Augustine, God undergoes no change. Contra Meeks' insistence that an unchanging God is necessarily incapable of love or relationship, Augustine argues—in a lengthy passage in Book V of *The Trinity*—that God's entrance into relationship with humanity does not logically necessitate any sort of change in God's own, eternal substance. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. OP, Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2012), V.4.16,17; pg. 248.

[105] Augustine, *Confessiones*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2001), XI.13.16; pg 295.

[106] Augustine, XI.7.9; pg. 290.

[107] Augustine, XI.7.9; pg. 291.

that will had already willed it.[108] God's will also knows no resistance. There is simply no set of forces in existence that can rival the effectivity of God's active choice. As such, God's will is of an altogether different kind than that of the human's.

Second, Augustine insists that God never draws on preexisting matter when God creates things. God thus creates *ex nihilo*—out of nothing.[109] Further, the things that God does create are altogether distinct from the divine substance; they cannot be equal or rival creatures to an eternal God. This is precisely why created things are contingent, mutable, and corruptible. Such things, being given being by God, are not themselves true being. They brush up against non-being and thus undergo the sort of corruptive transformation we have come to expect from the created order.[110] Consider, for example, the second law of thermodynamics—things inevitably decay.

Third, Augustine does not believe that God has any need for creation. God creates out of sheer goodness rather than any lack or need.[111] Augustine insists that if God is eternal, self-sufficient, goodness itself, then creation could not logically benefit God. As he notes in book XIII of the *Confessions*, "It could be of no profit to you, nor equal to yourself as though proceeding from your own substance, yet there was the possibility of its existing as your creation."[112] Creation is, as Rowan Williams has noted, altogether useless to God.[113] Within Augustine's doctrinal schema, to suggest otherwise is to either insist that God's self-realization is imperfect or to locate God within the order

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[108] Augustine, XI.10.12; pg. 293.

[109] Augustine, XI.5.7; XII.7.7; XIII.13.48; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, vol. 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), VII.29-30; pgs. 235–36.

[110] Scott MacDonald, "The Divine Nature: Being and Goodness," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, 2 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 32–33.

[111] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XIII.1.1-2.2; pg 342–43.

[112] Augustine, XIII.1.1; pg. 342.

[113] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016.

God is said to give being to. God either has the fullness of divine bliss eternally in itself and thus needs no external contribution of some missing, constituent element, or God lacks something that can only be supplied by some exterior other. According to the Augustinian tradition, to affirm the latter is to simultaneously abandon the idea of a coherent universe.[114] Augustine thus sarcastically asks thinkers who insist that God creates out of need if God created human beings in order that we might step in and fill God's creative role, offering God a rest from God's fatiguing work. As unpopular as the doctrine might be today, Augustine thus recognizes "a wholly non-negotiable asymmetry" between God and the world. It is a relation of total, absolute dependence.[115]

The experience, nature, and meaning of God's agency is thus quite different from humanity's. Any divine act we might characterize as creative or productive has come to pass in a manner entirely unique from the ways in which humans carry out productive tasks. That difference is so significant that referring to God's agency as "work" must mean something altogether different from whatever it is we do in our own professional endeavors. This radical distinction seriously problematizes any attempt to ground any human economic model or activity in God's eternal self or agency.

Re-Thinking Transcendence

For Augustine, God is—simultaneously—the source of all existence and the immanent presence of that existence. Augustine's vision of God's transcendence and immanence thus exist in dialectical relation to one another.[116] God, not being affected by the malleable, finite conditions of

[114] Williams, 71.

[115] Williams, 72.

[116] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 83.

creaturely change and time, is the life through which we come to know existence at all.[117] God, in God's freedom from the imperfect, corrosive forms of mutability that characterize our lives in the world, is the very ground of our being in the world. Hence, God is more present to us than we are ourselves.[118] This is why the continuities and discontinuities between God and creation—i.e. God's dialectical transcendence and immanence—are so difficult to separate and articulate in Augustine's theological system. As Rowan Williams has fruitfully summarized, "The continuities, the ways in which creation shares in the sort of life that is God's, steer us inexorably back to the fundamental difference."[119]

Rather than sketching a distant God operating on humans from above, Augustine argues that God is "most high, most deep, and yet nearer than all else, most hidden yet intimately present."[120] God is thus "more intimately present to me than my innermost being."[121] God's transcendence and immanence operate altogether apart from any distance or measure of space; God is "both interior to every single thing, because *in him are all things* (Rom 11:36), and exterior to every single thing because he is above all things."[122] That is, God is the uncaused cause all existing things.[123] This is why Augustine asks, "And whence would it have any kind of being, if not from you, from whom derive all things

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[117] Charles Mathewes, "On Using the World," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, ed. William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2004), 206–7.

[118] Augustine, *Confessiones*, III.6.11; pg. 83.

[119] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 67.

[120] Augustine, *Confessiones*, VI.4; pg. 139.

[121] Augustine, III.1.1; pg. 83.

[122] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," in *On Genesis* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2004), VIII.26,48; pg. 374.

[123] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:V.9.

which to any degree have being?"[124] God is the very ground and cause of creaturely agency rather than some extra agent in the same causal plane.[125]

It is for this reason that Charles Mathews has identified resonances between this Augustinian framework and Kathryn Tanner's vision of classical transcendence: "God's creative action upon the world, and the action of created agents within it, thus operate on two different logical levels; they are, in Kathryn Tanner's formulation, 'noncontrastive.'"[126] This dialectical sketch of transcendence/immanence thus serves as a helpful, critical tool through which we can guard against theological treatments that "implant God too immanently within the world and those that remove God too transcendently from it."[127] For Augustine and Tanner alike, traditional claims about God and creation are rectified and made coherent by avoiding either of those outcomes.

Tanner points to a consistency of talk about the Christian creator God's transcendence and subsequently demonstrates the consistency of that speech with the notion of creaturely agency.[128] She turns to Hellenistic and Greek philosophies in order to highlight the tensions operative in claims regarding a transcendent God who is also involved in the world. Such claims do not tend to hang together well. The root of the problem, though, lies in the way contrastive theories of transcendence posit God in terms of opposition to the created world, as one being among others of a singular

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[124] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI.7.7; pg. 315.

[125] It should be clear that I do not intend to frame this vision of transcendence and divine agency as a uniquely Augustinian phenomenon. Rather, Augustine articulates a classical vision of transcendence that is arguably shared by a host of other theologians scattered throughout the Christian intellectual tradition. I merely mean to use Augustine as a way into that vision and to draw on his understanding of the implications of that vision for theological anthropology.

[126] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 206, footnote 26.

[127] Mathewes, 207.

[128] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004), 36.

order.[129] This approach limits God by opposing it to that which God is said to create. Within such a structure, God's influence and agency is necessarily limited like the other finite agents God is said to stand in relation to.

While Tanner much prefers the non-contrastive vision she identifies in Plotinus, from whom she begins to develop her theory of non-competition, a similar approach is identifiable with Augustine's treatment of the same cluster of concepts. If God is the source of all, then God cannot be compared to or characterized in terms of the beings which depend on it for existence.[130] Non-contrastive transcendence posits a God radically involved in the world, whose agency extends over every form of action as its source of being. This extreme form of divine involvement depends on a radical form of transcendence.[131] The one mandates and depends upon the other. Tanner thus articulates particular rules by which coherent theological speech should operate: "avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates."[132] Secondly: "Avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner. The second rule prescribes talk of God's creative agency as immediate and universally extensive."[133] Such rules help to make Christian theological speech both coherent and consistent.

Whereas contrastive forms of transcendence posit God in terms of opposition to the created world, as one being among others of a singular order, non-contrastive transcendence posits a God radically involved in the world. Within this framework, God's agency extends over every form of

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[129] Tanner, 45.

[130] Tanner, 43.

[131] Tanner, 46.

[132] Tanner, 47.

[133] Tanner, 47.

action as its source of being. God's difference from creatures depends on God's direct involvement with every aspect of their being.[134] God is thus the transcendental ground of human consciousness and subjectivity, and creaturely being becomes what it is by depending on God. As Tanner notes, "There need be no contradiction in saying relations that are free or contingent along the horizontal axis of created order are determined to be so in a vertical relation of absolute dependence upon divine agency."[135] When articulated in this manner, human and divine agency are seen as compatible when we consider God's agency as the foundation and ground of human being rather than some sort of suppression of that active potential.[136]

This is precisely why Augustine does not see any sort of tension between divine and human agency, distinct as they might be. In fact, he even recognizes a certain form of correlation between the two agencies since they do not operate competitively within a singular causal plane. Given the nature of God's creation and preservation—God's continual, generous giving of being to all existing things—Augustine insists that it is God that grows agricultural goods, even if through the phenomenon of human work.[137] It is for good reason that we do not treat farmers as the sole creators of their crops; farmers actualize a creative process—potentiality—that exists outside of their own capacities and within the created order itself. God, Augustine reminds his readers, is the ground of that creative potential and process—not the farmer. He notes, "It is through the external action [of those farmers] that the power of God operates inwardly to create these things."[138] That is, God's will is accomplished

[134] Tanner, 39–57.

[135] Tanner, 90.

[136] Tanner, 82–90.

[137] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," 5.6.18; pg. 285.

[138] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Edmund Hill OP, Second edition (New City Press, 2012), III.8.13; pg. 159.

in material creation by producing effects in and through free creaturely agents.[139] All created bodies are subject to the will of God precisely in that they have no power, being, or agency apart from what God continually grants them. No act of human agency can therefore occur independently of God's will.[140] Thus "God's will is the first and highest cause of all physical species and motions."[141] God's creative form of action can be thus said to be the sourcing and empowerment of creaturely agency in the fullness of its creative potential.[142]

Problem 2: What Counts as Work?

The second problem with the "God as Worker" model, which is much easier to articulate and understand, lies in its lack of clarity regarding the nature of work. When reading proposals that unfold according to the "God as Worker" model, one is often left wondering what exactly is meant by "work." The lack of conceptual clarity leads to a number of perplexing outcomes. When "work" and "labor" are treated synonymously and rendered as the mode through which humans image God, one is left wondering which precise activities constitute such imaging. That is, does my cooking, cleaning, and cleaning myself image God in the same that my professional endeavors do? And when all productive activities are included in my "imaging" of God, what is so unique about the category of work? The inverse is just as problematic, though. If by "work" one simply means that activities for which I am compensated, how are we to understand the distinction between reproductive labor and commodified labor? Relatedly, what is it about the context of commodified labor within capitalism

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139 Augustine, III.1.6; pg. 151.

140 Augustine, III.1.7; pg. 152.

141 Augustine, III.1.4,9; pg. 154.

142 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:V.9; pg. 156.

that somehow makes one's agency count as imaging God over against the unpaid, unseen work carried out when one is off the clock, so to speak?

The lack of analysis of "work" also has significant consequences regarding the type of ethical proposals one puts forward. Meeks, Ray, and Jensen, for example, seem to understand work as a basic, ontological good; it is, after all, one of the ways through which we image God. As such, work-related problems can be traced back to the structures and norms of contemporary capitalism, which prevent us from working in properly human ways (and thereby imaging God in our work). As such, the ethical proposals tend to take contemporary work structures as their target, and they are aimed at re-formulating those structures so as to allow workers to flourish in their work.[143] That is, the context in which work unfolds is problematic, but the agency itself is ontologically good.

This, however, overlooks like the Biblical idea that work is a temporary, cursed mode of agency. Even if one manages to avoid the all-too-common exploitative practices of over-pricing goods, false-advertising, and bogus sales tactics, one's ethical work is still regularly marked by frustration and resistance. Within such conditions, the very things we work on inevitably enter into a state of decay the moment our activity ceases. The difficulty and toilsome nature of work as we currently know it is itself a result of sin and the disordering of God's good creation. And, for Augustine in particular, work is a cursed, creaturely phenomenon that will eventually end. It is the means through which we create and maintain our physical well-being so as to make possible our loving journey into God, but it is emphatically not the means through which we know or love God in the world. As I aim to show, treating work as those means—as the vehicle through which we image or know God in the world—overestimates the potential for justice and happiness in our work. As such, an alternative set

[143] Jeremy Posadas has done a wonderful job of noting the operative assumptions regarding the ontologically necessary status of work in many of these contemporary theological proposals. See Posadas, "The Refusal of Work in Christian Ethics and Theology."

of ethical proposals regarding work necessitates first re-thinking the nature and function of work altogether.

Conclusion: Or Gesturing Toward Another Beginning

I have argued a number of things in this chapter. I began by noting that contemporary America has a number of serious, work-related problems. We work too much, we expect too much from our work, we live and participate in an economic and ideological system that stresses that one's right to survive depends on their work, and our work-structures contribute to a seemingly ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. The systematic demands and fetishistic ways in which we obsess over our work give rise to operative work-ethics through we understand the moral status of ourselves in relation to our work.

This tendency, along with a cluster of other labor-related problems (i.e. automation, wage depression, wage theft, the rise of a flexible labor force, a lack of worker representation, over-work, and productivism) has rightfully caused a host of theologians to take up the question of work from a theological perspective. I have also argued that these modes of response tend to unfold according to a basic pattern: God, as an active agent, is said to work in creation and redemption much like the creatures created in God's image. Further, this line of argumentation goes, humans are invited to work like God and are said to have the capacity to participate with God's ongoing work in the world. As such, the constructive theological address to work-related issues is to imitate God's work in creation and redemption in our own work lives.

Establishing this pattern matters for two reasons. First, I take this to be the contemporary theology's primary response to work-related issues. That is, the pattern is both prevalent and consistent enough that it structures theology's main line of address to the problems at hand. This

highlights the import of my second reason for establishing the pattern, which is that this particular line of address contains a number of problems.

In thinking with Augustine and the Augustinian tradition, I argued that the "God as Worker" model depends on the rejection, neglect, or misunderstanding of classical forms of transcendence. That classical doctrine, when rightfully understood, problematizes the straightforward comparison of divine and human agencies and thereby highlights the doctrinal binds such proposals work themselves into. In order to address the woes of capitalist labor by turning to divine agency, such proposals inadvertently mischaracterize the nature of divine agency as such.

Against the backdrop of these contemporary sketches, Augustine urges us to conceive of the divine nature by considering our difference from God rather than focusing on our similarities to God. As Augustine notes, God is most accurately understood to be "the one who limits all things, gives intelligent shape to all things and directs all things to a goal."[144] God is that thing which fixes a mode of being for everything else—that which gives it a species and a way of being. Creatures derive their being from the source of Being-itself in such a way that they are entirely different from God.[145] Creaturely reality is shaped by a formative agency beyond the creature itself, and being human thus entails living in response to the prior ordering and shaping of creaturely existence and mental life.[146]

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[144] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," IV.3.7ff; Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 63.

[145] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XII.15.21; pg. 323; XI.7.7; 315.

[146] This is precisely why Augustine speaks of a narrative vision of the self, wherein the human is said to be a text whose ultimate meaning is determined by God as a reader of that text. We always only exist in relation to a God that is prior and that exceeds us. See Charles Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert Peter Kennedy, 1 edition (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 7–23.

The human subject testifies to and of God in its time-bound, malleable, mutable mode of life, which are qualities that Augustine maintains are neither coherently nor fittingly applied to God.[147]

When transcendence is understood from this Augustinian perspective, it becomes quite clear that it makes no sense for us to claim that God works like we do. We cannot therefore ground a theology of work within God's eternal self. Augustine, in fact, is quite explicit regarding the illogical nature of such an approach—God simply does not work or make things the way human beings do.[148] He writes, "But how did you make heaven and earth? What tool did you employ for so vast an enterprise? You cannot have gone to work like a human craftsman, who forms a material object from some material in accordance with his imaginative decision."[149] A worker's being, agency, and ability is only ever given to that person by God; the worker only ever formalizes or organizes pre-existing material. And Augustine is quick to point out that those materials also derive their existence from God. God made the craftsperson's body, their mind that animates and exerts some form of control over that body, the very materials the mind directs the body to work upon, and the skill and capacity that enables a creative worker to visualize and actualize a plan. God is the primary cause and creator of all of these things.[150] In light of such a vision, we can only say that God works with creatures in that God wills their actions by being the ground of their capacities; otherwise we run the risk of reducing them to the same, singular causal plane. As such, God's agency cannot be said to serve as a coherent

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[147] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 67. This is precisely why Augustine returns to the categories of measure, proportion, and weight in his theological anthropology. Given that those categories cannot logically act on God, Augustine argues that they must rather be the act of God that shapes and determines something of the structure of human being. The conclusion of this investigation of weight, measure, etc. is that beauty and intelligibility are not accidental tack-ons that make possible the category of creaturely being; rather, they communicate to us the truth of God and insist that God's action always produces harmony. That is, "God's nature is to be, not one harmonious or lovely thing above others, but the cause of all harmony and loveliness." (See Williams' "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 63-64).

[148] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," 13.41; pg. 139.

[149] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI.5.7; pg. 288–89.

[150] Augustine, XI.5.7; pg. 288–89.

pattern after which human work can be modeled. God simply does not work in the ways that humans do.

The second issue I take with the "God as Worker" model centers around its treatment of the nature and import of work. Work is typically rendered as an ontological good within this model; it is imagined to be one of the primary modes through which humans are said to image God. In contrast to this vision, I argued that "toilsome work" is a category only coherent in a life of sin, and I take such toilsome activity to be an activity that will eventually be abolished. The broad category of work is thus mis-represented when phrased as an ontological good rather than a cultural determinacy. When seen in this light, such proposals assume and thereby reify an over-estimation of the potential for justice, happiness, and flourishing in and through work.

In light of the limits of the "God as worker" model, any coherent articulation of a theology of work must thus begin elsewhere, with a theological anthropology capable of making sense of the nature, experience, and purpose of the act of laboring.[151] The task of developing a theology of work without violating a classical doctrine of transcendence requires treating work as a distinctly creaturely activity. The benefits of starting with theological anthropology are twofold: it enables me to avoid attributing such creaturely modes of agency to God, and it also enables me to develop a more detailed definition of work than is typically included in such models.

It is to that end that this project is ultimately headed. I will hereby work to articulate an Augustinian-inflected theological anthropology that can help us re-frame the nature and function of labor within our contemporary moment. In order to move toward an alternative understanding of the

[151] Augustine himself insists that it is "likely to be easier, after all, and more familiar for our mind in its weakness" to examine the structures of human being rather than the nature of this transcendent, triune God. This is why he spends so much time investigating the structures of the human mind in a treatise on the Trinity. See *De Trinitate* IX.2.2.

nature of work, I must now articulate the place of work within Augustine's larger theological anthropology.

Chapter 2

Work as Animal Agency: On the Place of Work in Augustine's Theological Anthropology

It is not just a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power….It also means asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution.

Jacques Derrida
The Animal That Therefore I am

We need to understand in what sense it is said both that man is made in the image of God and that man is earth and is going to go to earth. The first statement refers to the rational soul, which God bestowed on man—that is, on his body—by creating on him or, if the term is more apt, by inspiration. The second refers to the body, which God fashioned from dust and to which the soul was given so that it might become an animal body—that is, so that the man might become a living soul.

Augustine
DCD XIII.24

Introduction

As I established in the last chapter, any coherent articulation of a theology of work must begin with theological anthropology in order to re-imagine the nature, experience, and purpose of the act of laboring. Starting with theological anthropology is important to the extent that it enables me to avoid putting God to work in any way that resembles what human beings do in work (thereby violating a classical doctrine of transcendence) and to re-imagine the nature and function of toilsome work as a cursed phenomenon. As such, the most basic task of this chapter is to articulate the place of work within Augustine's theological anthropology. My goal is to get clear on precisely what work is so as to begin re-thinking how we ought to relate to that mode of agency in our contemporary world.

Drawing on an Augustinian theological anthropology, I will argue that work is an animal phenomenon; it is not a uniquely human form of agency. Determining the nature and function of work, though, will lead us into the depths and details of Augustine's anthropology. Properly sketching the nature and function of work in this broader theological anthropology simply requires a lot of groundwork given the non-central role work plays for Augustine. To think with Augustine is to insist that we cannot understand what it means to work without first saying something of the sort of thing a human being is and the ends for which it was created, which means that articulating the nature and function of work first requires an account of the nature and purpose of the human and its place within the order of creation. And while I argue that this Augustinian theological system has much to offer our theological considerations of work, retrieving the potential requires a dive into the depths of Augustine's theological anthropology and understanding of the soul.

I will thus begin by briefly overviewing Augustine's anthropology in order to identify the place of work within his vision of human being and flourishing. If the end goal is to develop a theology of work by way of a theological anthropology, it is important to remember that for Augustine there is no coherent vision of the self totally distinct from God. More particularly, human agency is always crucially related to both God and the world.[1] Being constituted in and through our loves, we are ultimately oriented toward God even if our disordered desires lead us to pursue other ends. The self is always constituted *in media res*; we remain in process and are therefore incomplete, only ever coming to know ourselves from within the horizon of being. Properly understood, then, our lives are like texts whose pasts confound us, whose future is unknown to us, and whose meaning is determined by a reader outside ourselves. It is within this broader framework that the work-related implications of Augustine's treatment of the soul are made most evident.

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[1] Charles Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: Interior Intimo Meo," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 2 (1999): 196.

After briefly analyzing Augustine's articulation of the nature and capacities of the soul, I will argue that much of the human's nature and agency must be understood according to the more basic category of animal. That is, Augustine articulates a theological anthropology wherein the human is classified as a particular sort of "animal" (fraught as Derrida reveals the sweeping category to be). We are created, we move, we have biological features, we grow, we reproduce, we satisfy our physiological needs by eating, and these features are essential to our survival. Human beings, much like other sorts of animals, have particular sorts of physical (food, clothing, shelter) and social (meaningful activity, identity, and community) needs that must be satisfied by way of a certain type of work and that give rise to a creaturely—or more precisely, animal—life. Work is a basic animal function—it is not distinctly human.

Framing work in animal terms will be deployed deconstructively toward much of contemporary theology's over-estimation of this form of agency. To be clear, I am not aiming to use twenty-first century thinkers to correct or address Augustine's fourth century theological anthropology. There is much literature concerned with that task.[2] Rather, I aim to follow a Derridean model in hopes of deploying this fourth century thinker onto our own assumptions about the role of productive agency in human being in order to contest the over-emphasized role work plays in our popular psyche and theological schemas. I hope to point to a constructive, alternative vision of work wherein work finds its meaning precisely in being decentralized. The real force of this analysis rests in the insight that we are not laborers first; we are worshipers. And work, I will eventually argue, can only be properly understood in terms of that higher calling of worship. The import of this analysis of

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[2] Stephen D. Moore, *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, First edition., Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, University of Illinois Press ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs a Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 1998); Celia E. Deane-Drummond and David Clough, *Creaturely Theology: God, Humans and Other Animals* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2009).

work is to demonstrate, then, that work (when properly divorced from the conditions for survival) is not all that important after all. And whatever meaning work is capable of delivering for us, it must be properly situated within and in service of our final calling of knowing and loving God.

Augustinian Anthropology: A Brief Sketch

Augustine spent much time investigating the nature of human being, though those insights often arrive to us in unexpected forms. His *Confessions*, for example, which is so often championed as the first major autobiographical text of the Western canon, ends up being more about God, time, and creation than any definitive vision of human being. It is actually in his book on *The Trinity* that he pens the most particular details of his anthropology. This paradoxical approach ends up serving as a helpful springboard into Augustine's most basic anthropological insights: any and all knowledge is mediated through self-knowledge, which is always mediated through knowledge of God. The path to objective truth must therefore pass through the inward life of the subject, which necessarily entails a turn outward to God. And for all the ink spilled on the topic, Augustine gives us a dramatically unfinished theological anthropology. As he so regularly stresses, being a self is a fundamentally confusing and unfinished process during our lives in the world.

An Incomplete Self

Augustine's theological anthropology deals as much with the elusive, confusing experience of being a self as it does the broader theological analysis of whatever the human actually is (i.e. its form, telos, soul, etc.). For Augustine, the evasive, confusing nature of our own narratives must play a crucial and determinative role in our self-understanding. He thinks we can learn much about ourselves by paying careful attention to the experience of being ourselves and, more particularly, to how confusing

that experience typically remains to us. Such an approach leads to the truly distinct feature of Augustine's anthropology: the refusal of any sort of finality.[3]

We only ever find ourselves *in media res*—in the middle of our journeys, still on the way toward our final destination. We discover our disorientation the moment we discover our own narratival structure; we simply do not know where we are in the broader, ongoing story we have found ourselves in the midst of.[4] Think, for a moment, of the vast differences between how you understand yourself today (your very nature, your relationships, your standing before God and the world, etc.) and how you conceived of yourself a decade ago. The tone, tenor, and humor of any attempt to say something of ourselves today likely takes a different shape than it would have ten years ago precisely because we have since entered a new chapter that sheds new light on our pasts. And yet, we still do not know what our futures hold. Our aspirations and plans might materialize as we hope, or we might discover that, unbeknownst to us, we are already nearing the end of what will be our last chapter. In reflecting on such possibilities, Augustine forces us to reckon with the impossibility of any final determination of selfhood and challenges us to reckon with our (obsessive) desire for an absolute description of ourselves to ourselves. Our lives are plastic and unknown to us, and we discover this in and through inhabiting that plasticity.

Augustine insists that I can certainly interrogate my past and see its influence on my experience of my present, but it is not entirely clear to me where this "I" doing that thinking and interrogating begins or ends. My own consciousness seems to consist of half-formed recollections and connections, none of which are wholly present to me. Consider the way we so easily come to believe, over time, the lies we tell to ourselves. Hence Augustine's repetitive insistence that my memory simply is what I

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[3] Rowan Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," in *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), 3.

[4] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 7.

am.[5] Even still, though, we are not coherent histories ready to be put on display in fixed, curated ways. Much of my own history is not readily available, present at the top of my conscious mind or filed away in any easily accessible manner. Given the determinative role that memory plays in my formation and being, Augustine argues that the nature and meaning of our lives remains largely unknown to us from within the scope of those lives. As Rowan Williams puts it, "I am never just 'there'. *Je est un autrei, 'I am another',* might be a summary of much of Augustine's reflection in the *Confessions*."[6] Being in time is thus being in search of myself, being "inescapably unfinished."[7]

And yet, crucially, we do seem to have the capacity to reflect on the confusing nature of our selves. That is, while we cannot finally name something stable about ourselves, we certainly can reflect on the nature of that mystery and incompleteness.[8] This "questioning self"—that self aware of itself asking questions—remains unknowable to itself in any definitive sense.[9] Self-knowledge rendered in this manner turns out to be an awareness of our unfinished, unknowing states.[10] The twin tasks of *The Confessions*, then, are to name the confusions we have regarding being human (hopefully giving space to others feeling the same) and to pray.[11] Augustine's anthropology must therefore begin by contending with the unintelligibility of our own lives, with the very confusing nature of being a self trying to make sense of itself in the world. *The Confessions* is nothing less than an attempt to confuse our presumptions and to highlight our failure to (properly) make sense of our selves.

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[5] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.8.15; X.11.18; X.17.26.

[6] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 3.

[7] Williams, 3.

[8] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 7.

[9] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 4.

[10] Williams, 10.

[11] Williams, 3; Augustine, *Confessiones*, Book X.

This is precisely why Charles Mathewes insists that Augustine's *Confessions* is actually anti-autobiographical. We can only narrate our lives from the inside, but our lives simply are not fully narratable from such a limited perspective.[12] Augustine is thus highlighting the presumptuousness of autobiography. Mathewes writes, "The danger of presumption is the danger of 'knowing already' what I will ultimately be; it refuses to be open to the transforming presence of God's grace."[13] Augustine recognized this presumption precisely because he understood that we assume we are our own authors, that we are the roots of our selves and that any coherent, ultimate description of ourselves must begin with us as creatures.[14] Against such a tendency, Augustine aims to speak the self's story in a manner only fully legible and coherent from the perspective of salvation. That is, *The Confessions* notes a narrative of life forever in development and on the way, and he insists that the final meaning and actualization of that life is only coherently understandable from an eschatological perspective. Any hope for a final resolution to the ongoing tensions of being human remained just that—a hope "postponed to a final resolution of all tensions, far beyond this life."[15] Hence Augustine's confession: "Let me, then, confess what I know about myself, and confess too what I do not know, because what I know of myself I know only because you shed light on me, and what I do not know I shall remain ignorant about until my darkness becomes like bright noon before your face."[16] Our beginnings are thus only comprehensible from God's end. We are legible to ourselves as a collection of scattered

[12] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 8.

[13] Mathewes, 7–8.

[14] Mathewes, 8.

[15] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, First Edition, Forty-Fifth Anniversary edition (Berkeley; New York: University of California Press, 2013), 150.

[16] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.5.7; pg. 241.

elements, but no part of us escapes from God.[17] Our lives, thus rendered, are not therefore our own or even fully present to us yet.[18]

Being Oriented Toward God

From the beginning of the first book of *The Confessions*, then, Augustine has started sketching a self whose beginning is not grounded in itself. Our only hope for coherency depends on seeing the beginning of our lives in God, as begun by God. It is, in fact, in trying to be our own beginnings that sin emerges.[19] Augustine begins his textual presentation of himself by pointing to an altogether different text (Psalms), a different voice (David), and by reflecting on a subject distinctly not himself (God).[20] In trying to make sense of the question of himself, Augustine finds the mystery of God to be the hermeneutic key. That is, for each topic Augustine takes up in his attempt to narrate his own creaturely life, God is given ultimate priority in that the meaning of any given topic only becomes legible in relation to God as creator. God exists before the world (and time, for that matter) begins. God is beyond and prior to space as well; in fact, God's being creates the conditions for spatiality and distinct objects to be at all.[21] Perhaps it is not as strange as one might imagine, then, that the most detailed and programmatic anthropological vision Augustine gives us comes in a book on *The Trinity* and that so much of his "auto-biography" necessarily veers into mystical reflections on the nature of God we love but do not know much of.[22]

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[17] Augustine, X.40.65; pg. 280.

[18] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 9.

[19] Mathewes, 9.

[20] Mathewes, 10; Augustine, *Confessiones*, I.1.1.

[21] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 11.

[22] Mathewes, 10.

All of this matters to Augustine (and for our project of identifying the place of work in his theological anthropology) in that the first thing we can and should say about ourselves is, in fact, not about ourselves at all. Rather, we should begin with words of thanksgiving to the gratuitous source of our being. We are only, and always, secondary effects of God's gracious love. In coming to terms with our true beginning, he thus has already begun to show us our true ends—gratuitous praise and love of the one who gives us life.[23] Augustine writes, "By continence the scattered elements of the self are collected and brought back into the unity from which we have slide away into dispersion."[24] Our lives and actions are thus reducible to response (i.e. confession).[25] And the proper response of a creature before its creator, Augustine will insist, is proper enjoyment—worship. Augustine writes, "Let me not waver from my course before you have a gathered all that I am, my whole disintegrated and deformed self, in to that dearly loved mother's peace, where are lodged the first-fruits of my spirit, and whenever I draw my present certainty, so that you may reshape me to new form, new firmness, for eternity, O my God, my mercy."[26] Whatever experience we might have of being a self, Augustine insists that it is properly oriented toward a mode of becoming before God in worship.

For Augustine, this basic pattern is not exclusively true for the human—ontology's very structure is patterned around God's triune nature. He infamously argues that various trinities structure both the world at large (*modus, species/forma, ordo)* and humanity's self-conception (memory, understanding, will), and each of those trinities are themselves somehow patterned after God's Triune

[23] Mathewes, 11.

[24] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.29.40; pg. 263.

[25] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 11.

[26] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XII.16.23; pg. 325.

nature. Hence to know or be or do is always to rely on God for the very condition of such an act.[27] The recognition of that pattern, Augustine thinks, does not slip into any overly determined doctrine of God that might violate God's transcendence. Our minds are unable to properly grasp or name God precisely because God transcends created categories. The categories might speak some sliver of truth regarding God, but God continually overflows them; God exceeds their borders and cannot be rendered therein.[28] God simply cannot be possessed in this way, and the struggle to possess in this manner is itself a corrosive, misdirected love that only further perpetuates one's alienation from God.[29] Augustine argues that it is this feature of transcendence—our inability to properly name or determine whatever it is that God, as the ground of being and order, is—that serves as the spark for this self-conscious reflection.[30] He finds a proper mode of inquiry in our failure to know God and our failure to speak of ourselves coherently apart from God. Again, from the outset of *The Confessions*, he is more interested in being grasped by God than grasping God: "What I now longed for was not greater certainty about you, but a more steadfast abiding in you."[31] The attempt at understanding thus takes the form of a request to the God who is the source and ground of knowledge: "Grant me to know and understand, Lord."[32]

This is a selfhood grounded in spectatorship rather than self-awareness or presence. The goal is to come to see one's place in the larger narrative of salvation so as to play one's part in the larger

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[27] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 12.

[28] Mathewes, 12.

[29] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 9.

[30] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 13.

[31] Augustine, *Confessiones*, VIII.1.1; pg. 184.

[32] Augustine, I.1.1; Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 13.

chorus and to find one's voice in the script of things.[33] Hence the anti-autobiographical nature of *The Confessions*. Because auto-biography is self-orienting, it is ultimately delimiting in that it misunderstands our experience and ontological structure. Augustine is, at least partially, aiming to make that sort of straightforward, narratival presentation of one's self unintelligible. To whatever extent we have the potential for a coherent understanding of ourselves, it must come through some other's action—i.e. God's governance of the created order and some future time we are not yet privy to.[34] As Mathewes crucially notes, by the end of the first book of *The Confessions,* we are faced with the destabilizing insight that whatever potential we have for understanding ourselves rests in coming to terms with our own incomprehensibility. This is a knowing in *un*knowing, and it forces a certain openness to that which is outside of us. This God who is external to us, who serves as the very ground and end of our being, is not the sort of thing we can force our wills upon. In this orientation toward God, we must learn to accept what will be, to receive our being, potential, and meaning as a gift from the God to whom we are ultimately oriented.[35]

Dialogical Selfhood

The very framework of the Confessions thus reads as a sort of testament to the necessarily logical connections between the experience of finite being and an altogether gracious, gratuitous creator.[36] Within that framework, Augustine insists that in order to establish what and who I am, I must be in conversation with the God giving me being and calling me to itself. This is why, after all,

[33] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 13.

[34] Mathewes, 22.

[35] Mathewes, 22.

[36] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 4.

The Confessions is a prayer: "I know myself less clearly than I know you. I beg you to reveal myself to me as well, O my God, so that I may confess the wounded condition I diagnose in myself to my brethren, who will pray for me."[37]

Much has been written on the plurality of meanings at work in Augustine's use of the term "confession:" acknowledgement, pronouncement of thanks, admission of fault, praise, etc.[38] The process of coming to know myself depends on each of these varied acts of confession, which means that speaking coherently about any one aspect of myself requires I also learn to speak about the God who is both the ground and end of the creature. The grammatical structure of the language we use to make sense of the various aspects of our lives (self, world, other) thus ends up having God at its center. God serves as the anchor and ground of the possibility of saying anything meaningful regarding those realities.[39] The entire rationale of confession, for Augustine, is that "the self not only discovers itself but essentially constitutes itself in relation to God."[40] Hence his confession in book X: "To you, then, Lord, I lie exposed, exactly as I am."[41]

God is thus neither some definitive answer that reveals the unanswerable dimensions of human being nor some projected object of desire through which we can fill in the gaps of our theoretical systems. Rather, for Augustine, God is the ground and excess of our desires—that which is beyond our own descriptive capacities. And to speak of that God both prior to and independent of us thus requires making use of borrowed language of desire and sensuality.[42] As Rowan Williams has

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[37] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.37.62; pg. 278.

[38] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 3.

[39] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 34.

[40] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.32.48; pg. 269, note 130.

[41] Augustine, X.2.2; pg. 238.

[42] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 9.

insightfully deciphered, the very attempt to speak of God in *The Confessions* is aimed at shining a light on our own incompleteness. I am, simply put, inevitably incomplete and thus incapable of remembering or speaking God properly or completely. Whatever unity Augustine finds in himself in this act of confession, then, is distinctively not based in himself. He confesses, Williams explains, "in the hope of receiving a unity constructed not by human words and human power (a unity which doesn't therefore need to be *defended* by the anxious and violent deployment of words and power) but by the divine act of seeing and hearing (or reading)."[43]

The issue, for Augustine, is not that a finite, time-bound individual is altogether incapable of moving from ignorance to knowledge or addressing the infinite God; quite the opposite, in fact. Augustine insists that given how obscure we are to ourselves, we can only come to understand something of the sorts of beings we are by passing through the infinity of God.[44] That is, coming to know myself requires coming to know God from within the boundaries of an existence marked by time, space, and finitude—hence Augustine's theoretical investigation of the confusions of time in *The Confessions*.[45] Being in time is a rather perplexing phenomenon, after all. To be in time is to be a creature tending toward non-being.[46] Or, in a proto-Heideggerian sense, to be is to be on a timeline toward death. For Augustine, the elusive passage of time (from anticipation of the future to present experience and into a past accessible only by way of my unreliable memory) perfectly signifies the fragility of time-conditioned creatures.[47] As Augustine notes, "I have come to the conclusion that time is nothing other

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[43] Williams, 9.

[44] Williams, 4.

[45] Williams, 4.

[46] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI.14.17; pg. 296.

[47] Augustine, XI.14.17; pg. 296, note 64.

than tension: but tension of what, I do not know, and I would be very surprised if it is not tension of consciousness itself."[48] It makes some sense, then, that he goes on to speak of the whole of one's life and actions in terms of the reading of a poem, as we shift from expectation to memory by way of a rapidly successive series of present moments, gone just as quick as they come.[49] The self, in time, is an altogether unstable entity.

There is no selfhood, then, that is entirely under the control of that self. Whatever coherence is to be arrived at in regards to my status or meaning as a creature before God is necessarily given by God as a listener and observer who is carefully, patiently "reading" the text that is my life. And as Williams points out, this means that the meaning of whatever is written—whatever becomes of my life—is, in the end, not finally determined by me. The ultimate meaning and horizon of creaturely life is not "available for human inspection." I simply cannot reach the perspective from which it all makes sense or adds up. Hence the ways my own narration of my past experiences change so frequently. Coming to know myself truthfully entails coming to terms with absence—of God as an object of knowledge, with the final horizon from which I can make sense of my self, and with the possibility of any complete, finished sense of selfhood.[50] In this sense, Augustine's anthropology can be most coherently understood in terms of narrative and textuality. And God, within such a framework, is the divine source of my text who is simultaneously reading and coherently interpreting the various pieces of my life that remain so elusive to me. God is the "infinite attention" to me that remains beyond my own control and limit.[51]

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[48] Augustine, XI.26.33; pg. 306.

[49] Augustine, XI.28.38; pg. 309.

[50] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 5.

[51] Williams, 10.

This is, importantly, for Augustine, not an alienating reality. Such an approach stems from one's need and desire to come to terms with their finitude and materiality. There is no stepping outside of or above language and time. Suffering absence, in this sense, is coming to terms with the nature of our own being. Augustine's painting a picture of a self "more passive than active," whose most constitutive experience is being given its life rather than creating it for itself. But that being also actively participates in the construction of that life, and they do so most humanely in the act of confession—in response to the confounding mystery that is the gift of being and grace given by the God governing that life and patiently reading that narrative.[52] A coherent picture of the self and realistic read of God's presence and absence is only possible, then, in the wake of coming to terms with otherness lying at the very heart and core of the self.[53]

Beings in Love

For Augustine, interiority is a self-subverting reality.[54] I always stand in relation to God, the world, and others, and my own understanding of myself necessarily depends on first turning toward God in love. Love thus plays a crucial role in the life of the human. Whatever the self is, it is determined and constituted in and through its loves.[55] When properly ordered, one's love of God should situate

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[52] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 65.

[53] Mathewes, 71.

[54] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 69.

[55] I am patterning my use of "love" and "loves" after Eric Gregory's astute treatment. Gregory notes that Augustine primarily uses three terms for love: *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas*, even as he tended to use the terms interchangeably (much like he does with *mens, mens humana*, and *anima*). Like Gregory, I hereby follow Augustine's interchangeable use of those terms. And while Gregory uses the generic term for his project of developing an ethic of citizenship, I mainly use the term to characterize the human's specific modes of relationality and attachment (be they to the self, the things of the world, the world itself, other humans, or God), all of which follow a cluster of desires. For Augustine, all humans desire beatitude (i.e. happiness), even as our disordered desires and wills direct us to inordinately love things incapable of delivering such happiness. In fact, the defining distinction between Augustine's moral psychology and that of the Stoics and the Manichees was that Augustine maintained the possibility (at least in the latter half of his career) of a will divided against itself. That is, as James Wetzel notes in *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, "It is the same soul (*eadem anima*), divided in its will, that stands torn between two objects of desire, two perceived goods" (130). Augustine did not believe that

and direct one's love toward others, the self, and the world at large. That is, in our love of God, we come to love others and the world most appropriately. For Augustine, we are to love the world precisely because God loves it, and we come to love the world by participating in God's love of the world and being fully in the world.[56]

That vision, Augustine insists, was disrupted in the fall, though. The entrance into sin entails the disordering of our minds and wills such that our loves are, when we are left to ourselves, out of order. The real problem with most kinds of sin is the love that animates our relation to the action or object in question. That is, sin, for Augustine, is "more dispositional than metaphysical."[57] We are supposed to love the world in God, but we tend to love it for ourselves apart from God. And in so doing, Augustine insists, we tend to over-estimate what the world can deliver to us. The fundamental problem with us as sinful people is precisely that we love the world too much, that we hope for the things and activities of the world to deliver something to us that they simply cannot—happiness. But even our attempts to return to a love of the world ordered according to our love for God are foiled by our continued desires to love the wrong things inordinately. Augustine notes time and again that the mind, as well as its capacity for intelligence and knowledge, is limited and disordered in the state of sin to the extent that the sinful person "is unable not only to cling to and enjoy God but even to endure God's immutable light."[58] Ethical action thus stems from a properly integrated self, whereas

grace re-makes one's desires in any sort of immediate or total sense before death; even in the midst of a life of grace, we are still capable of desiring the wrong things, all the while recognizing God as the singular source of goodness capable of satisfying our desire for happiness. Within such a state, "love" refers to the modes of relationality we undertake. As such, our loves are properly directed when they follow and actualize our properly ordered desires, and our loves are misdirected when they follow and actualize improper modes of desire. See Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 202; Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 35 n.7; James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 130.

[56] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 84.

[57] Mathewes, 89–90.

[58] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 1st Edition, vol. 2 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), XI.2; pg. 3.

wicked actions stem from disintegration. Our repetitive decisions to love the wrong things, or to love things in the wrong way, are doomed to failure. Created entities simply cannot deliver happiness. We are certainly free to choose, Augustine argues, but our internal disintegration (our misdirected loves) has enslaved the will to the extent that we simply cannot will or love anything properly of our own accord. The will directs one according to its loves and desires, and, in the midst of a sinful state, our wills and loves are misdirected to the extent that we continually prohibit our own flourishing.[59] In such a state, we are unable to follow our wills whole-heartedly. Our previous actions have formed a "chain of habit" to which we are shackled.[60]

The resolution to such a dilemma is not that we stop loving the world altogether. Quite the opposite, in fact. As Mathewes notes, "The world is not ultimately the problem; we are."[61] Rather, when sin is rendered in this way, redemption must entail a change in the ways we love. And this is precisely what stereo-typical renderings of Augustine's anxieties (and Plato's, for that matter) regarding sexuality, bodies, and materiality entirely miss. Augustine does not want us to stop loving bodies in order to love God; loving God, he thinks, should transform our loves so that we begin to love them in God and, therefore, to love them humanly. This transformation leads our desires and will back to their natural desires.

Such a transformation is only brought about, Augustine argues, by Christ's entrance into human being. We are saved in God's acceptance of the limitations of being a body in time and space.[62] Christ's presence, he thinks, is itself a declaration of God's ongoing attention to us, which is

[59] Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 206.

[60] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 166; Augustine, *Confessiones*, 8.5.10.

[61] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 90.

[62] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 11.

constitutive of our own identities. The incarnation of the Word in Jesus transforms us in and through a series of historical events, and it thereby declares that God's attention is in touch with those aspects of our lives that remain beyond even our own comprehension.[63] That transformation—stretched out across time—is funded through the grace of Christ, which enables voluntary practices that re-open our minds to the love and goodness of God and the world.[64] This, Augustine would say, echoing Paul, is simply what it means to "put on Christ." It is in Christ's unification with flesh that our loves can be redeemed, but that transformation first requires coming to terms with our own natures as they are constituted by those same conditions of time, space, material, etc.[65] Asking who or what I am must always be asked in relation to the narrative of Christ's taking on of finitude.

Humanimal

According to Augustine, the human's being, structure, and bodily nature cannot be understood apart from its most basic animal functions. Indeed, many of the defining characteristics of our humanity are, in fact, animal functions. All animals have five senses, and this enables something quite like a form of knowledge.[66] All animals, he explains, have some form of memory, sensation, and will—how else would a bird be able to trace its way back to its nest after each outing?[67] Animals are driven by an instinct for survival, and they actively work to avoid death.[68] He even thinks that humanity's

[63] Williams, 12.

[64] Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 202.

[65] Augustine, *Confessiones*, VII.18.24; pg. 178.

[66] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, trans. Francis E. Tourscher (Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly company, 1933), 137–39; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XI.27; pg. 28.

[67] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.17.26; pg. 254.

[68] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XI.27; pg. 28.

linguistic capacities fall, to some extent, within the broader animal category.[69] Augustine thus develops a theological anthropology wherein the human is classified as a particular sort of "animal" (fraught as Derrida reveals the sweeping category to be).

It is quite clear for Augustine, though, that none of this qualifies animals as rational creatures.[70] Animals can sense, remember, and seek what is pleasurable to them, but Augustine thinks they are incapable of "taking note of such things" due to their lack of reason. "Taking note" refers to a mode of complex analysis made possible by higher form of reasons such as judgment and evaluation.[71] As was typical for his time and context, Augustine argued that animals do not have rational knowledge; they act according to sense perception, which he took to be something quite different than knowledge.[72] He even goes so far as to wonder (though he never definitively answers the question) in *The City of God* if an animal's action "by which they act according to their nature in seeking or shunning something" can actually be said to stem from a will at all.[73]

Human beings, on the other hand, are said to be distinct from their animal others in their intellect. Augustine thus rendered the human as a rational, mortal, and grammarian animal.[74] We are reasoning, thinking, choosing, comprehending, loving animals, and no other animal, Augustine argues, is capable of such intellectual agency. Humanity's unique intellectual capacities have powerful implications too—they make possible our knowing God and ourselves. In this act of rational self-

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[69] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2nd Revised ed. edition (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1996), II.2.3; pg. 134.

[70] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:I.20; pg. 22; Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 139.

[71] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.2,2; pg. 410.

[72] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 155–57.

[73] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:V.9; pg. 155.

[74] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 137.

reflection, Augustine explains that we have left behind the capacities of animals altogether.[75] The ability to question—even to question myself—leads to a unique capacity for understanding, which, for Augustine, correlates to our ability to "glimpse the unseen things of God."[76]

The human is a kind of animal, but the capacity for reason and understanding is uniquely human. It is, he insists, what separates us from the other animals with which we roam the world. Nonetheless, Augustine thinks there is a real necessity to and goodness in these more basic animal functions. It is not as though an animal's inability to think rationally—their incapacity for really understanding something like Euclidean geometry, for example—establishes any moral lack. Augustine's model simply takes these animals to be arational rather than irrational. Animals simply act according to their created nature, and they were not created as rational creatures. Nonetheless, they are definitively good within that order of creation. Each thing is seen to contribute to the larger order "in proportion to the just beauty and the arrangement of all things."[77] So too in humans—the functions and agential capacities we share with these other animals are neither debased nor accidental. Rather, these capacities actually play a crucial role in our being human. And Augustine thinks they play a crucial role in moving us toward our ultimate calling of knowing and loving God. Our progressive formation into the eternity, truth, and charity of God cannot be carried out apart from our animalistic urges, our sense-perceptions, and our being embodied in time. Hence the import of our animal natures—much of our agency is crucially directed to our survival, "to the utilizations of changeable and bodily things without which this life cannot be lived."[78]

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[75] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.25.36; pg. 261.

[76] Augustine, X.6.10; pg. 243.

[77] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 215.

[78] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.13.21; pg. 428.

The catch, for Augustine, is that we are not the sort of animals whose final calling or ultimate destiny is contained within the plane of bodily survival. These animal phenomena and functions simply cannot deliver our happiness. He argues that we are to make use of them unto our pursuit of truth, beauty, and the love of God, which cannot occur apart from our being in the world. We do this "in order to do whatever we do in the reasonable use of temporal things with an eye to the acquisition of eternal things, passing by the former on the way, setting our hearts on the latter to the end."[79] Augustine thus divides these activities and their corresponding aims into inner and outer categories, and he insists on the import and necessity (given the sorts of creatures we are) of rational uses of non-rational, animal capacities:

> We are dealing with the inner man and that knowledge of his which is about temporal and changeable things. When anything is taken up in pursuit of this knowledge from things that belong to the outer man, it is taken up for the lesson it can provide to foster rational knowledge; and thus the rational use of things we have in common with non-rational animals belongs to the inner man, and cannot properly be said to be common to us and non-rational animals.[80]

Within this framework, the inner pursuits (love of God's beauty and truth as made possible by rational capacities) depend on an effective functioning of the outer pursuits (all other animal functions).

God is both the end for and means through which the human is created, and the human mind plays a definitive role in moving one toward that end in the wake of the grace-filled transformation Christ's incarnation enables.[81] We work to remember and love God in the midst of our inability to remember ourselves and properly direct our disordered loves, but the mind's transformation for the sake of coming to take some share in the eternal, triune life of God will only be completed in the end,

[79] Augustine, XII.13.21; pg. 429.

[80] Augustine, XIII.1.4; pgs. 440–41.

[81] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:VIII.4; pg. 247.

when God is seen face to face.[82] Augustine ends book XIV of his massively important book on the Trinity by rephrasing the mental trinity (previously established as the mind's remembering, understanding, and willing itself) to the mind remembering, understanding, and willing God.[83] Any true act of self-understanding, he insists, is only possible when properly situated in relation to God.[84] As Rowan Williams notes, God can only be pursued in and through the soul's activity, and, more particularly, in and through the work of the memory—"not as a remembered object of perception, but in the remembrance of 'joy' or the remembrance of the desire for joy in the truth ([*Confessiones*] X.xxi/30-xxii/33)."[85] Augustine is therefore much more concerned with rational capacities directing us toward God than rational capacity itself. The image of God can therefore be understood, most simply, as the human in search of God.[86] And, for Augustine, that search is largely wrapped up with and animated by the soul's human and animal capacities.

The Soul, Worship, and Work

On the Soul

Augustine spends a good deal of time theorizing the nature of the human soul. In shifting to a discussion of some (seemingly obtuse) technical details of the soul, though, we must remember two important points. The first is the broader context of Augustine's anthropology. This technical

[82] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.16.22; pgs. 498–500.

[83] Augustine, XIV.12.15; pg. 491.

[84] Augustine, Introduction, pg. 53.

[85] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 8.

[86] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Introduction, 52.

investigation of the soul is rooted within Augustine's larger anthropological vision. That is, he is not interested in detailing the soul for the sake of the soul as much as in investigating the nature of the soul given the crucial role it plays in animating the life of the human and enabling our knowing and loving God. The second point to remember is the primary aim of this chapter—I am working to articulate the nature and function of work within Augustine's theological anthropology. In order to locate the role of work in that theological system, we must now turn to a technical analysis of the human soul.

The soul is crucially bound up in the self's pursuit of God precisely because the mind is said to be the rational capacity of the soul.[87] The soul is, Augustine insists, immaterial, even as the corruptible body perishes.[88] Most simply, the soul is what animates the body. The human being is constituted as a soul and body composite, and the human soul is rational in nature.[89] The Trinitarian structure of the mind—memory, understanding, and will/love—is itself rooted in the broader entity Augustine refers to as "the soul." As such, the soul is made in the image of God because the soul makes possible the human's proximity to and search for God.[90]

Given that the soul is what animates the body, Augustine thinks that animals have souls much like humans do. In fact, he thinks that all living things (plant life included) contain a soul, though he also insisted those souls differ in important ways.[91] Augustine develops a hierarchy of sorts in order to highlight the extent to which the human soul resembles and diverges from other souls. Rather than

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[87] S. J. Bruno Niederbacher, "The Human Soul: Augustine's Case for Soul-Body Dualism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, 2 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 125–26.

[88] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X.7.9; pg. 371.

[89] Bruno Niederbacher, "The Human Soul: Augustine's Case for Soul-Body Dualism," 125.

[90] Bruno Niederbacher, 125; Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 33.70.

[91] Bruno Niederbacher, "The Human Soul: Augustine's Case for Soul-Body Dualism," 125.

thinking of these as discrete levels or areas of the soul, though, we must recognize Augustine's treatment revolving around various powers or functions that different souls may or may not be capable of carrying out.

The most basic function is animation. In this state, the soul gives life to the body and animates its physiological survival according to the nature of its body. He notes, "these [powers] can be seen to be common to man with plants; for we say of them too that they love; we see and we acknowledge that everyone one of them is kept and is nourished and grows and germinates each in its own kind."[92] Whether in plants, dogs, or humans, the soul here is said to do things like distribute nourishment, enable regeneration, and keep the material form of the body intact. The second, more complex function is sensation. He is imagining the ability to feel and distinguish texture, temperate, and weight as well as hearing, smelling, and seeing. Additionally, this second level of sensation refers to appetition and movement, which function in tandem. Sexuality and the ability to care for offspring also emerge here, along with memory and habit.[93] Even still, all such forms of agency fall within the broader animal category.[94]

It is only after reaching the third level of the soul's capacities that Augustine speaks of something uniquely human. Whereas the souls of plants, animals, and humans are capable of animation, only the human soul, Augustine argues, is capable of these higher functions. Discursive reasoning refers to the soul's capacity for cultural invention in art, language, counting, writing, organization, law, etc.[95] He speaks of craftsmanship and the preservation of memory in writing, play,

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[92] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 189–91.

[93] Augustine, 191–93.

[94] Augustine, 193.

[95] Bruno Niederbacher, "The Human Soul: Augustine's Case for Soul-Body Dualism," 126; Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 193–95.

music, conjecture, and argumentation. And "this abounding property common to [rational] souls is shared in degrees by the learned and the unlearned, by the good and the bad."[96] The fourth level of *virtus* is evaluative and ethical.[97] Morality becomes a determining factor here, and *virtus* enables metaphysical reflection.[98] This matters in that it enables one to see the differences between oneself purified and oneself defiled. We are capable of comparing goods, following moral statutes, and undergoing moral transformation due to this particular function of the soul. The fifth capacity of the soul is *tranquillitas* (rest). This is the level at which one's fears and anxieties (typically regarding death) are overcome. Once freed from sins and living a holy life, *tranquillitas* enables the contemplation of and advancement toward God, which Augustine treats as its own kind of work.[99] The sixth level—*ingressio* (entering)—drives one to (and enables) an understanding of the deepest level of things. And the final, seventh level of *contemplatio* represents the culmination of that desire. This refers to the soul's contemplation and engagement with truth and goodness itself—God as the cause of all things. It is in that encounter that one's encounter with truth culminates.[100]

It is important to note here that Augustine's treatment revolves around various powers or functions that different souls may or may not be capable of carrying out; the issue is not whether the capacities are always or even regularly directed toward God in the way Augustine thinks most fitting. Part of what makes his *Confessions* so intriguing is the frequency by which he takes himself to be improperly loving God (and thus himself and the world). That is, it is fitting for the soul to be directed

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[96] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 195.

[97] Bruno Niederbacher, "The Human Soul: Augustine's Case for Soul-Body Dualism," 126.

[98] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 197.

[99] Augustine, 199.

[100] Augustine, 203–5.

toward God, though it regularly is not. This, however, does not shift Augustine's conception of himself as a person. That is, even when one's soul is not properly directed toward God, one continues having the same agential capacities (stemming from their soul) that make them a person. Proper love and worship of God is made possible through the human soul's capacities, and the capacities do not disappear when they are not directed toward God. In a technical and important sense, each person has the capacity for discursive reasoning (the soul's capacity cultural invention in art, language, counting, writing, organization, law, craftsmanship, the preservation of memory in writing, play, music, conjecture, and argumentation.), virtus (evaluative and ethical), transquillitas (rest, overcoming fears and anxieties), ingressio (entering; driving one to an understanding of the deepest level of understanding of things), and contemplatio (contemplation of and engagement with truth and goodness itself) even when they are not contemplating the triune God. This matters given the way in which the category of "worship" was used as a legitimating litmus test in colonial and genocidal practices of Native American populations, for instance. It flies in the face of Augustine's theological anthropology to suggest that a person stops being a person if and when they do not worship God. And, if one is to actually follow Augustine in his theological ethics, the proper contemplation and enjoyment of God dictates a particular love of other humans (and animals) that stands to confront that history of classification, genocide, and extinction.

Augustine scholar Edmund Hill has argued that none of this qualifies as any sort of new, innovative claim about the nature of the soul. Augustine's much more interested in noting its function than he is in defining its nature.[101] He starts with the insight that the soul—or the mind, as he sometimes calls the particular function of the soul he finds most interesting and important—is the source of self-awareness. The soul enables reflexivity. The soul knows itself—it loves itself, as he goes

[101] Edmund Hill, "Foreword to Books IX-XIV," in *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, Second edition (New City Press, 2012), 324.

to great lengths to demonstrate in the latter half of *The Trinity*—"simply by being itself," as Hill explains.[102] Working outward from that center, Augustine builds up the psyche as a collection of inter-related functions.[103] It is open to God above it and within itself, and its receives the bodily senses from below and outside itself. This is that same affective structure that is, for Augustine, disordered in the wake of sin to the extent that it has been turned inside out and therefore stands in need of redemption.[104]

In sin, the psyche's highest functioning is disrupted by way of a consent to the lower, *sciential* functions in a lust for power, which leads one into the depths of carnal enslavement. The disorientation of the soul and the impairment of the divine image in the *psyche* are thus caused by a turning away from God for the sake of self-love. In prioritizing private possession over and above common participation, one enters into a state of sin, which is certainly not without its subversive economic implications.[105] As Hill notes, "It is only when the *sciential* function has consented to this divine condescension by *faith*, and begun to control the appetites of the outer man by *virtue*, that the

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[102] Hill, 324.

[103] Augustine's *psyche* is divided into two parts, and each part contains its own subdivision. The inner part consists of *sapientia* (the contemplation of the eternal) and *scientia* (rational judgement and decisions regarding temporal realities), and the outer part consists of higher (memory/imagination) and lower (sensation) functions. Throughout *De Trinitate*, Augustine uses three different words to name these various psychic functions. *Mens* refers to the 'mind,' though with it he refers to the higher psychic functions (volitional, affective, cognitive) that ultimately make possible *scientia* and *sapientia*. *Mens* is, practically speaking, synonymous with the inner person. He uses *mens humana* to refer to the whole psychic structure (inner and outer). *Animus* is the second word he uses quite frequently. It is a broader term that, Hall explains, "stands for the human soul precisely as rational, and could never be used for the souls or life principles of animals," Hall thus translates *animus* as "consciousness." *Anima* is translated as "soul," but Augustine regularly urges us to remember that he is not uniquely referring to the human soul with the term. But, once again, Augustine's not very precise and regular in his use of this term either. It is not as though he uses it to refer to the outer functions alone. Thus, *mens* can be said to refer to the inner functions, *animus* to the lower functions, and *anima* to the whole system. See Edmund Hill's "Foreword to Books IX-XIV" in *The Trinity*.

[104] Hill, "Foreword to Books IX-XIV," 325.

[105] Hill, 327.

highest *sapiential* function can begin to be released once more for the loving contemplation of the divine."[106]

Doxological Selves

Augustine's vision of human being—as was charted in our big picture overview of Augustine's anthropology and our dive into his technical articulation of the nature and function of the soul—is most helpfully summarized by Michael Hanby's term "doxological self."[107] Within this Augustinian model, the human being is first and most a worshipping animal. We are destined to enjoy—to delight in for its own right, apart from any reference to anything outside of that thing—God eternally. And while our bodies play a crucial role in enabling that function, as we have established, "what gives life to our bodies is our souls, and it is with these that we enjoy God."[108] Reason matters in this sketch precisely because "the chief capacity of the human mind" is to know God.[109] The mind's orientation to itself by way of memory, understanding, and will is not, finally, the image of God. These capacities and functions matter to the extent that they make possible the knowing and loving of God as the source of the self. This is why Augustine makes the important shift, in book XIV of *The Trinity*, from the soul's trinitarian nature being remembering, understanding, and willing to the soul's remembering, understanding, and willing God.[110] This orientation of the mind is itself a form of worship of "the

[106] Hill, 328.

[107] Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*.

[108] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.27.28; pg. 122.

[109] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.8.11; pg. 485.

[110] Hill, "Foreword to Books IX-XIV," 330; Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.4.15.

uncreated God, by whom it was created with a capacity for him and able to share in him."[111] On this point, he writes:

> As far as concerns that supreme, inexpressible, incorporeal and unchangeable nature and the perception of it in some measure or other by the understanding, there is nothing on which the human mind could better practice its gaze (provided of course that it is governed by the rule of faith) that on that which man has in his nature that is better than other animals, better even than the other parts of his own soul; and this is the mind to which has been allotted a kind of power to see invisible things, and to which the senses of the body also bring all things for judgment as it presides, so to say, in the innermost and uppermost place of honor, and which as nothing above it to whose government it is subject except God.[112]

This is a progressive growth into the life of God wherein we come to see, understand, remember, and love God by way of God's grace, thereby taking a share in God itself.[113]

Augustine's doctrine of God thus conditions his entire, subsequent theological system. It simply makes no sense to treat human freedom, creation, or the nature and function of work apart from his belief that God is the eternal life and joy of the self.[114] The human self is born into the world by way of this relation to God. It becomes itself in and through the struggle to acknowledge God as the gracious source of its being and to find its place in the larger "pattern of divine gift and bliss."[115] Human freedom thus rests in perfect determination.[116] We only come to be ourselves in taking a share in the goodness of God as it is offered to us in Jesus Christ's entrance into the finitude of the world.[117]

But where does the role of work fall within such a vision of human being and flourishing?

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[111] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.12.15; pg. 491.

[112] Augustine, XV.27.49; pg. 564.

[113] Augustine, XIV.17.23; pg. 500–501.

[114] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 76.

[115] Williams, 77.

[116] Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 195.

[117] Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 101–2.

The Place of Work

The deconstructive efforts of much of philosophy's animality discourse can be a rather constructive tool in making sense of the vision of humanity and work operative in such a theological anthropology, particularly when placed in conversation with Augustine's treatment of the animal soul. Considering this relationship between humans and other animals can be productively destabilizing. Derrida's primary aim in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is to have us think the problem of "the animal" within the history of philosophy.[118] Though his writing and the detail of argumentation is characteristically dense, the aim is altogether simple: he hopes to have us think and question the supposed boundary between ourselves and that which we call "the animal." His thesis is that all of philosophical history is guilty of misrepresenting the ontological distinctions between "the animal" and "the human." It is quite clear to Derrida that "the animal" serves the distinct (though not clearly named) philosophical purpose of helping us define ourselves, of cuing the writing of our own autobiographies. It is a negative injunction—while we might not be able to confidently assert what the human is, we know it is not the animal. It is for precisely this reason that Derrida argues that violence against "the animal" serves as the very ground of humanity's self-understanding.[119]

Such an insight has massive implications when we consider the typical lines of thought that emerge in theology's treatment of the question of work.[120] The general approach John Paul II took to

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[118] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louis Mallet, trans. David Wills, 1 edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[119] Derrida, 47-48;135.

[120] A few more clarifications and caveats are in order here. First, I do not mean to equate Augustine's sense of the human as an animal with Derrida's interrogation of the category of animality or postmodern animality studies altogether. There are, to be sure, certain distinctions between these ways of thinking the relationship between the human and the animal, and I imagine many scholars in that latter camp would be quite eager to interrogate the ways in which that boundary appears in Augustine's theological system. Second, in bringing these thinkers together, I do not intend to reconcile their positions on the matter; such a task is not all that interesting or important to me. Rather, I am attempting to problematize the central role work plays in our theological anthropologies by suggesting its animal nature. Such an attempt, to be sure, still depends on the Augustinian insight that humans are distinct from their animal others in and through their potential for rationality—an idea I know many animality scholars have earned their tenure contesting. I find Derrida, Haraway, Agamben, and other postmodern animality scholars helpful in carrying out my task, and I do not

the question of work in *Laborems Exercens* is quite telling. John Paul II argued that "work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth."[121] Work is said to be an activity through which the human is invited to share in the very activity of the Creator.[122] Work has a crucial theological significance in that it is the means by which humanity is to "subdue" and "dominate" the earth.[123] Work, John Paul II argues, is a uniquely human phenomenon precisely because we alone have the capacity to dominate in this way.[124] Within such a framework, only humanity can imitate God because only humanity can create in its work like God.[125] For John Paul II, sin has surely disordered work such that much work is now riddled with "toil," but sin has not shifted the essential nature of work. That is, even in sin, John Paul II argues that work is the means through which we work like and with God.[126] In this telling, work is "something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's

think engaging those scholars on the question of animality requires me to refuse any distinction between humans and "animal others." Third, I see my attempt to contest some contemporary assumptions regarding work to be tonally resonate with Derrida's broader project, even while that undertaking depends on a particular animal-human distinction Derrida is rather critical of (i.e. human as rational animal). That is, while I maintain one particular formation of the boundary between humans and their animal others, this gesture is undertaken so as to challenge mastery rather than uphold it. I am thinking the boundary between human and animal so to question and contest the operative notion of self-mastery that undergirds so much of contemporary capitalism's work-ethic, theology's discourse, and the essential nature of work for human beings.

[121] John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens" (Papal Encyclical, September 14, 1981), II.9, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

[122] John Paul II, V.25.

[123] John Paul II, II.4.

[124] John Paul II, II.6.

[125] John Paul II, V.25.

[126] Stanley Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of a Remarkably Bad Idea," in *Co-Creation and Capitalism: John Paul II's Laborem Exercens*, ed. John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williams (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), 47.

dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it."[127] It is in work, John Paul II argues, that one comes to be fully human, even "more a human being."[128]

But, if we are to follow Derrida's animality cues, we end up misunderstanding both human being and the nature of work alike when we conceive of work as a uniquely human phenomenon. With John Paul II's insistence on work being the means through which we participate with and properly image God in the back of our minds, let us consider the beaver. Beavers are marvelously effective engineers. Needing to inhabit some combination of dry land and water, beavers convert streams into ponds through the detailed construction of dams. Those dams are built using materials from the surrounding area—boulders as well as logs and branches from fallen trees. These materials are collected and then packed together and sealed with mud. And beaver's regularly attend to the maintenance of these dams; they regularly patch and repair the leaks that inevitably emerge given the constant pressure the structure maintains. These surprisingly sturdy dams can produce lakes up to a mile wide. Those lakes are important for beavers in that they drastically stretch out the areas in which the beavers can safely forage for food. Beavers dig out complex channel systems underneath these lakes, which enable quick retreats when predators emerge. The beaver's lodge, typically built on the opposite end of the lake from the dam, contains multiple under-water entrances and has to be strong enough to keep bears out. Building the dam and lodge are complex engineering processes, which involve the transformation of material from its natural state into some new shape or arrangement to satisfy a basic need. The agency is purposive, strategic, cooperative, efficient, and productive. It is

[127] John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," II.9.

[128] John Paul II, II.9.

work.[129] And if we are honest with ourselves, it resembles much of the work humans have done for centuries (and continue doing today, even if in lesser numbers).

Animality scholar Donna Haraway has also insisted on the import of considering the ways animals work. The work of herding dogs, for example, is located somewhere between work and sport, much like the work of sled dogs.[130] Indeed, some dogs have state jobs (as police agents) and other participate in the private sector (working as security personnel at airports).[131] Some dogs have been trained to warn humans of oncoming epileptic fits and seizures, thereby completing forms of medical

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[129] It is worth noting here the racialized history of animal discourse. The category of "animal" has been used to warrant and legitimate particularly tortuous modes of labor extraction, and it has, at various points, enabled the valuation of people in terms of their productive capacities alone. The booming industry of slave trading depended on a larger discourse of white supremacy, which worked to stabilize the operative, hierarchical structure through discourse that rendered black people as animals. When imagined as animals—and therefore as lower than human—they were said to be "fit" for both the labor in question and the institution that managed them so as to extract that labor.

As Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told* so lucidly demonstrates, one cannot properly understand early American capitalism apart from the intentionally crafted system of chattel slavery. Baptist notes, "More than $600 million, or almost half of the economic activity in the United States in 1836, derived directly or indirectly from cotton produced by the million-odd slaves—6 percent of the total US population—who in that year toiled in labor camps on slavery's frontier" (Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 322). Further, many of the insights and practices that structure modern bookkeeping, finance, and accounting are traceable to their origin: the plantation. Both the trade and use of slaves was remarkably efficient due to the management of that slave-labor camp. For instance, Baptist shows that the massive rise in cotton productivity from the 1790s to the 1860s, wherein enslavers dramatically increased efficiency through torturous acts such as whipping, sexual humiliation, water boarding, and bodily mutilation (i.e. the "pushing system") (Baptist, 134-136). Cotton was by far the most traded commodity in the 19th century, and the profits gained from selling that cotton depended on the institutionalized exploitation of slave labor. Much of this was deemed appropriate given the simultaneous categorization of those laborers as "animals."

To suggest that work is not a uniquely human phenomenon, though, is not to enable or legitimate these discourses; it is, rather, to contest them. My treatment of work as an animal phenomenon and my insistence of its non-central place in Augustine's theological anthropology is aimed at insisting that people are always much more than their labor capacities. In fact, defining work as a mode of animal agency is to suggest that treating a person in terms of their productive capacities alone is inhumane and unjust precisely because work is definitively not what makes us human. It is also worth noting that the alternative (i.e. suggesting that work is a uniquely human phenomenon) does nothing in itself to challenge the historic correlation between racist uses of animal discourse and slave labor. That is, nothing about the logic of American slavery is challenged by insisting that the slaves were carrying out a uniquely human mode of agency. No matter which level of the soul's capacities work stems from (to think with Augustine on the matter), one is still left to deal with the horrifying history of American slavery and the problematic ways in which black labor was so tortuously extracted.

[130] Donna J. Haraway, "Value-Added Dogs and Lively Capital," in *When Species Meet*, 1 edition (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 56.

[131] Haraway, 57.

work humans are altogether incapable of. Haraway hopes these insights are destabilizing; she wants to push us past the strict divisions we erect between ourselves and our animal others, between our becoming and theirs.[132] Her point is rather simple: "Once again we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories."[133] Haraway is much more interested in the curious meeting of various species, which requires more of an unlearning of those divisions and the practices that maintain them than re-theorizing those dividing lines.[134]

This vision of animal work is strikingly consistent with Augustine's theological anthropology. According to Augustine's theorization of the soul, this work is enabled by *animatio* and *sensus*—the two capacities of the soul that humans and other animals all share. According to this Augustinian anthropology, our productive agency (i.e. work) has nothing to do with the image of God.[135] Work is a basic animal function—it is not distinctly human. The distinction between humans and other animals, according to Augustine, rests in the beaver's inability to rationalize its productive agency.[136]

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[132] Donna J. Haraway, "When Species Meet: Introductions," in *When Species Meet*, 1 edition (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2007), 19.

[133] Haraway, 42.

[134] Haraway, 22;36.

[135] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.9.17; pg. 524.

[136] It should be noted here that Augustine's treatment of "animal arationality" is but an assumption, and it is arguably a faulty one. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting the possibility of animal language and rational cognition alike. The point here is that the question remains emphatically undecided in contemporary scientific research, though Augustine (quite characteristically for his time, we must remember) treats the issue as a certain fact. To be clear, the status of that answer (or lack thereof) does not ultimately concern me. Should Augustine's point be proven correct, my argument regarding the nature of work as a broad animal (i.e. not uniquely human) phenomenon would stand. I have no reason to believe, though, that the event of Augustine's assumption regarding the arational nature of other animals being proven wrong would disqualify my argument. Even if other animals are capable of linguistic communication and rational thought, my understanding of work as "productive agency" still remains a broad animal phenomenon, and my argument for its decentralization would still stand. Put differently, my argument that one's knowledge and love of God is

He writes, "These being irrational animals would not of course carry their burdens with any thought for the good work they are engaged in, but simply as they are prompted to it by their natural appetite for pleasure and their natural avoidance of pain."[137] The beaver cannot conceive of the fullness of the purpose of its actions within a larger causal framework; such potential simply lies beyond the purview of its soul's capacities. The force of that distinction, though, has nothing to do with work. While humans work in much the same way that beavers do, the beaver is incapable of worshipping God in the same way as a human.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that thinking with Augustine about the nature of work requires situating that mode of agency in relation to one's final calling: praise and love of the one who gives us life. Such forms of engagement are made possible through the highest functioning of one's soul. But the human soul, Augustine insists, is capable of a range of activities, many of which it shares with plants and animals. That is, certain human functions are not uniquely human; many of the defining characteristics of our humanity are, in fact, animal functions. We remember, sense, and will things much like wolves do, and we are driven by instinct and actively work to survive much like snakes. Augustine thinks that it is the capacity of the human's soul for rational insight that ultimately distinguishes that figure from other animals and makes possible its knowledge of God. The human is thus rendered as a rational, mortal, and grammarian animal.[138] We are reasoning, thinking, choosing, comprehending, loving animals, and no other animal, Augustine argues, is capable of such intellectual

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vastly more important and central to the status of human being than are their productive capacities does not necessarily depend on any particular answer to the ongoing question of animal a/rationality.

[137] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, III.2.8; pg. 152.

[138] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 137.

agency. As such, Augustine regularly insists that our ultimate aims and desires cannot be properly satisfied within the bodily realm.

According to Augustine's theorization of the soul, work is enabled by *animatio* and *sensus*—the two capacities of the soul that humans and other animals all share. According to this Augustinian anthropology, our productive agency (i.e. work) therefore has nothing to do with the image of God. Humans, like other animals, certainly have physical and social needs that require some mode of productive agency, but this activity has nothing to do with one's final calling or one's imaging God. It is neither uniquely human nor all that important for Augustine's broader theological anthropology.

We are not workers first and foremost; we are worshippers, even if we need to work to enable that life of worship. Augustine, we must remember, never abandons the lower forms of bodily, animalistic activities for the sake of prioritizing the intellectual pursuits alone. Quite the opposite, in fact. His treatment of inner and outer (or higher and lower) forms of agency function in tandem, as a sort of composite whole. There can be no inner function that is not taking seriously the self's material needs. But this approach also stands to correct the ways we typically over-value our productive capacities.[139] Work is a broad animal phenomenon, and that insight can be creatively deployed against any economic, ideological, or theological treatment of work that over-emphasizes our productive capacities. Acknowledging that work is an animal activity rather than anything uniquely human forces us to sit with our own animal natures in a new way, and it offers us a way to make sense of the role of work within a broader theological anthropology.

Augustine writes, "If then this is the correct distinction between wisdom and knowledge, that wisdom is concerned with the intellectual cognizance of eternal things and knowledge with the rational cognizance of temporal things, it is not hard to decide which should be preferred and which

[139] Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable."

subordinated to the other."[140] The question thus becomes how we should relate to work given this insight. What role should it play in our lives in conjunction with our higher calling to know and love God? It is to this question we turn in the third chapter.

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[140] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.15.25; pg. 434.

Chapter 3

Using Oneself:
An Economic Reading of Use and Enjoyment

For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

Matthew 16.26

The great question is whether human beings ought to regard themselves as things to be enjoyed, used, or both.

Augustine
DDC I.22

Introduction

I begin this chapter by charting where we have been in this winding argumentative path, where we currently are, and to remind my readers where it is that we are going. In the first chapter, I identified a common pattern that regularly structures contemporary theological responses to work-related issues, which suggests that we should work more like God works in the creation and redemption of the world. I then problematized this pattern of response by way of Augustine's doctrine of transcendence and suggested that if theology is to coherently and faithfully address questions of labor, it must begin that task from the vantage point of theological anthropology. I began that endeavor in the second chapter, where I sketched Augustine's theological anthropology in order to locate the place of work within his theology of the human in order to identify something of the nature of work. For Augustine, at least within the time of the *saeculum*, work is neither uniquely human nor nearly as important as contemporary capitalism tends to imagine. I concluded the second chapter by arguing that to think

with Augustine's theological anthropology is to suggest that worship is the primary mode of human agency.

It is here, at the beginning of the third chapter, that we now enter the constructive phase of the project. Moving forward, my basic task is to articulate the role work should play in the life of the Christian given that worship is one's final calling. Before I can turn to the question of work in particular, though, I will develop an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment dyad, which I argue should serve as the foundation of an Augustinian economic theology. The most basic goal of this chapter is thus to develop an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to identify the relation between one's highest calling of worship (articulated in Augustinian terms as the "enjoyment of God") and work (articulated in Augustinian terms as the "using oneself"). Such a sketch will provide us with the theoretical foundation and conceptual model through which the requirements for a just, Christian vision of work (in the next chapter) and a mode of relating to work in our contemporary context (in the fifth and final chapter) come into clear view.

In order to accomplish that task, I begin this chapter with a brief overview of Augustine's framework as it is articulated in *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Civitate Dei*. This use/enjoyment model has a massive and highly contested reception history that has been helpfully and clearly mapped by other scholars.[1] As such, I will bypass that reception history in order to focus on some recent political appropriations of the framework in the second section. Focusing on the recent political appropriation of that framework in the work of Eric Gregory and Charles Mathewes enables to me to further analyze the framework itself and to highlight the resources the framework offers us for answering questions about the pressures and challenges of navigating contemporary public life in a faithfully Christian

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[1] Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 335–62; Anthony Dupont, "Using or Enjoying Humans: Uti and Frui in Augustine," *Augustiniana* 54 (2004): 475–506; Helmut David Baer, "The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in 'De Doctrina Christiana,'" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (1996): 47–64; Oliver O'Donovan, "'Usus' and 'Fruitio' in Augustine, 'De Doctrina Christiana I,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982): 361–97.

manner. In the third section, I extend those recent political appropriations of the framework into the economic sphere. I do so in order to develop an economic read of the framework wherein I position work as a form of "using oneself" in order to enable my articulation of the theological standards of work from this Augustinian system. I then conclude with some observations regarding work undertaken in terms of worship and enjoyment.

Use and Enjoyment in Augustine

Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* is a treatise on Christian teaching wherein Augustine sets out to analyze the mechanics through which one might understand strange, alien texts. Most particularly, though, it is a series of sustained reflections on the relationship between *signum* and *res*—signs and things.[2] We encounter myriad *res* in the world, some of which signify something beyond themselves while others do not. In the world, *res* operate in conjunction with our wills in distinct ways: they can be either used or enjoyed. We find, in our time in the world, things meant to be "enjoyed," things meant to be "used," and things which do the "enjoy-ing" while being "used." According to Augustine, we properly "enjoy" something when it delights us—to the highest degree—apart from any external referent or additional end.[3] It is the very nature of that object that sustains enjoyment and happiness. Augustine writes, "Our final good is that for the sake of which other things are to be directed, while it is itself to be desired for its own sake."[4] "Enjoyment" thus consists in "clinging to something lovingly for its own sake," whereas "use" consists in a relation that refers one toward what

[2] Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire: The Nature of Christian Formation," in *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), 41.

[3] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XI.25; pg. 26.

[4] Augustine, 2:XIX.1; pg. 347.

is to be "enjoyed."[5] In light of this schema, there is a crucial connection between our own (universal) desire for happiness and the ways in which we relate to the things and people we find in the world.[6]

Such happiness, though, is not so easy to come by; it is not readily available to us in those things we encounter in the world.[7] According to Augustine, God is not determined by anything outside itself, and God requires no superfluous interpretation to be what God is.[8] God is thus supremely and uniquely *res*—a thing learned through signs whose being is not determined in and through the use or meaning of anything else.[9] No sign, therefore, can properly represent or live up to the reality that is this *res* (apart from the *signum* this *res* willingly becomes in the incarnation).[10] So, for Augustine, everything is *signum* in light of God being *res*. We can only find our happiness in that thing capable of sustaining "enjoyment" (i.e. God alone), and we are to "use" the things of the world on our way toward the happiness that "enjoyment" makes possible.[11] Augustine speaks of the "use" of such things as "crutches and props for reaching the things that will make us happy, and enabling us to keep them."[12] Within such a perspective, we are to "proceed from temporal and bodily things to grasp those that are eternal and spiritual."[13] The distinction only makes sense when the ultimate end of loving and knowing God is understood and prioritized.

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[5] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.3.3; pg. 110.

[6] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.23.33; pg. 259.

[7] Augustine, X.21.30; pg. 357.

[8] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.5.5; pg. 111.

[9] Augustine, I.2.2; pg. 110.

[10] Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire: The Nature of Christian Formation," 43.

[11] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.3.3; pg. 110.

[12] Augustine, I.3.3; pg. 110.

[13] Augustine, I.4.4; pg. 111.

Enjoying God

God, in its triune, supreme, uniquely-*res* nature, is what humans are to enjoy because God is the ultimate source of happiness. Only that which "constitutes the life of bliss" is capable of being enjoyed. God is thus to be enjoyed, Augustine argues, precisely because God is eternal and unchanging.[14] As he writes in *The Confessions,* "When I seek you, my God, what I am seeking is a life of happiness. Let me seek you that my soul may live, for as my body draws its life from my soul, so does my soul draw its life from you."[15] God, as the source of our very selves, should be the object of focus and the end toward which we direct ourselves.[16] There is, in fact, nothing else capable of sustaining such happiness: "This is the happy life, and this alone: to rejoice in you, about you, and because of you. This is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else. Whoever thinks there can be some other is chasing a joy that is not the true one; yet such a person's will has not turned away from all notion of joy."[17] To "enjoy" God, in whose triune image we are made, is to move into the fullness of happiness.[18]

Aiming at such enjoyment of God is necessarily a totalizing endeavor. Pursuing the "enjoyment" of God entails the totality of one's life given that there is no surplus category of my person or being which is not to be directed toward that enjoyment.[19] And given that Augustine understands the person as a union of body and soul living in the material order, pursuing that "enjoyment" requires a particular mode of navigating bodily life. The question for Augustine thus

[14] Augustine, I.22.20; pg. 118.

[15] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.20.29; pg. 256.

[16] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.20.21; pg. 119.

[17] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.22.32; pg. 258–59.

[18] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.8.18; pg. 84.

[19] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.20.21; pg. 119.

becomes how one is to properly be in the world so as to facilitate such "enjoyment." It is this primary relation of person to God that is supposed to structure and direct all other forms of relationality. We "use" something, he explains, when "we seek it for the sake of some further end."[20] For Augustine, we properly relate to the things of the world—i.e. all that is not God—when we "use" them in our pursuit of "enjoyment" of God. Work, I will argue, is no exception.

Improper and Proper Use

Such a framework places a heavy emphasis on the ways we relate to the things of the world. Augustine insists, time and again, that the things of the world are good precisely in existing as God's creation. But to "use" something is to love it properly, in light of its place within that order of creation. One example Augustine gives is that of food: a wise person can make proper "use" of the most decadent, expensive food without slipping into greediness or self-indulgence, while a fool can feast in gluttony in relation to something simple like chocolate snack cakes.[21] The moral status of the act of eating thus depends less on the content of the food itself than it does my relation to the food. He writes, "For in all matters of this kind it is not the nature of the things we make use of, but our reason for making use of them and the manner in which we set about getting them, that decides whether what we do deserves approval or disapproval."[22] All things are indeed lawful. The key is our relation to the object or act in question, and a right will gives way to a proper form of love.[23] Or, perhaps most

[20] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XI.25; pg. 26.

[21] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, III.12.19; pg. 185.

[22] Augustine, III.12.19; pg. 186.

[23] Augustine, III.12.18; pg. 185; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIV.7; pg. 107.

simply, one makes good "use" of the things of the world when one relates to them in order to "enjoy" God rather than in an attempt at some form of "enjoyment" of the world itself.[24]

When we "enjoy" what is to be "used," though, we disrupt our own progression into the life of God; such an act is nothing but the directing of our love toward the wrong end.[25] Augustine writes, "For anyone who loves something else along with you, but does not love it for your sake, loves you less."[26] The key to improper "use" is that it inevitably leads to disappointment because it is most commonly based on an over-estimation of the thing's potential.[27] The issue Augustine points to is thus not some depraved, evil creation that must be jettisoned to get to higher, more pure realities. Things are good simply by drawing their existence from God. How could they be otherwise, he wonders? God, after all, made things exceedingly good.[28] The problem, rather, is that people "are more immediately engrossed in other things which more surely make them miserable than that other reality, so faintly remembered, can make them happy."[29] In sticking with the example of food, it makes good sense, then, that in speaking of David's temptation with water in 2 Samuel 23 and Christ's temptation to convert stones into bread in the wilderness Augustine explains that the sin rests not in the desire for meat or bread but in the form of hunger that gave rise to anger at God. The problem emerges in a lustful relation to the food rather than in the food itself.[30]

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[24] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XV.7; pg. 146.

[25] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.3.3; pg. 110; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIV.7; pg. 107.

[26] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.29.40; pg. 263.

[27] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.38.42; pg. 130.

[28] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.34.51; pg. 271. Augustine regularly cites Genesis 1.27 when establishing this point.

[29] Augustine, X.23.33; pg. 259.

[30] Augustine, X.31.46; pg. 268.

Perhaps the best example of improper use is Augustine's own telling of his relation to the unknown friend of Book IV of the *Confessions*. It is there that Augustine analyzes his past experience of mourning and dread in the wake of a close friend's death. As he recollects, he was so upset at his friend's death that he found himself hating the places he had come to associate with his deceased friend—those places were now incapable of facilitating the friend's presence and proximity.[31] Augustine finds himself swinging back and forth between wanting to die himself and being overcome with the fear of death given that his own death necessarily features the end of his memory of that friend. The most interesting aspect of this retrospective telling, though, is that, over time, Augustine realizes the ways in which this series of responses represents his own failure to love his friend humanly.[32] He had failed to take the finitude of that other creature to heart, somehow (perhaps even subconsciously) hoping that this other human could transcend its mortal nature and thereby provide the sort of happiness all mortal things search for.[33] To love in lust is to love something on its own account, devoid of its place within the order of things. It is therefore to over-estimate what that thing can deliver. Such a form of love is corrosive precisely because it fosters an illicit form of "enjoyment" aimed at the wrong object.[34]

In contrast to this over-estimation of a friend's nature and capacities, Augustine explains that we are to love other people in relation to our love of God. That is, we do not love others as the ultimate horizon—we are not to "enjoy" them in themselves as much as we are to "use" them in the

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[31] Augustine, IV.4.9; pg. 97.

[32] Augustine, IV.7.12; pg. 99.

[33] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 5.

[34] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX.2.13; pg. 349.

"enjoyment" of God. As such, we are to love each other for the sake of something else.[35] Properly "using" an other, though, entails "enjoying" God in that person.[36] In this sense, loving a person for God's sake does not prohibit loving them for their (and my own) sake as well. Rather, whenever I manage to love my neighbor for God's sake, I inevitably love that neighbor according to their best interest (as well as my own) precisely because I am loving them and "enjoying" them in God, where we properly belong together.[37] To properly "use" something or someone is to let our love of that object refer our delights to our final goal in God.[38] Proper "use," in this sense, depends on properly ordered love. One must be able to properly evaluate things and then love them in the right order "so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally."[39] The point is not that creatures and the things of the world cannot or should not be loved, but that proper love of the creature in service of one's love of God leads to a shift from covetousness and lust to charity.[40]

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[35] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.22.20; pg. 118.

[36] Augustine, I.33.37; pg. 127.

[37] Augustine, I.22.21 n. 22; pgs. 118–19. As Edmund Hill notes in his edition of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Augustine insists in *De Doctrina Christiana* that "we must love ourselves and other men, *non propter se, sed propter aliud*, not for our own sake, but for God's sake. This is not properly speaking, according to his own definition, to enjoy ourselves and others, though it can also be called enjoying ourselves and others in God; it can be called using and loving, using because we thus refer ourselves and others to the supreme good, loving because we value ourselves in ourselves, but not however purely for ourselves. This, he is careful to point out, does not dishonor ourselves or others but simply treats human beings according to their deepest ontology as creatures, that is, as beings with a built-in reference or orientation on their creator (1,22,21)." See Augustine's *De Trinitate* IX.2.13 n.24; pg. 349.

[38] Augustine, I.22.20; pg. 118; I.33.36; 126–27.

[39] Augustine, I.27.28; pg. 122.

[40] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX.2.13; pg. 349.

Making Use of the Use/Enjoyment Framework

There is, to be sure, an over-abundance of literature on the use/enjoyment framework. The framework understandably tends to sound a few alarm bells in the ears of modern readers, and it has thus received a large amount of critical feedback.[41] Still, other commentators have identified a certain workability in the model when read in light of Augustine's own late-antique context. Even more recently, some authors have moved beyond attempts to highlight the framework's consistency with and logical fidelity to Augustine's larger doctrinal system in order to undertake a series of constructive deployments of the framework aimed at addressing questions of contemporary political life.

I will, in this section, briefly note some of the ways in which this framework is being used in contemporary theology for the sake of addressing pressing political questions. Such an endeavor will set up my own constructive development, wherein I extend these recent political appropriations of Augustine into the economic sphere, using the use/enjoyment framework as the ground of a contemporary economic theology that can address the question of work in particular.

Contemporary Political Appropriation

Eric Gregory—who has wonderfully traced the nuanced history of reception of the use/enjoyment framework—uses Augustine to make a case for the viability of love (and therefore Christian theological presence) in liberal democracies. In so doing, he highlights resources in Augustine for an Augustinian civic friendship. Such friendship is "where together we find comfort in

[41] Interested readers should see Eric Gregory's lovely typology and history of reception of the framework. See Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 319–60. Gregory does a fine job articulating the arguments of the critics, who largely argue that Augustine's framework has problematic overtones of egoism and instrumentalism. Gregory also does a fine job of articulating the ways in which those criticisms have been historically addressed. I will, for the sake of brevity, not recite those arguments here. Suffice it to say I agree with Gregory's articulation of that reception history in that I find those criticisms lacking and do not ultimately believe that Augustine's use/enjoyment framework is egoistic, instrumentalist, or anything like what Kant had in mind when he warned against using another as a "means" to an end.

the sadness of life's fragile journey, relief from its pain and poverty."[42] Because this model of friendship is public and grounded in the equality of my neighbor as a creature before God, Gregory argues that Augustine's framework "democratizes and publicizes love through a theological (and so political) populism."[43] All of this matters for Gregory in that he is pushing back against Arendt's concern that Augustine's political theology leads to other-worldliness and paternalism. For Arendt, the passions of the heart should be transformed and deindividualized in order to properly fit into public life, particularly given that a true polis gets things done through reason and argument rather than violence or coercion, both of which she believes inevitably result from the passions.

Gregory acknowledges that liberal citizenship certainly does not have the intimacy of friendship, and it does not seek to share all things in common like friends do. But the experience of citizenships, Gregory argues, is phenomenologically akin to that of friendship. He writes, "Civic friendship is a species of friendship that highlights the ethical relation as fundamental for political community even given the affirmation of finitude and the radical possibilities of sin. It relies on the same Augustinian anthropology of desire and love."[44] This is the more expansive vision of politics, including the passions and love, that Gregory is calling for. Gregory thus argues that the use/enjoyment framework must be read as an eschatologically-shaped mode of discipleship that orders love according to a good God. God can thus be said to create in a way that enables the very form of encounter with others that liberal democracy prioritizes. And yet, the framework warns us of

[42] Gregory, 352.

[43] Gregory, 355.

[44] Gregory, 358.

the dangers of improperly loving our neighbor and thereby undoing the very thing the framework aims to support.[45]

Charles Mathewes engages the framework for related, though distinct, contemporary political purposes. Mathewes re-energizes the framework in order to develop a theology of public citizenship. That is, he thinks Augustine offers us a unique set of resources for navigating the questions and tensions of contemporary public life. In the process, he gives a rather compelling sketch of the use/enjoyment framework, and he manages to translate the logic of Augustine's framework into a contemporary idiom.

Contrary to stereotypical dismissals of Augustine's theology, an Augustinian very much values the world. Mathewes suggests that it makes no sense, for Augustine, to consider the loving activity of God to be quarantined apart from any space of creaturely life.[46] As creatures of God, we are necessarily in the world. Augustine manages to strike a balance that acknowledges that our love of the world is necessarily otherworldly while still, in the fullest sense, being a love of the world itself. For Mathewes, the question is how to be in the world, given that there is no nature/super-nature distinction in Augustine's thought, and it is actually the recognition of that otherworldly love that enables one to properly love the world in all its worldly ways. Such a model frees us from expecting more than the world can offer to us, thereby freeing us from being disappointed in the world.[47] Augustine's theological system—and the use/enjoyment framework in particular—is therefore aimed at teaching us "how to be committed to the world and to God in the right way."[48] Augustine's vision of love thus

[45] Gregory, 362.

[46] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 22.

[47] Mathewes, 36–37.

[48] Mathewes, 73.

ties our everyday activities in the world into otherworldly concerns. To be in the world properly—to love the world as the world—is to imagine it as God's creation, in a theological register. And yet our theological concerns only ever play out in the ways in which we are in the world, at least during our lives in the world.[49] Mathewes thus thinks Augustine's understanding of love offers us a deeply human way of being in the world, which frees us to love the world for what it actually is and thereby avoid overvaluing the things of the world.[50] Such overestimation is our great temptation. We tend to love the things and people of the world inhumanely, as though they offer us some permanent sense of self, security, or stability.[51]

In light of that theological background, Mathewes frames Augustine's use/enjoyment paradigm in terms of the Christian cultural assumptions to which Augustine was responding when he first developed the model. At the time, the broad Christian commitment to retreat from the world led to a sort of anti-politics.[52] But Augustine is quite clear that we are made to embrace the world. As creatures of God whose continued existence depends on being in the order God created, we are to participate in the world's redemption as vehicles of God.[53] The use paradigm was aimed at pushing Christians back into the world, into engagement. Augustine intends the "use paradigm" as a means of undermining ontological dualism. He deploys those insights against the popular ascetic assumptions of both the Christians and cultured pagans of his day in order to affirm, appreciate, and apprehend the world's goodness.[54] The world cannot be avoided; Augustine was problematizing our hope for

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[49] Mathewes, 80.

[50] Mathewes, 84–85.

[51] Williams, "A Question to Myself: Time and Self-Awareness in the Confessions," 6.

[52] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 204.

[53] Mathewes, 205.

[54] Mathewes, 203.

that while also warning against an uncritical, totalizing love of the world.[55] When perceived in this manner, it becomes quite clear that the world is, in fact, not the problem—we are. The problem is with our inordinate, improperly directed love of the world, which stems from our expectation that the world can deliver more than its capable of.[56]

That paradigm is aimed at a proper usage of and relation to the world precisely because our worldly attachments have massive soteriological import.[57] We must "use" creation to "enjoy" God now. God "uses" created things as signs, pointing to something beyond their immediate materiality. The value of things in the world is thus not only in themselves; their significance lies in the whole economy at play, and this is precisely why immanentism cannot account for the fullness of their meaning.[58] The task of ordering our loves consists in "transforming and harmonizing *all* of our various loves into an integral framework which will render our lives coherent and rightly ordered toward God."[59] Prudence thus involves us treating the things of creation as gratuitous gifts rather than necessities. Worldly action, when understood in this register, becomes a mode of exploration into God. Mathewes frames this as the liturgy of the church— "the work whereby a collection of disparate individuals comes together in community to begin the infinite task of understanding."[60] He writes, "In using the world we are loving it and in loving the world we are becoming deified. To realize this

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[55] Mathewes, 205.

[56] Mathewes, 203.

[57] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 91.

[58] Mathewes, 100.

[59] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 209.

[60] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 103.

is to realize that the 'enjoyment' of God need not entail that the 'use' of the world denigrates created things; rather, it consummates them."[61] The affairs of the world, then, are always already theological.

Mathewes has thus translated—rather convincingly, I think—the use/enjoyment framework into a contemporary idiom in ways that emphatically avoid and correct the two most commonly cited problems from critics of framework: egocentrism and instrumentalism. But, like Gregory, he has invested in vivifying Augustine's framework not just to suggest that it is logically coherent with Augustine's broader theological system. Mathewes certainly thinks it is, but he is much more interested in sketching what that framework has to offer us today. His is a constructive deployment. Mathewes speaks of the framework in the first half of *A Theology of Public Life*, where he explicates the general theology of engagement that develops into an explicit political theology in part II. Part I works to explain how Christians should understand the basic dynamics of their faith leading to a rich engagement with their created condition. Part II translates this Augustinian theological vision of political engagement into a theology of citizenship—"a theological analysis of faithful civic engagement during the world as part of God's providential economy."[62] Mathewes aims to show how civic engagement can happen in our contemporary world in ways that entail political resistance achieved in faith, hope, and love. He thereby develops a theology of citizenship wherein our work entails engagement with the public life of the world and formation into God simultaneously. "To claim that civic life can be liturgical in this sense is to suggest that civic life can be performed in a way that is continuous with the liturgy of the blessed in heaven that is our eschatological destiny."[63] Both liturgies can thus be performed as two sides of the same coin. It is no surprise, then, that Mathewes

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[61] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 216.

[62] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 145.

[63] Mathewes, 146.

despises liberal theory as much as he does; he argues it is more of a strategy for avoiding politics than actually doing politics.[64]

All of this matters for the purposes of this chapter in that both Gregory and Mathewes alike are using Augustine to speak of a mode of faithful, formative engagement in contemporary political life. The contemporary political appropriation of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework is thus aimed at sketching a form of public, political life that recognizes the limits of political structures and political life that simultaneously avoids slipping into other-worldliness or lack of engagement. Gregory makes the case that Christianity (and Augustine in particular) has resources (i.e. love) that political liberalism needs. And Mathewes argues that faithful Christian existence promotes a particular sort of engagement with the world, during the world. Faithful citizenship during the world should be lived as a way "of training them in their fundamental vocation as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, particularly considering those forces—material, structural, institutional, cultural, and intellectual—that mis-shape our engagement in public life today."[65]

Both thinkers have made use of resources within Augustine and Augustinian studies to articulate something of a model for faithful, Christian citizenship in our contemporary world (and they are ceartinly not alone in this gesture). Yet, as many political theorists have recently suggested, any viable vision of contemporary life must account for the growing and changing influence of capitalism for contemporary life and politics.[66] To date, however, little work has thoroughly examined the resources in Augustine's theological system for questions of contemporary economic life. As a result, scholarship regularly endorses a vision for political life wherein the economic implications of that

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[64] Mathewes, 156.

[65] Mathewes, 2.

[66] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy*; Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*; Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic.*

vision are largely under-addressed. Without an adequate analysis of the crucial role that capitalism plays in structuring contemporary politics and American life, we severely misrepresent the nuanced mechanics, pressures, and needs for structuring a faithfully Christian sketch of public life.

In the next section, I will draw on these contemporary political appropriations of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to extend those forms of political appropriation into the economic sphere. I do so by developing an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework, which I argue has under-analyzed economic implications and can serve as the ground of an economic vision stemming from a classical theological system. That is, I believe my economic reading of this framework can (and should) serve as the foundation of a larger, Augustinian economic theology wherein questions of faithful economic life in the contemporary world, marked as it is by globalized, neoliberal capitalism, can be faithfully answered.[67] Deploying the use/enjoyment framework in this

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[67] In so doing, I do not mean to suggest that Augustinian scholars are altogether overlooking or unaware of the economic implications of Augustine's theological anthropology or his use/enjoyment framework. In fact, numerous scholars have either explicitly written on or gestured toward an economic use of Augustine's theology; my own reading is thus not without some precedent in Augustine scholarship. Charles Mathewes, in a manner similar to his broader political appropriation of Augustine, has identified resources in Augustine for navigating issues of property ownership and consumerism. Mathewes deploys Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to frame questions of consumption, giving, work, and our own attachments to the world in terms of faithful management, joy, and charity. And, in so doing, he highlights the potential of a treatment of work-ethics by way of the Augustinian framework (Mathewes, "On Using the World," 210–12). Eugene McCarraher similarly uses Augustine to identify the continued enchantment—what McCarraher refers to as "mammon"—of contemporary capitalist markets (Eugene McCarraher, "The Enchanted City of Man: The State and the Market in Augustinian Perspective," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth, Augustine in Conversation (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005), 261–96). William Cavanaugh contrasts capitalist visions of freedom as choice apart from constraint, as articulated by economist Milton Friedman, with Augustine's vision as the cultivation of desire and virtue that moves one toward one's created telos—union with God (William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), chapter 1). John Milbank develops his vision of Christian socialism by drawing on Augustine's *City of God* to argue for a Christian counter-narrative that privileges an ontology of peace. He writes, "Salvation from sin must mean 'liberation' from cosmic, political, economic, and psychic *dominium*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*, or temporal interval between the Fall and the final return of Christ. This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community" (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2 edition (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 391–95.). Milbank thus uses Augustine to identify the church as an alternative civitas to that of contemporary capitalism and nation-states.

These constructive theologians clearly recognize the economic implications and import of Augustine's theological system. But most of their treatments tend to be ad-hoc and unsystematic. That is, Augustinian economic insights tend to be used on a piecemeal basis to address singular economic issues, such as consumerism, relations to markets, and property relations, often in service of these thinkers' larger constructive proposals. There is certainly nothing wrong with such an approach, but my hope in developing this economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework is to set up a larger,

manner thus enables me to further sketch a faithful, Christian vision of work out of a classical, Augustinian theology. Read differently, I am using Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to further clarify and articulate the implicit economic models of a classical theological system.[68]

An Economic Reading of Use/Enjoyment

The use/enjoyment framework, when read in an economic register, treats all questions of value and relation in relation to God, who is itself the highest form and source of all value and goodness. God is the very ground from which all goodness and beauty arises, and God is therefore the standard according to which all other things are properly valued. Said differently, God is to be enjoyed, and all other things are to be used. The use/enjoyment framework thus provides us with a conceptual rubric through which we can evaluate and determine the justice (or lack thereof) of any number of economic systems, proposals, and practices. Any sketch of the systematic organization of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods must ascribe to the standards of just relations articulated in the framework in order to qualify for "use" rather than "abuse." Money, debt, property, and work are things and practices to be used in service of a shared enjoyment of God. Any approach to those economic entities and practices that fails to foster such a mode of relation is both unjust and abusive, and therefore becomes condemnable from an Augustinian perspective.

It is important to emphasize the differences between my reading of Augustine's framework and Kant's articulation of means and ends. A Kantian "means to an end" is not the issue here. Augustine's terminology of use/enjoyment is much more aimed at recognizing that any earthly, creaturely good (good as it might be) is ultimately for the purpose of directing one towards their highest end in God. Proper use of the earth and its plants, animals, and other humans should be in

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Augustinian economic theology wherein I can articulate a mode of faithful work out of a classical, Augustinian theological system.

[68] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), xi; Tanner, *The Politics of God.*

service of our knowing God, which is emphatically not a manipulative, dominating phenomenon for Augustine. As Charles Mathewes helpfully points out, the earth is distinctly not "mine to be consumed" within this framework. Proper use would likely thus entail less "usage" (as we commonly hear that term now) given that all aspects of one's life need to be in service of humanity's highest calling of knowing and loving God rather than satisfying my own corrupted desires and aims. The use-model, then, is not Kantian; it is not just about using things as means. Rather, it is a proscription against ascribing too much hope to any one cluster of things, hoping them to be the God they most certainly cannot be. Augustine is thus greatly concerned with our tendency to instrumentalize our neighbors and the world itself, to use them for our own purposes and egoist drives. His prescription of use thus reads much like Kant's proscription—Augustine urges us to "use" the goods of this world in order to avoid manipulating them for our own misdirected interests or expecting that they can provide us with any sort of lasting happiness.[69] We properly use such goods when we receive them as the good gifts from God that they are, treating them with the respect, dignity, and alterity they thus deserve.

Such an economic reading of the use/enjoyment framework has profound implications for our contemporary understandings and practices of work—what I am calling "the use of the self." Much like we are to use our neighbors for the enjoyment of God, thereby loving them properly and humanly, so too are we to "use" ourselves toward that gracious end. As Augustine notes, we "are ourselves also things."[70] He thinks this is implied in Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor as

[69] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 86.

[70] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.22.20; pg. 118.

ourselves.[71] As such, we must use ourselves "for the sake of the one whom we are to enjoy."[72] Every aspect of our persons—all agency, projects, and professional undertakings—"must be whisked along toward that point to which the whole impetus of [our] love is hastening."[73] The task is thus to learn how to properly "use" and thereby love ourselves in order to properly benefit from and relate our own work in relation to each other and in service of our highest callings.

Augustine actually speaks of work on multiple occasions (one of which I analyze, in-depth, in the next chapter). He touches on the topic, in a passing way, in the tenth book of the *Confessions* when he notes that even the best of work will not suffice if it is not undertaken in service of and relation to one's enjoyment of God. Craftpersons with creativity, ingenuity, and meticulous skill, he explains, create clothing, household goods, and tools whose value and beauty vastly exceed their intended purposes and uses. They create at a remarkably high level of quality, but they misuse their own agencies whenever they undertake their work in a way that forsakes "the One within by whom they were made, and so destroy what they were made to be by driving it out of doors."[74] Such an insight makes good sense when received in light of Augustine's doctrine of transcendence. Whatever beauty emerges in human design or blueprints ultimately stems from God, and the ultimate meaning (as well as the norms by which we ought to relate to that mode of agency or the objects/fruits of our labor) of that work is not readily available in the act of working itself. Work must find its place in the order of things; it too must be "used" in service of "enjoying" God.[75]

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[71] Augustine, I.26.27; pg. 118. Matthew 22.37-40.

[72] Augustine, I.22.21; pg. 118.

[73] Augustine, I.22.21; pg. 119.

[74] Augustine, *Confessiones*, X.34.53; pg. 272.

[75] Augustine, X.34.53; pg. 272.

This approach frees us from the need to cling to our own work as though our final end, happiness, or value were somehow bound up in that context. We are thereby freed to refuse the ways we so regularly abuse ourselves in and through our work. Any "use" of the body and its agency that does not frame its activities in conjunction with humanity's end is thus misdirected. This does not, however, denigrate other forms of human agency and activity as much as it speaks of the end toward which they are to be directed. It becomes clear that capitalism (or any other economic system, for that matter) cannot possibly deliver a proper vision of agency or work because the final end toward which all human agency is directed (i.e. God—that being both present and absent from which any definitive meaning for the self must stem) remains beyond its purview. The self—and its work—can only be properly used, loved, and related to when placed in service of one's enjoyment of God. Faithful work must thus be undertaken in worship of God.

Working in Worship

As I just established, all creaturely things—including oneself—are to be used for the sake of enjoying God. An economic theology built on Augustine's use/enjoyment distinction takes God as its highest value. Worship (i.e. proper enjoyment of God) is therefore the end (and lens) through which the nature, purpose, and ends of work comes into clear perspective. I will therefore conclude this chapter by briefly defining what this Augustinian vision of "worship" entails, clarifying what it is not, and noting what such an understanding of worship offers for questions of contemporary economic life.

For Augustine, we will only fully know, and therefore "enjoy," God in the eschaton. And to know God in this way "is nothing other than to cling to him by whose incorporeal embrace alone, if

one can speak of such a thing, the intellectual soul is filled and made fertile with true virtues."[76] But even though we cannot know God fully during the *saeculum*, we can still worship that God now. The city of God, as it lives in the *saeculum*—the middle time between Christ's resurrection and return—is characterized by its worship of God, even as any definitive division or sorting of the city of God and the earthly city remains impossible during this period.[77] To love God in the world is thus to "set our course toward [God] in love, so that when we reach [God], we may be at rest, blessed because made perfect by the one who is our ultimate end."[78] Worship, to the extent it entails ascribing due honor and praise, thus includes loving all things in relation to God. For Augustine, worship simply is using the world and enjoying God to whatever extent possible during our lives in the world.

Proper worship of God therefore entails a standard of human behavior; the latter is logically implicit in the former given Augustine's characterization of ordered love. The task of loving the world becomes referring all that one does toward the happiness that stems from knowing and loving God. In clinging to God in order to establish and maintain happiness, a person models that they know what it means to love themselves.[79]

Augustine thus speaks of worship—of living out of a properly ordered love—in terms of a sacrifice.[80] But such a mode of sacrifice is neither self-diminishing nor anti-body. Augustine, in fact, is quite clear that attaining happiness by way of worshipping God cannot possibly mean neglecting or fleeing bodily life. Rather, such worship entails a particular mode of engaging in bodily life, of being

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[76] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:X.3; pg. 308.

[77] Augustine, 1:X.3; pg. 308.

[78] Augustine, 1:X.3; pg. 308.

[79] Augustine, 1:X.3; pg. 308.

[80] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIV.23; pg. 384.

in our bodies. When undertaken in this register, proper "use" and worship does not entail detesting or denigrating things. There is no looking down on the objects of the world. In fact, proper "usage" more often entails treasuring and caring for things precisely because they are distinct form ourselves and in God.[81] He writes, "To attain happiness, therefore, there is no need to flee from all bodies but only from bodies that are corruptible, burdensome, oppressive, and death-bound—not, that is, from bodies such as God's goodness created for the first human beings but rather from bodies such as sin's punishment compelled them to be."[82] Augustine insists we have no reason to neglect or insult God due to the frailty of our bodies—they are properly ordered within God's good creation. To "live according to the flesh" does not negatively characterize embodiment as such. The phrase refers to being in our bodies without reference to God as creator. Or perhaps it is to live according to our bodily life alone, as though it is somehow separable from the larger needs and direction of the soul.[83]

As Luke Bretherton has helpfully demonstrated, the church's worship constitutes its nature and identity while also spelling out something of a vision for public engagement in the saeculum. The church's basic commitment to worship thus clarifies something of its distinct economic vision and understanding of work. The church is, according to Augustine, properly constituted as a *res publica*—a commonwealth—in and through its worship of God. As such, it should stand in stark contrast to the ideologies and assumptions of the city of mammon, driven as it is by market dynamics and productivist work-ethics.[84] The church's worship also clarifies its mode of social engagement, freeing the church to attest that the world (like our neighbors) is not ours for consumption. It is, rather, a

[81] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 209.

[82] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIII.17; pg. 83.

[83] Augustine, 2:XIV.5; pg. 104.

[84] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 143.

good gift of God that is continually dependent on God and given in grace and love to enable our communion with God.

Worship thus attests to the ordered realities over-above the economic realm; economics, when seen from this perspective is neither all-encompassing nor soteriological. Worship thus speaks of the limits and standards against which all economic realities must be measured and held accountable.[85] When read in relation to the broader economic theology I am developing here, worship functions as a standard for just economic relations, agencies, and forms of exchange. One cannot love God apart from a proper use of oneself and relation to one's neighbors in the world. I am thus framing worship as the conceptual rubric through which we can evaluate the justice and proper placement of work in the life of the Christian. Worship (i.e. "enjoyment of God," if we are to stick with Augustine's terminology) offers us something of a series of contours through which we might begin imagining a Christian vision of work: worship limits work, directs work, clarifies work, and prepares us for work.

The category of worship contests our drive toward over-work and absolute. Augustine writes, "No one ought to be so completely at leisure that in his leisure he takes no thought for serving his neighbor, nor should anyone be so fully active that he makes no room for the contemplation of God."[86] It is not, in fact, the activities of work or leisure themselves that are to be properly enjoyed; those modes of agency, important as they might be for our life during the world, are only to be used in God so as to make possible our enjoyment of God.[87] To a certain extent, worship—particularly when articulated in this Augustinian register—insists that humans are created for purposelessness. We are created to delight in God, for God's delight first and foremost, which is simultaneously our own

[85] Bretherton, 97. Bretherton makes this case regarding worship and politics through an analysis of the relationship between worship and community organizing. I'm drawing heavily on that vision here.

[86] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIV.19; pg. 376.

[87] Augustine, 2:XIV.19; pg. 376.

derivative delight as well.[88] Worship thus brackets work in insisting that work has no meaning apart from its reference to God; work must come to an end in order to make space and time for more formative pursuits. That cluster of insights is a direct challenge to contemporary productivism and the contemporary work-ethics this project aims to problematize.

Worship also directs work. Augustine, perhaps unsurprisingly, insists that work and the products of our work are not all that valuable in and of themselves. Their real value is only perceived and taken advantage of when they are properly directed toward their ends: love of God and neighbor. As such, our relation to our work and the products of our work matters a great deal. What ought to be prized is the sake for which we undertake that work and the ways in which we let those motivating factors animate our work. For Augustine, to work "rightfully and helpfully" is to work to "contribut[e] to the well-being of those set around us."[89] Work, undertaken in the love of God, must be undertaken for the common good. He thus concludes, "It is the love of truth, then, that seeks holy leisure, and it is the drive of love that takes on righteous activity."[90]

Worship clarifies work as well. The very act of worshipping God is only ever made possible by the transformation of our wills enabled by the grace of Christ. This gets interesting when we realize that agents' re-discovery of their freedom depends on a "reintegration of their affective structure, through their loves' conversion back to congruity with their natural desires."[91] God is thus said to be the grammatical anchor of a properly Christian vision of work.[92] As such, a properly Christian vision

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88 Mathewes, "On Using the World," 214; Rowan Williams, "Good for Nothing? Augustine on Creation," in *On Augustine* (London Oxford New York New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016).

89 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIV.19; pg. 376.

90 Augustine, 2:XIV.19; pg. 377.

91 Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 208.

92 Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 34.

of work—working in freedom—depends on a properly reintegrated vision of one's affective structure made possible by a life of love wherein we grow into God during the *saeculum*. To grow into this vision of work is thus to grow into Christ and the virtues Christ enables.

Relatedly, worship thus prepares us for work. That is, worship forms our imaginations regarding how to work and how to engage with the structures that make possible (and demand) our work. The ongoing formation made possible through an attentive participation in the liturgical year has profound implications for Christian political witness. The Christian political imagination is, at its best, nurtured and cultivated in relation to the spatial and temporal ordering of the liturgy.[93] So, in addition to worship being the standard by which the justice and proper use of any economic agency or structure is to be evaluated, worship is also the means through which just practices and alternatives can come to be envisioned.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, any proper "use" must be directed toward humanity's final calling, which Augustine speaks of in terms of "the enjoyment of God." This does not, however, denigrate other forms of human agency and activity as much as it speaks of the end toward which they are to be directed. The self—and its work—can only be properly used, loved, and related to when placed in service of one's enjoyment of God. Worship is therefore the lens through which the shape of the human's work comes into clear perspective.

I have drawn on contemporary political appropriations of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to extend that discourse into the economic sphere by showing the need to address economic questions. In so doing, my hope has been to properly address issues of "public/political

[93] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 192–93.

life" by highlighting the theoretical implications that one's "enjoyment of God" should have on one's work. In particular, I have argued that the implicit standards of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework enable us to use worship as something of a standard when imagining an Augustinian vision of work. Worship provides us with a series of basic insights regarding a Christian vision of work: worship limits work, directs work, clarifies work, and prepares us for work.

While I have focused on the question of work in particular, this approach can (and should) serve as the foundation of a larger, Augustinian economic theology wherein questions of faithful economic life in the contemporary world, marked as it is by globalized, neoliberal capitalism, can be faithfully answered. Deploying the use/enjoyment framework in this manner thus enables me to further sketch a faithful, Christian vision of work (and other pressing issues in contemporary economic life, such as markets, property, debt, money, etc.) out of a classical, Augustinian theology. Read differently, I am using Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to further clarify and articulate the implicit economic models of a classical theological system.

But what might such a mode of work actually entail? What shape might it take? What could it mean to work in service of worship or to undertake our work as a mode of worship? It is to these questions I now turn in chapter four, where I will analyze Augustine's short treatise on manual labor in order to continue re-imagining the nature and function of work within an Augustinian theological system.

Chapter 4

Work in a Life of Liturgy

Jobs are not big enough for people. It's not just the assembly line worker whose job is too small for his spirit, you know? A job like mine, if you really put your spirit into it, you would sabotage immediately. You don't dare. So you absent your spirit from it.

Nora Watson, editor
Quoted in Studs Terkel's Working

What is a rule, if it seems to be mixed up with life without remainder? And what is a human life, if it can no longer be distinguished from the rule?

Giorgio Agamben,
The Highest Poverty

Introduction

As I established in the first chapter, labor plays a key role in contemporary life. In capitalist work structures and culture, we tend to believe that our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to an ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. Our work plays a crucial role in our identities, self-perception, and evaluation of each other's social and moral worth. As I established in the second chapter, through a brief analysis of Augustine's theological anthropology, this is a significant departure from Augustine's conception of the role of work as a cursed, though necessary, mode of animal agency. According to Augustine, humanity's highest, final calling has very little to do with one's own productive agency. Work is neither uniquely human nor a central category through which we ought to understand ourselves or evaluate one another. I thus began, in the third chapter, articulating a different way of understanding and relating

to one's work. To think with Augustine about work requires reimagining work in light of the human's final end—knowing and loving God. Work is properly undertaken, or used, when it is aimed at the enjoyment of God, which provides a certain set of prescriptive standards for relating to the world, our selves, and others. Even more particularly, I concluded chapter three by sketching the implications of the category of worship (i.e. "enjoying God") for our relation to work. Worship, I argued, offers us something of a series of contours through which we might imagine a Christian vision of work: worship limits work, directs work, clarifies work, and prepares us for work.

In light of that, the broad goal of this chapter is to sketch what such a Christian vision of work—using oneself for the enjoyment of God—might actually look like. More particularly, I will draw on the ways in which Augustine and Giorgio Agamben understand and envision the role of labor in a monastic context in order to: (1) articulate the conceptual slippage between a prayerful life of Christian existence aimed at the beatific vision and work properly related to, directed, undertaken, and contextualized; (2) demonstrate the ways in which the theological virtues make possible a vision of work distinct from the operative norms of contemporary capitalism; and (3) identify some practical models for non-monastic work within Augustine and Agamben's proposals.

I will thus begin with a brief analysis of Augustine's treatment of work in *De Opere Monachorum*, which I will use to argue that work can only ever make sense when positioned in service of humanity's love of God, marked as it must be by prayer and worship. Even in the midst of the emphatically non-central role labor plays in Augustine's theological anthropology (not to mention the generally cursed nature of such modes of agency during our lives in the world), one's work can play a crucial role in their temporal progression toward the beatific vision to the extent that the work is properly contextualized, related to, and directed.

I will then briefly turn to Giorgio Agamben's *The Highest Poverty*, which I believe offers us some theoretical resources through which we can properly understand the relationship between prayer and

work operative in *De Opere Monachorum*. That is, Agamben's text provides a helpful theoretical lens with which to read Augustine's practical insights, and it helps to reveal the crucial connections between labor and formation in worship operative below the surface of Augustine's text. Agamben argues that the brilliant insight of monasticism is not the confusion of life with the norm, as is popularly conceived; rather, monasticism refigures the relationship between the two in such a way that they point to a third thing: liturgy. Properly conducted, the divine office of monasticism constructs the whole of life as an unceasing liturgy. Interestingly enough, even manual labor was conceived as a mode of *meditatio*. The rule and liturgy coincided not with a list of individual acts, but with the expression of an entire life. Under such conditions it became impossible to distinguish between work and a way of life. Agamben's insights thus help clarify some of what's behind the scenes in Augustine's text: it is possible for the boundaries between work and prayer to blur altogether, such that one is left with a holistic, singular life of liturgical development. This is what it means to use onself for the enjoyment of God.

After passing through *De Opere Monachorum* and Agamben's *The Highest Poverty*, I will conclude by identifying some practical implications for non-monastic work within Augustine and Agamben's proposals. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are intrinsic to the life of the believer and provide something of a structure and framework of Christian existence. Rendered this way, the virtues become one mode of response to God's efficacious gift of transformative grace. In our lives in the world, we are being prepared for—made worthy of—what is to come in the new creation. Such a transformation makes possible alternative modes of being and doing in the world, even to the extent that basic activities can be redirected toward the love of God and others.

When seen from such a perspective, grace's transformation of work comes into clear view. Grace transforms the believer to the extent that they can undertake work in a virtuous manner, and work can hereby be re-oriented toward enjoyment of God, proper use of the world, and love of others.

When grace transforms our loves and desires, work takes on a new meaning and shape, and that new shape—"liturgical work"—features a new relation to time, others, our selves, and God. "Liturgical work" is thus a mode of work made possible by the transformative power of grace, and it is a graced mode of work that can and should contest the operative norms and power dynamics animating work in contemporary capitalism. Worship (as one's "enjoyment of God") is therefore the lens through which the shape of the human's work—its nature and place within the order of creation and the purpose of its activities—comes into clear perspective.

The Role of Work

Augustine's *De Opere Monachorum* seeks to address a particularly local and unique situation, and it is thus practically oriented. That is, it does not develop a systematic, theoretical analysis of work as such. Thus, before turning to that particular text, we must begin by saying something of Augustine's broader treatment of the nature of work. While our author never gives an overtly theoretical account of work in *De Opere Monachorum*, he does briefly treat the activity in a host of other texts. I therefore begin this section by highlighting some basic elements of Augustine's understanding of the dignity, value, and obligation of work in general. After laying that groundwork, I will then turn to *De Opere Monachorum* in order to analyze the contemporary implications of work in relation to a life of liturgy.

Dignity, Value, and Obligation

Augustine insisted throughout his theological oeuvre that work has both dignity and value, and such a sentiment was largely counter-cultural. Cultural and philosophical elites in ancient society worked hard to avoid the demands and toil of common work. They maintained a strict division between the life of culture and that of work; the former depended on one's ability to bypass the latter.

Augustine, however, manages to affirm the dignity of work without universalizing it, mandating it, or even denigrating life outside of work-time.[1]

Work's value and dignity, he thinks, stem from creation. In the creation narratives, he argues, we find a certain obligation to work. The injunction to (and perhaps need for) work did not stem from the fall. Rather, Augustine reminds his readers that humanity worked in the garden prior to the fall, even if that work was qualitiatively different than what we experience today—"labor was not a hardship then, but a spontaneous experience of joy."[2] As he notes in one of his Genesis commentaries, "The things created by God grew more exuberantly and fruitfully through the concurrent labor of man, resulting in more copious praise of the Creator himself who had given to a soul consigned to an animal body the intellect and faculty of rational activity in proportion to the willingness of the spirit, and not in proportion to the necessity of satisfying the needs of the body."[3] It is only after the fall that work becomes a hard, toilsome activity under divine curse. This is due, he explains, to the transformation of the will in the fall. He writes, "Inactivity, sloth, laziness, negligence, undoubtedly are vices which shun labor, since labor, though useful, is itself a punishment."[4] In the postlapsarian world, work becomes a response to a need. Even if one manages to avoid the all-too-common exploitative practices of over-pricing goods, false-advertising, and bogus sales tactics, one's ethical

[1] Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," in *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of the Very Reverend Georges Vasilievich Florovsky*, ed. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 248.

[2] Arbesmann, 249.

[3] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," VIII.8. Quoted in Arbesmann, 249.

[4] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XVIII.49; pg. 335. Quoted in Arbesmann, 250.

work is still regularly marked by frustration and resistance.[5] Within such conditions, the very things we work on inevitably enter into a state of decay the moment our activity ceases.[6]

Within a sinful world, work takes on the same role of moral re-formation that Augustine recognizes in any other form of worldly suffering.[7] Work, he maintains, is considered honorable whenever it provides humanity with the required necessities for sustaining life, is done well, and is carried out honestly (a rather tall order given the toilsome, cursed nature of work in the wake of the fall).[8] This is why he argues that the work of artisans is preferable to that of merchants or managers. Doing manual work—occupying one's mind with the task at hand and thereby avoiding thoughts of profit and accumulation—is said to be a higher good than delegating such tasks (certainly management is its own form of work, Augustine notes) and thereby risking the occupation of one's mind with anxiety, possession, or excess money.[9]

Augustine also thinks that the category of work cannot be totally reduced to earthly, material conditions. He encourages his readers to undertake their spiritual formation with the same sort of discipline, vision, and agency that animates daily work: "the way is narrow, attended by labor and suffering."[10] And yet, manual work undertaken at the expense of mental work is not wholesome, and

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[5] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 1st pbk. reprint., Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 13.14.

[6] Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," 250.

[7] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XVIII.49; pg. 337.

[8] Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," 252.

[9] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 15.16.

[10] Augustine, 29.37.

mental work carried out at the expense of physical work is said to be negligent.[11] He thus highlights a crucial connection between work and the broader practice of spiritual formation. That is, bodily work, when properly ordered and directed, should facilitate spiritual work. This is the core insight that animates his treatment of work in the monastic context in *De Opere Monachorum*.

The Work of the Monks

At the request of Aurelis (the Bishop of Carthage at the time), Augustine wrote *De Opere Monachroum* sometime around the year 400 in order to settle an ongoing dispute over monastic discipline. A faction of monks was refusing to work and trusting in alternative provisions based on a particular reading of Matthew 6.25-34.[12] The monks had undertaken a spiritually motivated, hermeneutically grounded labor strike. The strike was significant in the life of the monastery both because of the role work played in the liturgy of the hours and the basic, necessary tasks required to cultivate a shared life in that monastic context.

Augustine's analysis of the work of the monks is not important for the sake of monks' experience in work alone. Rather, Augustine identifies in Paul a form of work he thinks the monks are capable of enacting. It is, perhaps, virtuously conducted work carried out in a context capable of

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[11] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 2: 20-50*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, Edmund Hill O.P., vol. III/2 (20-50) (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1991), 37.5-6; quoted in Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," 256.

[12]"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6.25-34)

sustaining just relations (to the work, to oneself, and to one's fellow workers), and it is a form of work that Augustine notes he himself is quite jealous of. As he notes, his duties as bishop simply necessitates different activities.[13] Nonetheless, Augustine's vision offers us some crucial insights about the nature and function of work within a Christian theological framework, and I do not believe those insights need to be confined to the context of the monastery alone. The goal of this section is thus to draw on Augustine's treatment in order to articulate the underlying vision of work. It is that basic potential of properly ordered work that I think has so much potential for contemporary economic life, even life outside of the walls of the monastery.

That strike seems to be a local iteration of a larger monastic trend of *Xeniteia*, or voluntary alienation. Inspired by both Abraham's leaving of his home in Genesis 12 and the gospels' account of Christ's traveling ministry, such monks opted for a traveling approach to monasticism that was largely funded through material dependency, be that on other traditional monasteries or gifts from the communities in which they found themselves.[14] It is not clear, though, if Augustine's treatise led to an end of the strike or if his comments were altogether ignored, particularly since he makes no mention of the situation in his letters or in the monastic rules he eventually builds for nuns.[15]

Augustine begins his text by considering the argument of the monks. Citing Christ's parable of the birds that neither toil nor spin, these monks explained that they were refusing any manual work in order to enable and prioritize a life exclusively dedicated to spiritual activities—prayer, reading, and meditation. The striking monks stood strong in the face of 2 Thessalonians 3.10 ("whoever will not

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[13] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 29.37.

[14] Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of Classical Heritage Series (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 1–82. See also Columba Stewart, *"Working the Earth of the Heart": The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to A.D. 431* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[15] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, Introduction, pg. 324.

work should not eat"); as we see in Augustine's text, those monks did not think Paul was referring to bodily work in that passage. Rather, they argued that Paul exclusively referred to spiritual work, which was the very form they were aiming to prioritize. Further, the monks argued that Paul could not possibly contradict Christ himself, who, in the gospel of Matthew, urges his followers not to worry about what they will eat or wear. Christ seems to indicate that God will provide, even apart from one's own toil, so how could Paul possibly require the precise thing Christ frees believers from?[16] The only logical possibility, they argued, was that Paul was referring to spiritual work. To substantiate this claim, the monks pointed to 1 Corinthians 3, wherein Paul speaks of Christian formation in terms of work.[17] In so doing, they identified a hermeneutical precedent. The monks were trying to avoid becoming the worker who wastes the talent by burying it, and in the face of such concern, they faithfully tended to their spiritual work. They read, prayed, and worshiped with the other brethren. They sought to comfort and encourage those who came to them weary from the toils of the world, and they had thrown off all physical work in order to expand their capacities for such spiritual care. In so doing, Augustine makes clear, they assumed themselves to be operating on accordance to both the Gospel and apostolic precepts.[18]

After briefly overviewing the striking monks' argument, Augustine shifts to criticism. Much of the problem, Augustine argues, revolves around their poor, self-oriented interpretation of Scripture.[19] Can they not decipher that Christ is speaking in parables while Paul literally references

[16] Augustine, 1.2.

[17] "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Cor. 3. 6-10)

[18] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 1.2.

[19] Augustine, 2.3.

physical work? In order to rebut the monks' argument and practice, Augustine points to Paul's refusal of the right not to work in order to help make sense of the Matthew passage in a different way. Paul, Augustine argues, has given the monks both a precept (in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12) and his example in order to aid their understanding of work.[20] Augustine hopes to demonstrate that Paul wants Christians to take up manual work, which he thinks can lead to great spiritual reward, in a way that enables them to provide the necessities of life for both themselves and those in need without becoming a burden to those around them.[21] This is the basic thrust of Augustine's message to the monks.

In addition to helping the striking monks understand Paul's vision and urging them to follow his example, Augustine also hopes to demonstrate that the Pauline passages the strikers are drawing on do not, in fact, contradict Christ's message in the Gospels. Paul's exemption from manual work—an exemption, Augustine repeatedly reminds his readers, he neglected to claim—stemmed from his status as an apostle.[22] Such an exemption, Augustine explains, was a legitimate apostolic practice. Apostles often did not engage in the manual work required to provide themselves with the necessities of life, and they therefore accepted the gifts of nourishment from the people they were spiritually nourishing.[23] Paul, however, refused to live on such alms for the good of the communities he was working with. In Augustine's reading of the narrative, Paul did not want to be an undue burden, even

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[20] "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12)

[21] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 3.4.

[22] Augustine, 4.5.

[23] Augustine, 7.8.

though his authority granted him the right to do so.[24] Further, Paul hoped to avoid any suggestion that the Gospel was up for sale. Living off of the gifts of the communities to whom he was preaching, he worried, might suggest he was exchanging the good news of Christ's incarnation and resurrection for some bread, wine, and a warm bed.[25]

Augustine certainly seems interested in highlighting the sheer audacity of the striking monks. If Paul himself, who has the legitimate right to throw off work and claim alms, refused to do so, what makes the monks think they are so worthy of such a claim? Augustine remains similarly fascinated by the monks increased free time. What, he wonders on multiple occasions, could they possibly be doing with their extra leisure time that is so drastically important?[26] Against their self-oriented mode of interpretation, Augustine insists that a proper read of these texts demonstrate that "the Apostle performed manual work; that he provided his physical sustenance by means of that work; and that he did not avail himself of the right which the Lord had given to the Apostles, namely, that the preacher of the Gospel should live from the Gospel."[27] And the import of this approach lies not in the sort of work that Paul did; Augustine writes, "Whatever work men perform without guilt and trickery is good."[28] Rather, it is Paul's insistence on working so as to not take advantage of the communities he was ministering to that so interests our author.

It is worth noting that in building his basic argument that the monks should be working, Augustine avoids slipping into a trite read of Paul's instruction to work. Paul's intention (and

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24 Augustine, 7.8.

25 Augustine, 10.11; 12.13.

26 Augustine, 17.20.

27 Augustine, 13.14.

28 Augustine, 13.14.

Augustine's for that matter) is not to shame those incapable of working in this particular manner. Rather, Augustine points to Galatians 6 to highlight Paul's instruction to communities to provide preachers with the supplies they need for living, and he thus insists, along with Paul, that the goodness of one's work rests, at least partially, in the ability to provide for the needs of the community. Augustine thinks that such a communal approach to work and provision actually opens up a new relationship to work itself. When freed from the love of and drive toward private possessions and accumulation, one is able to suffer with the lowly in solidarity, taking on their struggles and working to provide for those in need.[29]

Augustine is thus suggesting to the monks that the same basic activity they associate with greed and distraction from spiritual matters can be re-deployed toward different, just ends when approached within the context of a community marked by the gospel of Jesus Christ. But this is precisely the sort of potential and understanding that the monks' strict dualism prohibits. Those striking monks had erected a strict divide between their inner (spiritual) and outer (animal) needs, and they were aiming to address the former at the expense of the latter. But this approach overlooks the composite relation of the soul to the body. We simply are not the sorts of creatures that can or should attend to spiritual needs alone; spiritual realities cannot be fostered apart from a proper navigation of our bodily lives. As Augustine argues, the realities of our bodily life dictate that we attend to the work required to tend to ourselves. Whatever knowledge and love of God that the soul makes possible depends on the health and well-being of the one's bodily life.[30] Why do these striking monks assume that attending to their outer (animal) needs via work has nothing to do with their spiritual formation? We can, he argues, work in ways that enable our spiritual formation. This is why Augustine urges the monks to sing

[29] Augustine, 18.19.

[30] Augustine, 17.20.

canticles while they work—if they are so interested in praying and worshipping, they should take up those activities in the midst of their work. Such an approach might "lighten the labor itself."[31] We have to think of our work making possible our spiritual pursuits while still acknowledging that the two are not synonymous.[32] Augustine is thus suggesting that in directing their work towards these inner (spiritual) ends, the work can be undertaken in order to enable and further their knowledge and love of God.

Such potential is most easily seen with in the monastic context. When situated in the broader context of the monastery, time is liturgically structured. Work is positioned within the larger liturgy of the day, which provides monks with sharp enough boundaries to protect against over-work or any over-estimation of one's work. Monastic work is also framed in communal terms; the needs and well-being of the community at large depend on, in a very real way, the work of each individual comprising that community. It makes sense, then, that Augustine's practical advice to the striking monks is to abandon the strict divide they have erected between prayer and work. They should, rather, take up work on behalf of their community in prayerful terms. Within such a vision, each aspect of the life—prayer, study, work, and communal belonging—plays a constitutive role in spiritual formation. Augustine actually laments that his leadership role prohibits him from seizing this opportunity; his bishop duties, he explains, have created several extra hours of ecclesial work to attend to each day.[33]

[31] Augustine, 17.20.

[32] Augustine, 17.20.

[33] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 136.

Work and the Life of Liturgy

Giorgio Agamben makes a similar set of observations about the role of work in a monastic context in *The Highest Poverty*. I now turn to Agamben's text in particular because of the ways in which it makes explicit some theoretical connections that are implicit and under-developed in Augustine's *De Opere Monachorum*. I will thus make use of Agamben's theoretical work to call Augustine's implicit vision—i.e. the conceptual slippage between a prayerful life of Christian existence aimed at the beatific vision and work properly related to, directed, undertaken, and contextualized—to the surface.

Agamben analyzes monastic traditions and Franciscan debates in order to interrogate the formation of a life that cannot be separated from its form—what he calls a "form of life." He writes, "The object of this study is the attempt—by means of an investigation of the exemplary case of monasticism—to construct a form-of-life, that is to say, a life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable from it."[34] He combs through myriad monastic rules and primary texts in hopes of noting how they approach the categories of law, rule, and practice. And such matters have great contemporary import. He undertakes this task in order to "think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation."[35] Agamben's text is therefore not merely historical; he aims to identify resources and tactics within monastic traditions for our present moment. Something of that distant past, he thinks, might help us navigate our contemporary world. In fact, Agamben's entire study turns on the political significance of monastic life, which is all too often assumed to depend on a retreat from the political.

The first model Agamben highlights is the monastic rule as a form of life, which he argues is

[34] Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, 1 edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), xi.

[35] Agamben, xiii.

sharply distinct from Roman normalcy. The rule enables and fosters a very different relation to law, action, and discipline. For Agamben, that rule signifies the possibility of a form of life totally removed from the grasp of law itself.[36] He argues that the brilliant insight of monasticism is not the confusion of life with the norm, as is popularly conceived; rather, monasticism refigures the relationship between the two in such a way that they point to a third thing: liturgy. When properly conducted, the divine office of monasticism constructs the whole of life as an unceasing liturgy. When properly followed, the rule transforms the whole of life into an ongoing liturgy wherein all of one's work is marked in divine terms.[37] Thinking this form-of-life, he suggests, reveals a mode of human being "entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation. That is to say again: to think life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use."[38] The monastic experience is thus not centered on doctrine, law, or isolation as much as life itself. As such, the monastery was not overthrowing the legal order; they simply sought to create an alternative life in the midst of a broader legal structure.

Here the distinction between the monastic rule and law comes into clear focus. The rule does not consist of a set of juridical commands given from an external source, as though the monk is supposed to submit to some outside governing force in taking on the hours prescribed in the rule. Rather, the rule is voluntarily undertaken, and it is envisioned as a form of an exemplary life. Rather than a set of tasks one occasionally completes, the rule is undertaken in a totalizing way such that the monk's entire life is thereby transformed into an ongoing liturgy. Agamben therefore argues there is no real distinction between monastic liturgy and monastic life—the liturgy prescribes the form of life,

[36] Agamben, xiii.

[37] Agamben, 22.

[38] Agamben, xiii.

and that life functions in a liturgical manner.

For Agamben, the monastery, much like Aristotle's city, is a community aimed at living well (i.e. the perfection of life).[39] Such a form of life, he argues, is necessarily built on communal habitation.[40] Inhabiting that community entails taking on a shared habitus that animates and directs all of one's life, even down to the finest details. Take, for example, the monk's clothing. The rules' prescriptions and reasoning demonstrate that even the monk's clothing should foster a particular way of life.[41] Within such a context, even clothing is imbued with a distinct kind of moral meaning.[42] And the same goes for the monk's relation to time.

Meditatio—the ancient understanding of meditation, as opposed to what we currently conceive of as clear thinking—was also deeply important in this life-encompassing liturgy. Memorizing the scriptures enabled an uninterrupted mode of solitary reflection and prayer that was woven throughout the regular activities of every day. Interestingly enough, even manual work was conceived as a mode of *meditatio*. The rule and liturgy coincided not with a list of individual acts, but with an expression of entire life.[43] When the rule was followed such that it transformed the whole of life into a liturgy, all of one's activities were properly oriented toward God. Even the most menial tasks required to keep the monastery going take on a certain spiritual efficacy.[44] This is the "spiritualization of work" enabled by the rule, which Agamben insists must be seen "as a significant precursor of the Protestant *ascesis* of

[39] Agamben, 11.

[40] Agamben, 13.

[41] Agamben, 14.

[42] Agamben, 16.

[43] Agamben, 26.

[44] Agamben, 22.

labor, of which capitalism, according to Max Weber, represents the secularization."[45] The whole approach sanctified life through time.

Starting in the fifth century, monastic rules were considered a phenomenon alien to the law.[46] Monks were instructed to view the rule as non-legal apparatuses. They were, instead, a moving art-form, making the monastery the first place to consider life itself as a mode of art.[47] Again, for Augustine, the rule was not an imposition of a set of obligations as much as the attempt to take seriously the profession the monks made toward a certain kind of life.[48] The monk was thus made in their obedience to the rule in the wake of the vow, rather than in the vow itself.[49] Agamben argues that such a unilateral commitment cannot be properly understood as contractual given that it was oriented toward an entire form of life rather than a particular set of acts.[50] As Agamben notes, "What is clearly expressed here is the tendency to consider the monk's life as an uninterrupted Office and liturgy, which we have already mentioned and to which we will have occasion to return."[51] When approached within such terms, the life of the believer takes on a form of freedom and faith outside of the realm of law altogether. And here Agamben's interest in the monastic rule comes into clear view: the monastic exile from the world was thus the foundation of a new community, a new public sphere outside of the established bounds of law.[52] The life made possible in the vow is a common life, and it

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[45] Agamben, 24.

[46] Agamben, 29.

[47] Agamben, 33.

[48] Agamben, 34.

[49] Agamben, 39,41.

[50] Agamben, 42.

[51] Agamben, 43.

[52] Agamben, 50.

remains one that Western society can still not fully fathom.[53] This rule produces life and is produced by that life.[54] Exposition of that life makes no sense apart from the rule that produces it.[55]

The Franciscans represent, for Agamben, the culmination of this tradition.[56] They brought the tensions between life and law to their ultimate expression, opting out of the dichotomy altogether. Franciscanism was "drawing from the complete and total equation of rule and life of Christ a radical transformation in the way of conceiving both life and rule."[57] This was a mode of life that coincided with the form. Here there is no room for the application of the law to life. "Form of life" is not so much a set of codes or rule as it is the general mode of living in accordance to the gospel of Jesus.[58] Form of life emerges as a third thing between doctrine and life; it is living into the life of Christ. That is, in Agamben's telling, there was no distinction between life and law for Francis; the Gospel and the life of Christ was his only rule. Francis sought to avoid the norms for governing one's life so as to take on Christ's own life as sort of rule. He writes, "One could not say more clearly that if a life (the life of Christ) is to furnish the paradigm of the rule, then the rule is transformed into life, becomes *forma vivendi et regula vivifica*."[59]

In tracing and theorizing this history, Agamben has explicitly named some of the theoretical assumptions that animate Augustine's treatment of labor in *De Opere Monachorum.* Agamben's text thus provides a helpful theoretical lens with which to read Augustine's practical text, and it helps to reveal

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[53] Agamben, 59.

[54] Agamben, 69.

[55] Agamben, 71.

[56] Agamben, 94.

[57] Agamben, 99.

[58] Agamben, 102.

[59] Agamben, 107.

the crucial connections Augustine recognizes between labor and formation in worship. The rule and liturgy coincided not with a list of individual acts, but with the expression of an entire life. Under such conditions it became impossible to distinguish between work and a way of life. The boundaries between work and prayer, when undertaken in this context and manner, begin to blur. This is work for the sake of prayer, undertaken in hope of the time in which *sapientia* will displace productive activity altogether.

The Transformational Power of Liturgical Work

The Virtues and Transformation

Augustine seems quite aware of the gaps between work carried out in the monastery and work carried out elsewhere. When asked why anyone should leave their jobs in the city to come and find a new role in the monastery, Augustine is quick to insist one should not equate the two forms of life. These are, after all, different forms of work. The most crucial distinction, though, is not that of location; it is not as though the walls of the monastery or the monastic vow somehow transforms one's work in any necessary or magical manner. For Augustine, the real difference lies in virtue, which makes possible this alternative understanding of, relation to, and orientation of work. The goodness of the monks' work (at least those properly following the rule rather than those refusing work altogether) is that it is directed towards the proper end and animated by the theological virtues. This is why, for Augustine and Agamben alike, something of the monastic approach to work is readily available to those outside the monastic context. This is particularly true given that the theological

virtues of faith, hope, and love are intrinsic to the life of the believer and provide something of a structure and framework of Christian existence.[60]

Rooting that difference in virtue is significant, particularly given my goal of developing a properly theological treatment of work, in that virtue does not stem from human agency alone. That is, the virtues are not positive accomplishments of self-making. Augustine is, after all, quite critical of Pelagian understandings of humanity's moral potential.[61] This is a mode of agency undertaken in response to God and God's efficacious gift of transformative grace.[62]

Augustine argues that the ignorance that stems from sin prevents one from understanding their soul in relation God as the source of goodness and beauty, and it prevents any coherent understanding of self-motivation.[63] Such ignorance also prevents one from reaching any clear conception of the requirements for acting justly in a given set of circumstances. Weakness, on the other hand, refers to the self's inability to act justly.[64] Ignorance and weakness, which map onto the intellect and will, refer to a singular spiritual problem—these two effects of sin interact with each other and contribute to the same outcome of self-interest before God and others.[65] Within such a state, ignorance and weakness ensure that one is simply incapable of acting virtuously in and of their own volition.

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[60] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 20.

[61] Mathewes, 10.

[62] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 9.

[63] Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*, 28.

[64] Dodaro, 28.

[65] Dodaro, 29.

This is why Augustine insists that there cannot be any cultivation of virtue apart from grace, which communicates the knowledge and love of God to the sinful soul in a transformative manner.[66] And this is why Augustine's criticism of Cicero's virtuous statesman in *De Civitate Dei* is such a crucial piece of Augustine's larger criticism of Rome's misdirected (and inherently limited) civic virtues. In a classic, Aristotelian manner, Cicero's ideal statesman exemplifies justice and thereby encourages the broader community to pursue justice as well. Augustine, on the other hand, argues that the capacity for true virtue and justice depends on the healing of a leader's soul, such that their fundamental limitations resulting from sin are overcome.[67] Hence Augustine's insistence that Christ himself is the true philosophy capable of fostering virtue during the world.[68]

Augustine insists throughout *De Civitate Dei* that any acquisition of true virtue is only ever made possible by God's giving of grace, which pardons the sinner and transforms the soul's capacities. The virtues of faith and humility, enabled as they are by grace, help counteract the ignorance and weakness that result from sin. Faith directs the soul toward both the enjoyment of God and a proper use of the world, and humility overcomes the self's reliance of its own strength when pursuing such ultimate ends. True virtue is thus always aimed at eternal goods, and it therefore takes aim at the knowledge and love of God, who is the highest good and source of goodness itself. This is why Augustine argues that any justice a statesperson can carry out will be accompanied by a public testimony regarding their own corruption and vices.[69] It is only in grace that one's virtues are transformed and redirected toward real justice and goodness. And it is precisely because the virtues

[66] Dodaro, 31.

[67] Dodaro, 31.

[68] Dodaro, 31.

[69] Dodaro, 35.

stem from grace that one's own motivations and actions are only explicable in reference to the love of God.[70]

The virtues are, ultimately, a matter of preparation. In our lives in the world, we are being prepared for—made worthy of—what is to come in the new creation. In so doing, they work on our dispositions and teach us to be more open to God's grace.[71] That is, we are being made fit for a life in which we take a full share in God's beauty and goodness, and we come to inhabit such modes of being in and through the virtues, through the transformation that makes possible a proper use of the world. It is in that transformation that a deep sense of desire for the life to come is cultivated, particularly given that the world cannot provide such joy.[72] This matters for the question of work in that this virtuous transformation funds alternative ways of being and doing in the world, such that the same activities are properly undertaken and redirected toward the love of God and others. That distinction has much to offer our contemporary moment, particularly when considering a Christian treatment of work.

Liturgical Work

If love is the root of the soul, as I argued in chapter 2, then the transformation of one's love by grace is a sort of unifying force in selfhood, relation to others, and relation to God.[73] We become instruments of God in the world when we love God properly, and this proper love of God manifests in terms of a proper love of one's self and others. When our love is transformed in this way, we "use"

[70] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 135.

[71] Mathewes, 12–13.

[72] Mathewes, 167.

[73] Mathewes, 81.

things and people properly by loving them in God. On this point, Charles Mathewes writes, "As regards people, one discovers that caritas is community-building: as this energy directs the self toward conversion back to God, it also urges the self to seek communion with others."[74] This basic insight should transform our work altogether. After all, Augustine's instruction to "love and do what you will" accounts for the transformation of one's affections. He means to say that "love has so transformed you that you now behave in a new way."[75]

When seen from such a perspective, grace's transformation of work comes into clear view. Grace transforms the believer to the extent that they can undertake work in a virtuous manner, and work is hereby re-oriented toward enjoyment of God, proper use of the world, and love of others. When grace transforms our loves and desires, work takes on a new meaning and shape, and that new shape—liturgical work—features a new relation to time, others, our selves, God, and the work itself. This is precisely why work takes on an altogether new form when carried out in the liturgical context of the monastery. When one enters the monastery and takes on the liturgy of the hours, one enters into an alternative mode of work. The monastic context has the ability to foster work and the alternative social effects that stem from this virtuous mode of work.

Augustine also seems to suggest that this work is not only possible in the monastic context. The hours of the liturgy certainly help structure this new relation to work, but Augustine does not argue that such an approach is altogether non-reproducible outside of the monastery's walls. Rather, much of his theological treatment of work suggests that this alternative approach to work—"liturgical work," as I will call it—is distinctly possible outside the walls of the monastery. "Liturgical work" is thus a mode of work made possible by the transformative power of grace. It is the work of the

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[74] Mathewes, 81.

[75] Mathewes, 82.

transformed self, wherein one's disordered loves are re-directed to the extent that one properly uses others, the world, and one's self for the enjoyment of God.

We might even say, then, that liturgical work should function according to the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. We work believing in the infinite God that is the ground and source of our very being, who is ever calling us to itself. Such faith thereby offers a limiting perspective on economic realities, which will never deliver our ultimate happiness. We work in hope of the future justice God has promised in the eschaton, which enables a certain realistic pessimism regarding the possibilities of justice and happiness in our current economic systems and structures. And we work in love, responsibly engaging the world in its present state, making proper use and striving for justice wherever we can. As Augustine insists, "The labors of people doing what they like doing, such as hunters, bird-collectors, fishermen, wine-growers, businessmen and sportsmen, are never burdensome, but are a pleasure in themselves. What matters, therefore, is what one likes; for either what one likes involves no work, or else one likes the work too. Think, how sad and shameful it is when there is no pleasure in toiling to capture animals, to fill bins and purses, to throw the javelin, but no pleasure in working to attain God."[76] We must love God, and being transformed by that love, do what we properly will, working in love while remembering that God alone is the source of our ultimate happiness. When undertake in virtue, such grace-enabled work has the ability to further enable that love, preparing the self for further transformation into the life of God.

The transformation of time, self, relationality, and relation to God that happens by way of this liturgical work is not some particular, historical phenomenon whose possibilities passed away with Augustine or late antiquity. In fact, I think the transformational possibilities of liturgical work are all the more relevant for our context given the economic changes that have unfolded since Augustine's

[76] Augustine, "De Bono Viduitatis," in *Marriage and Virginity*, ed. John A. Rotelle, trans. Ray Kearney (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1999), 21.26.

day. That is, the real force of such transformation is all the more crucial given our contemporary assumptions about and relations to work in capitalism. This is not to suggest that the potential of the monastic context and virtuously-informed "liturgical work" easily translates into contemporary capitalism and everyday work experiences. Quite the opposite, in fact. As we will see in the next chapter, the practical translation of this ongoing potential for liturgical work stands in real tension with our contemporary economic assumptions and values, and those tensions must be further explored and analyzed if this potential of "liturgical work" is to have any real contemporary import. But to shift too quickly to implementation and practical issues is to put the cart before the horse. Before we can speak of how to work virtuously, and thus liturgically, within contemporary capitalism, we must clarify what difference liturgical work makes in the life of the worker.

This section thus aims to highlight the transformations carried out in liturgical work (i.e. what is really different about liturgical work), even within contemporary capitalism. I will begin each subsection (time, relationality, self) by sketching a few operative assumptions and norms within contemporary capitalism and then identifying the ways in which those categories can be transformed in and through the practice of liturgical work.

Contemporary Transformations: Time

Karl Marx conceives of capitalism as a highly affective system. He believed that the economic system works on individuals in myriad highly influential ways, ultimately shaping them into a certain form of citizens. He spends a great deal of the first volume of *Capital* thinking through capitalism's relationship to time. In Marx's telling, capitalism treats both space and time as workable variables that can be manipulated in order to extract the maximum amount of labor and profit from an individual. This insight is most perceptible in Marx's investigation of the working day, which is structured around the distinction between necessary and surplus forms of labor time. Necessary labor time refers to the

portion of the working day during which the initial phase of labor is exerted in order to cover overhead expenses—i.e. hourly wages of all involved parties, materials, cost of production, etc. Surplus labor-time represents the phase of a shift after which enough product has been produced to cover the overheard expenses of the entire operation for that day. The remainder of labor extracted from this point on produces products that can be sold for the sake of profit accumulation, all of which goes to the owners of the means of production. Time is here arranged and used in ways that dramatically shape the everyday existence of the worker, maximizing the amount of labor that can be extracted.

David Harvey, drawing on and affirming Marx's insights in *Capital*, argues in *The Condition of Postmodernity* that both time and space are social constructions determined through social relations. It is precisely because we perceive our experience of time as a natural progression that we fail to notice its socially constructed nature.[77] In the Renaissance, time-keeping devices enabled the rationalization and abstraction of time.[78] Such technical and epistemological shifts enabled the manipulation of the category of time for the sake of producing beneficial shifts in social relations. Harvey speaks of "time-space compression" to signify the manipulation of both categories through which our fundamental perceptions of the world are shifted. Postmodernity, he argues, is merely a response to the modes of time-space compression operative in the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation. Postmodern time is characterized by credit, instant trading, and flexible accumulation, all of which has grown our consumptive habits.[79]

This normalization of time influences emotional and psychological responses to cultural issues, particularly as people have come to expect different things from different types of time:

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[77] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford England ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 201–3.

[78] Harvey, 242–47.

[79] Harvey, 286.

immediate service, two-day delivery, 24-hour operations, etc. Consider how often we feel guilty for spending time unproductively. This conception of time in pursuit of productive labor is what Kathy Weeks has recently termed "productivism." Productivism refers to the operative work ethic in capitalism, which is always demanding more from laborers. Weeks writes, "Let me be clear: to call these traditional work values into question is not to claim that work is without value. It is not to deny the necessity of productive activity…. It is, rather, to insist that there are other ways to organize and distribute that activity and to remind us that it is also possible to be creative outside the boundaries of work."[80] Within a productivist culture, time is rendered as the opportunity to undertake that next task.

Debt also plays a significant role in the structuring of contemporary time. Capitalism works to create subjects that are driven toward productivity, responsibility, and self-control. Time is put to use organizing bodies to foster maximum productivity. Debt increases the temporal implications of this process, as each subject is as responsible for their previous expenditures and earning capabilities as they are their present work habits. Within capitalism, our present is over-determined by both the role debt has played in our past and the obligations that debt places on us in our futures.[81] Our future working and spending is dictated by our debt accrued in the past, which is carried forward with us into the present.[82]

Augustine, however, identifies an alternative vision of time operative in liturgical work. He recognizes that the monastic form of work features a unique division of time, which enables a re-thinking of time altogether. St. Paul, he explains, seems to have simply appointed time in the evenings

[80] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011), 12.

[81] Linn Marie Tonstad, "Debt Time Is Straight Time," *Political Theology* 17, no. 5 (September 2016): 437; Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 34–62.

[82] Tonstad, "Debt Time Is Straight Time," 438.

for manual work so as to make time for his spiritual work during the day.[83] But the monastery manages to weave the hour of work into the larger liturgical movement of each day. Augustine writes, "I would much prefer to do some manual labor at certain hours each day as is the custom in well-regulated monasteries, and to have other hours free for reading, prayer, or for study of the sacred Scriptures than to endure the very confusing perplexities of the problems of others in regard to worldly concerns which must be eliminated by our judgments or curtailed by our action."[84] The transformation of time in liturgical work decentralizes the drive for productivity. Liturgical work transforms our conceptions of time by delimiting and placing the hour of work within the larger liturgical movement of the day. In the context of the monastery, one works for a fixed period of time, and one is expected drop work and return to prayer at regularly scheduled intervals. As such, liturgical labor renders time not as a collection of momentary opportunities for increased productivity but as a fluid movement through which we can move into the life of God. Work certainly has a place within that temporal arrangement, but it emphatically non-central and comes to an end.

Contemporary Transformations: Relationality/Community

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argued that the pursuit of self-interest in the market place is the best way to distribute opportunities for happiness in a complex society. Smith infamously notes, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."[85] Rather, the brewer has decided that the most efficient way to provide for her family is to brew and sell tasty beer with a smile. In so doing, her tasty beer

[83] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 18.21.

[84] Augustine, 29.37.

[85] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I-III* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 119.

enters the marketplace, and I am given the opportunity to purchase and consume that tasty beer at my own convenience. For Smith, one person's creation of economic opportunity enables others to pursue their own ends and work to achieve their own happiness. It is competition, he argues, that keeps this self-interest in check. The brewer cannot raise her prices (or cut costs on ingredients, thereby lowering the quality of her product) too much without risking that I start purchasing from her competitor. Competition is thus said to work in tandem with self-interest. The invisible hand of the market ensures additional, external benefits from acts carried out in self-interest. Smith was aware of the possibilities of alienation within such a framework, but he argued that such outcomes are unavoidable; they simply need to be accepted and dealt with for the sake of the greater, common good.

As farmer and agrarian writer Wendell Berry has tirelessly insisted for the past thirty years, such competition has detrimental effects on all forms of relationality. Public life tends toward competition and exploitation whenever carried out apart from community interest. He writes, "As private life casts off all community restraints in the interest of economic exploitations or ambition or self-realization or whatever, the communal supports of public life also and by the same stroke are undercut, and public life becomes simply the arena of unrestrained private ambition and greed."[86] Such competition, he argues, pits each thing against every other and thereby destroys every place's self-sufficiency: households, farms, communities, regions, nations, and the earth.[87] The "law of competition" is aimed at efficiency, productivity, and price rather than sustainability. Again, Berry insists, "The law of competition implies that many competitors, competing on the 'free market' without restraint, will ultimately and inevitably reduce the number of competitors to one. The law of

[86] Wendell Berry, "Sex, Economy, Freedom, Community," in *What I Stand On: The Collected Essays of Wendell Berry 1969-2017:*, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 2019), 49.

[87] Wendell Berry, "Life Is a Miracle," in *What I Stand On: The Collected Essays of Wendell Berry 1969-2017:*, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 2019), 216.

competition, in short, is the law of war."[88] This is precisely why competition is finite; competition necessarily overcomes itself.

Augustine, however, identifies an alternative vision of relationality made possible in liturgical work. Liturgical work is communally oriented. In the monastic context, work is divided according to the needs of the community at large. Given that the monks own everything in common, one's work is necessarily carried out in service of the community's good and needs. Within such a context, self-interest expands communal self-interest as the worker comes to see their place and needs within the larger whole of the community in which they are participating. Competition also drops out of the equation when the end-goal becomes the well-being of the community at large.

It is also worth noting that liturgical work reformulates typical class dynamics as well. Whereas those entering the monastery stem from various classes, statuses, and social ranks, their relationship dramatically shifts in the monastic context. In the context of liturgical work, old social and class divisions give way to a new social arrangement wherein the value and dignity of each is valued apart from their productive output. One's life in the monastery simply does not revolve around one's work therein. This is particularly significant given the rigid nature of social classes in late antiquity.[89]

Contemporary Transformations: Self

Michel Foucault's conception of power has proven so crucial for contemporary philosophy and theology precisely because of his ability to demonstrate the connections between power structures and the formation of human being.[90] Biopolitical systems produced new kinds of subjects in addition

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[88] Wendell Berry, "The Total Economy," in *What I Stand On: The Collected Essays of Wendell Berry 1969-2017:*, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 2019), 286.

[89] Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," 259.

[90] Docility marks the ideal mode of being suited to thrive in the systems of institutions through which the power is deployed: democracy, capitalism, prison, industrialism, etc. This process produces the ideal prisoner, student,

to new forms and objects of knowledge.[91] Foucault argued that subjects are formed by internalizing the norms and visions of the power structures they inhabit. As Lynne Huffer has noted, this happens through a sort of "inward folding," which reveals the absurdity of viewing the subject in terms of stability, cohesion, unity, or isolation. The subject here is more than a contextual being; it exists as the product of its context.[92] This all matters to the extent that Foucault is demonstrating that we are made into certain types of citizens simply by participating in the modern world. And the history of the west in the modern world is marked by structures ensuring the longevity and continuation of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism. In inhabiting modern disciplinary regimes, we are actually being formed in particular ways, internalizing and deploying these particular modes of knowing, seeing, doing, and being.[93]

One of the crucial insights of Michel Foucault for our consideration, then, is that there is no stable, fixed, or given self outside of a particular context.[94] Humans are always in a process of becoming, of being shaped and directed towards various ends by internalizing the norms, visions, and

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and worker such that the norms of the system are internalized and modeled in the citizen. Biopower, on the other hand, is marked by a system or institutions management of life, enabling life for some and allowing the death of others. Biopower is aimed at populations, but it does so through working on individuals. In fostering the flourishing of a race (human race in this sense), biopower takes stock of causes of life and death alike. The knowledge that biopower produces leads to the creation of new ways of being and doing—new subjects. Power, then, is not solely restrictive. Rather, it is productive, constructing normative practices and discourses that lead to the internalization of various ideals and values. See Ellen Armour's *Signs & Wonders: Theology After Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 28-30.

[91] Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100.

[92] Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 30.

[93] Ellen T Armour, *Signs & Wonders: Theology After Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 91.

[94] Johanna Oksala, "Freedom and Bodies," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor, 1 edition (Durham: Routledge, 2014), 87. Bodies are both given and not. Foucault does not question the idea of a collection of organs moving through time and space, but he does insist that we cannot understand that collection of organs in a non-historical or non-culturally influenced way.

values of the systems and cultures we inhabit.[95] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello get at something rather similar in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. They suggest that it is precisely in neolibrealism's appropriation of behavioral psychology and cognitive science that capitalism so deeply integrates itself into the subject. The drives and demands of capitalism have pervaded everyday life to the extent that it now structures everyday thought.[96] In speaking of the broad implications such a project has for subjectivity, Bruce Rodgers Vaughn writes, "This subtly but steadily influences our attitudes and feelings toward ourselves, including our understanding of what it means to be a "self," as well as our dispositions and feelings toward others. Combined with the erosion of belief in the common good, this leaves us with a society in which each person increasingly looks after their own interests, and leaves others to look after theirs."[97] Put simply, we are object-obsessed consumerists who regularly over-estimate the potential for happiness in the things we purchase, the experiences we afford, and the work we give ourselves over to. Working within a system that prioritizes self-interest over communal belonging, we tend to view ourselves in an isolated manner; we consider ourselves as the ground of our own agencies, and we work to satisfy our own needs and produce our own happiness.

Augustine, however, identifies an alternative vision of selfhood operative in liturgical work. As we have previously established, Augustine argues that we are constituted in and through our loves. We are ultimately oriented toward God even if our disordered desires lead us to pursue other ends. But in and through grace, those misdirected, disordered desires and loves are re-oriented such that we can properly use the world in and for our enjoyment of God. Liturgical work is thus a byproduct of

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[95] Foucault makes this process of internalization and formalization quite clear in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. He speaks of "neoliberal subjectivity" so as to highlight the mode of being fostered and created within late capitalism.

[96] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

[97] Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, 1st ed. 2016 edition (New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 18.

this re-orientation. As Augustine notes, the working monk, when they undertake work in a properly liturgical manner, should not be dominated by the pursuit of riches. Rather, such work is outwardly directed, orienting the monks toward God, their neighbors (with whom they are working), and the broader community in which they find themselves. Augustine encourages the monks to work on behalf of those "who, though they work at manual work to supply their food, lack these things because of physical infirmities, religious duties, or intellectual absorption in spiritual matters."[98] This is a self oriented outward, toward the otherness that Augustine thinks is so properly constitutive of human being.

We also cannot consider that we are providing for ourselves apart from God's sustenance in manual work. Augustine reminds us that the Lord is providing for us in and through our work.[99] It is a gift that we are the type of thing capable of working, and Augustine reminds the striking monks that God might be seeking to provide for those in need through the work of the monks. Even more particularly, Augustine insists that God is itself the very ground of our own agential capacities. Sure, we work in order to feed and clothe ourselves, but it is through God as the ground of being that we move at all. Such a vision features a sort of confluence of agencies, as God's agency and will is carried out in and through our own.[100]

Conclusion

The task of this chapter has been to sketch what "using oneself" for the "enjoyment of God" should look like. Much like we saw in Augustine's *De Opere Monachorum* and Agamben's *The Highest*

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[98] Augustine, *De Opere Monachorum*, 16.19.

[99] Augustine, 26.35.

[100] Augustine, 27.35.

Poverty, work can only be properly understood and carried out when placed under humanity's final aims and purposes. When read in such a manner, properly orienting one's work toward one's final end entails situating one's work in a broader life of liturgy. Within the context of the monastery, it seems, one can relate to and undertake their work in alternative ways such that the work itself is grafted into a larger life of worship and formation.

Such potential, I argued, is not necessarily limited to the particular ways time, space, and relationships are liturgically structured within the monastic walls. This is particularly true given that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are intrinsic to the life of the believer and provide something of a structure and framework of Christian existence. Rendered this way, the virtues become one mode of response to God's efficacious gift of transformative grace. In our lives in the world, we are being prepared for—made worthy of—what is to come in the new creation. That is, we are being made fit for a life in which we take a full share in God's beauty and goodness, and we come to inhabit such modes of being in a proper use of ourselves and the world. Such a transformation, I argue, funds alternative modes of being and doing in the world, even to the extent that basic activities (work included) can be redirected toward the love of God and others.

When seen from such a perspective, grace's transformation of work comes into clear view. Grace transforms the believer to the extent that they can undertake work in a virtuous manner, and work is hereby re-oriented toward enjoyment of God, proper use of the world, and love of others. "Liturgical work" is thus a mode of work made possible by the transformative power of grace, and it is a graced mode of work that can and should contest the operative norms and power dynamics animating work in contemporary capitalism. It is the work of the transformed self, wherein one's disordered loves are re-directed to the extent that one properly uses others, the world, and one's self for the enjoyment of God. When grace transforms our loves and desires, work takes on a new meaning and shape, and that new shape—i.e. work being situated in a broader life of liturgy—features a new

relation to time, others, our selves, and God. Worship (as one's "enjoyment of God") is therefore the lens through which the shape of the human's work—its nature and place within the order of creation and the purpose of its activities—comes into clear perspective.

Chapter 5

The End of Labor:
Notes for An Augustinian Anti-Work Ethic

But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Luke 10.42

What you [Martha] have chosen will be taken away from you. But it will be taken away for your benefit, so that the better part may be given you. Toil, you see, will be taken away from you, so that rest may be given you. You, my dear, are still on the high seas; [Mary] is already in port.

Augustine
Sermo 104

It is the love of truth, then, that seeks holy leisure, and it is the drive of love that takes on righteous activity.

Augustine
DCD XIX.19

Introduction

Finding Our Place in the Larger Whole

As I noted in the first chapter, contemporary theology has rightly diagnosed a cluster of labor-related problems, but it neglects to address the problem of work itself. We inhabit a culture that insists our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to an ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. The majority of Americans hate their work, and yet we continue working at dangerous rates. Further, I identified a common pattern that regularly

structures contemporary theological responses to work-related issues, which suggests that we should work more like God works in the creation and redemption of the world. I problematized this pattern of response by way of Augustine's doctrine of transcendence and suggested that if theology is to coherently and faithfully address questions of labor, it must begin that task from the vantage point of theological anthropology.

I began to undertake such a task in the second chapter, where I analyzed Augustine's theological anthropology in order to locate the place (and nature) of work therein. For Augustine, at least within the time of the *saeculum*, work is neither uniquely human nor nearly as important as contemporary capitalism (and contemporary theology, for that matter) tends to imagine. It is, rather, a mode of animal agency humans undertake along with other animals. Humanity's higher, final calling, it turns out, has very little to do with one's work, and any faithful relation to work depends on situating it in relation to that final calling.

As I established in Chapter three, work must be reimagined in light of the human's end being knowing and loving God. Making proper use of one's productive capacities, Augustine insists, entails aiming them at the enjoyment of God, which provides a certain set of prescriptive standards for relating to the world, our selves, and others. I thus concluded chapter three by sketching the implications of the category of worship for our relation to work.

Interestingly enough, Augustine actually theorizes a mode of work oriented toward worship. His short treatise on work—*On the Work of the Monks*—examines the nature and function of monastic work, which he thinks is more highly ordered and intentional than work in a non-monastic context. I analyzed this text in conjunction with Giorgio Agamben's analysis of liturgy and *meditatio* in monastic contexts in the fourth chapter, where I argued that Augustine's theological treatment of monastic work provides us with some critical resources for imagining the nature and import of non-monastic work properly aimed toward God in our contemporary world. Work can only be properly understood

and carried out when placed under humanity's final aims and purposes. When grace transforms our loves and desires, work takes on a new meaning and shape, and that new shape—i.e. work being situated in a broader life of liturgy—features a new relation to time, others, our selves, and God. Or, put differently, humanity's final end has some profound implications for the ways in which we relate to and undertake work.

But all of this raises the more pressing question of how that ideal vision—i.e. work as liturgy—should be related to within our contemporary world, marked as it is by global capitalism. How are we supposed to think about and relate to work given the disjunction between this vision of work as liturgy and that of contemporary capitalism? The most basic task of this chapter is to answer that question, and it is my basic contention that to think with Augustine regarding the question of work is to refuse capitalism's work ethic and work-related demands. That is, we must undertake our cursed work in hopes of its eventual abolition, and we must manage to do so in ways altogether distinct from normative modes of working in contemporary capitalism.

A Brief Outline for the Chapter

I will be phrasing this refusal of capitalism's work ethic and work-related demands as an "anti-work ethic." Such a loaded phrase has myriad implications, so it is fitting that I begin by briefly noting what I take the phrase to represent and the potential I see in that phrase. I have largely chosen the term out of precedent.

Post-work theorist Kathy Weeks, whose work I draw on a great deal in what follows, regularly bounces between "antiwork" and "postwork" on a temporal scale, particularly in reference to an "antiwork politics" or "antiwork critique" and "postwork imaginaries." I take Weeks to understand "antiwork politics and critique" as a means of inaugurating a "postwork imaginary." The latter is a reference to a utopic society that is emphatically not arranged around productivism or work-centered

identities. For Weeks, such a society will only exist after the productivist work-ethics of contemporary capitalism are abolished (hence the post-work term).

"Antiwork," however, describes her call for a non-normative, ethical relation to work within the larger system of contemporary capitalism. I thus follow Weeks in my use of "anti-work," given that I am much less interested in the inauguration of that utopic society than I am with a non-normative, ethical relation to one's work within the time and space of contemporary capitalism.[1]

Kathryn Tanner similarly follows Weeks's usage of the term in her recent *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism,* wherein she presents a "Protestant anti-work ethic" to counter Weber's basic thesis in his *Protest Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Tanner agrees with Weber's understanding of religion's efficacy in shaping people, and yet her aim is opposite Weber's. She wants to show how Christian beliefs might undermine rather than support the new spirit of capitalism. She thus traces the temporal implications of Christianity's soteriological system (we are not chained to our pasts; baptism is a rupture of our present from our past; we are grafted into God's secure future; etc.) so as to contest the demands placed on members of a finance-dominated capitalist society. She articulates those notions in order to (1) break the link between the right to good living and work, (2) break one's identification from one's productive self, and (3) break the time-continuity that constrains imaginative alternatives.

In thinking with Weeks and Tanner, I thus use "anti-work" to contest the broad assumptions regarding labor within capitalism rather than to problematize productive agency altogether. That is, I am trying to address the assumptions regarding labor within capitalism (i.e. work sold as a commodity within capitalism) and the underlying, associated cultural tendencies that accompany such a wide-scale

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[1] It is important to note here that I am not suggesting that capitalism must be preserved or should be redeemed. I also do not mean to suggest that I am simply interested in making work more just through small-scale adjustments that preserve the larger capitalist eco-system. I merely mean to avoid the sort of utopic imaginary that tends to imagine the total abolition of work-related injustice in capitalism's overthrow.

practice, which I have phrased in terms of capitalism's "work ethic." I am therefore not interested in problematizing or contesting productive agency as such, which I take to be both toilsome and inescapable for our lives in the *saeculum*. I am most interested in contesting (1) the way in which that work is commodified and sold as labor in contemporary capitalism, and (2) the culture that has built up around that basic economic practice, which have more to do with capitalism's work-ethics and power dynamics than productive agency itself. I am, in fact, suggesting that Augustine offers us the resources for a very particular Christian understanding of how we ought to relate to and direct our own productive agencies that stands in stark contrast to the operative norms and practices of how one relates to and directs their productive capacities (i.e. labor and reproductive labor) in contemporary capitalism.

In order to develop this Augustinian anti-work ethic, I begin with a brief reflection on a few passing comments Augustine makes regarding Mary and Martha in *De Trinitate,* which I use to frame the chapter. Augustine reads the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10 to signify two competing modes of work, and such a reading has profound implications for the Augustinian anti-work ethic I aim to develop in this chapter. From there, I develop a brief summary of Augustine's *The City of God*, wherein I focus on the limits of the earthly city's use of and relation to temporal goods. I then draw Augustine's understanding of the limits of social and political structures (as articulated in *The City of God*) into conversation with Kathy Weeks's feminist, post-work discourse, which I believe provides some necessary theoretical resources for developing an Augustinian anti-work ethic relevant for our contemporary age. After overviewing the basic contours of Weeks's vision, I then sketch an Augustinian anti-work ethic, which translates much of the post-work vision into an Augustinian paradigm. This anti-work ethic, I argue, is distinct from capitalism in its alternative understanding of, vision for, and mode of relating to work, and I believe it is our best hope of managing to use ourselves

for the enjoyment of God in a time such as this. I then conclude by sketching some of the pressing, practical proposals implicit to this Augustinian anti-work ethic.

An Augustinian theological anthropology relativizes economic value and contests our over-estimation of productive agency in the economic sphere. As I will show, insisting that we were not created for work, that our work does not create value, and that there is no place for work-ethics in God's purposes in creating and saving the world has profound implications for the ways we conceive of and undertake our work. More particularly, it spells out some practicalities for navigating contemporary economic life that avoid any over-estimation of either economic agency or escapism (be it pessimistic or utopic in nature).

Mary Chose the Better

In the first book of *De Trinitate*, Augustine uses the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10 to compare and contrast two competing visions of human agency in relation to humanity's final calling.[2] According to Luke, when Jesus visits the home of Martha, Martha spends her obviously precious time in the presence of Jesus playing the precarious role of host. Her sister Mary, however, spent that time sitting at Jesus's feet, apparently captivated by what he was saying. Martha—who felt (understandably) abandoned to tend to the tasks that make possible hosting a prophet and the crowd that follows such prophets around all by herself—approaches Jesus and asks if he cares that she has been abandoned "to do all the work by [herself]." If he does, she says, then he should tell Mary to get up and help for a change. In response to what feels like a very human and understandable set of frustrations, Jesus

[2] "Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10.38-42)

tells Martha that she is unduly distracted by her need to carry out her various tasks. There is actually "only one thing," Jesus explains, and "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."[3]

The Luke passage comes up in Augustine's *De Trinitate* as an example of the sort of contemplation and presence that constitutes the beatific vision—"the direct contemplation of God, in which all good actions have their end, and there is everlasting rest and joy that shall not be taken away from us."[4] In Augustine's telling, Mary symbolizes that joy and contemplation which the faithful will eventually undertake in an unceasing manner. It is Mary, at the Lord's feet, intent upon the Lord's words and "at rest from all activity and intent upon the truth" that images our final, eternal calling. In Augustine's telling, while "Martha was preparing a banquet for the Lord, Mary was already reveling in the banquet of the Lord."[5] It is Mary's contemplative agency that most clearly resembles our eschatological end; burdened work, after all, is nothing except the result of a sinful world.[6] As such, it will be abolished upon Christ's return.

It is important to note, though, that Augustine does not vilify or condemn Martha's work. Martha was "busy doing what had to be done—activity which though good and useful is going to end one day and give place to rest."[7] The point for Augustine is not that Martha chose the bad option; it

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[3] It is also worth noting that this is the same Mary—the sister of Martha and Lazarus—that will eventually wash Jesus' feet with her tears and hair. (See Matthew 26.6-13, Mark 14.3-9, Luke 7.36-50, and John 12.1-8). In that narrative, Judas protests her economic misstep much like Martha did. Surely, Judas insists, she has misvalued both her own agency and this costly perfume. But once again, Jesus affirms Mary's economic logic, which defied cultural and economic norms. Her sense of value is shaped by the presence of Christ, which places her outside the norm with regard to her estimation of costly goods, her own agency, rest, and gifts.

[4] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.10.20; pg. 87.

[5] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 4: 94A-147A*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, Edmund Hill O.P., vol. III/4 (94A-147A) (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1992), sermon 104; pg. 81.

[6] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.10.20 n.56; pg. 88.

[7] Augustine, I.3.10.20; pg. 87.

is that Mary chose the better.[8] If anything, Augustine legitimates Martha in a way that Jesus does not, at least in the passage given to us in Luke. Martha is simply doing what needs doing, and the language Augustine uses to characterize Martha's toil—with connotations of both work and suffering—is sympathetic.[9] He thereby positions Martha as a symbol for the active life during our lives in the world while we await Christ's return. The curse of toilsome work has not yet been abolished, Augustine suggests, and Martha is not to be faulted for acknowledging the necessity of such work-related duties.[10] Crucial for Augustine's analysis is the insight that Martha's mode of agency will ultimately end; Jesus explicitly notes as much. The toil of work will pass away, the unity of charity will remain, and we must figure out how to navigate the toilsome demands of bodily life until that ultimate abolition.[11]

Mary and Martha's narrative—and Augustine's read of the text—has fascinating implications for my own analysis of work. Mary is a representative of humanity's highest, contemplative pursuits, whereas Martha represents the unfortunate economic realities of a life carried out in a sinful world. Augustine thus prioritizes Mary's contemplative, worshipful refusal of work while simultaneously noting the realities of inhabiting a sinful world wherein work is cursed and still necessary. I hope to suggest, though, that Mary's vision is not altogether unavailable to us today, even as we continue waiting on Christ's return. Augustine even says as much when referencing Mary's rest in Sermon 104: "Even now, you see, we do enjoy something of that sort."[12] To substantiate that claim, he points out that each member of the congregation that is present, gathered together in time and space to hear

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[8] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 4: 94A-147A*, III/4 (94A-147A):sermon 103; pg. 78.

[9] Allie M. Ernst, *Martha from the Margins the Authority of Martha in Early Christian Tradition*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, v. 98 (Leiden ; Brill, 2009), 217.

[10] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.3.10.20 n.56; pg. 88.

[11] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 4: 94A-147A*, III/4 (94A-147A): sermon 104; pg. 83.

[12] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 4: 94A-147A*, III/4 (94A-147A): sermon 104; pg. 84.

whatever witness the saint offers, has left their shops and offices. They have put down the things of work to gather for worship, thereby moving from the figure of Martha to that of Mary.[13]

The point is that we should navigate the demands of economic life in the world in hope of the abolition of those demands.[14] Such demands, he crucially notes, are to be tolerated rather than loved.[15] The question of work thus becomes how we should inhabit Mary's rest in the midst of a system that demands Martha's work. And, when necessary, how do we undertake Martha's tasks in ways that circumvent the system that prioritized the disciples' rest at the expense of Martha's time and energy? Or, to translate those questions into a contemporary idiom, how do we inhabit Mary's rest in a culture that solely prioritizes Martha's productivity? What might it mean to undertake Martha's activities in and for the sake of the enjoyment Mary has already taken a share in?

The task of this final chapter is to sketch an Augustinian anti-work ethic that accounts for the non-escapable tasks of Martha in a way that is informed by Mary's contemplative rest and refusal of work. Much of this anti-work ethic is informed by and follows Kathy Weeks's post-work vision given the resonances I recognize between Week's critical work, practical proposals, and an Augustinian model of economic life.

An Economic Reading of *The City of God*

The basic goal of this section is rather modest. Rather than developing any totalizing economic vision out of Augustine's *City of God*, I am trying to identify some basic principles of a theological ethic through which I can analyze our contemporary assumptions regarding work. I am thus trying to think

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13 Augustine, III/4 (94A-147A): sermon 104; pg. 84.

14 Augustine, III/4 (94A-147A): sermon 104; pg. 83–84.

15 Augustine, III/4 (94A-147A): sermon 104; pg. 86.

with Rowan Williams's mode of reading *The City of God*, wherein he suggests there is "little value in trying to extract a wholly consistent programme from the *City of God*. We should look less for a systematic account of 'Church' and 'world' (let alone Church and state), more for a scheme for reflecting on the nature of social virtue."[16] Williams argues, rather convincingly, that we cannot actually extract something like a theory of the state from Augustine's text, let alone a related theory of economy. To do so is surely anachronistic, but it is also to misread Augustine's basic intent in that text. Augustine is much more concerned with theorizing human being as such rather than any fifth century state structure. It makes sense, then, that Williams urges us to read book XIX in terms of "the optimal form of corporate human life in the light of what is understood to be its last end."[17] Augustine can thus be said to be interrogating and analyzing the tensions between political virtue and vice rather than analyzing the categories of public/private or church/world. He is developing something of a theology of citizenship, raising questions of how we should be in the *saeculum*—the time between the resurrection and Christ's return wherein the city of God and the earthly city inhabit the same space and share the same goods—faithfully, in light of the end for which we are destined.

On an Economic Reading

Augustine is much more concerned with questions of transformation than just social structures; he remains thoroughly skeptical of any possibility to constructing the latter. Augustine is not interested in articulating any ideal political or economic program, and he warns against the utopic tendencies that underlie such urges. He insists that we could never build a system (political or economic) that could ultimately deliver justice, security, and happiness in any complete, final sense.

[16] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: Reading the City of God," 110.

[17] Williams, 111.

Such a gesture—claiming the actuality of such a system—would be fundamentally anti-human because that gesture would depend on a wholescale rejection of creaturely finitude.[18] To think about economics with Augustine does not necessitate moving from discrete categories of theology or church to economy. Rather, we are to learn to be faithfully Christian in the latter, which is to say that he is far more concerned with our being re-made in Christ in ways that qualify us for a just navigation of economic life. This is precisely why he so consistently prioritizes the possibility of living well and blessedly in the midst of a sinful, oppressive context. Such a blessed life entails being concerned with one's relation to economic structures and activities as much as (if not more, for Augustine) than the moral status of those structures themselves.

Augustine is, however, emphatically concerned with the question of living a good life, and he therefore names some of the virtues he thinks ought to be operative in those with political authority and power. As Williams notes, we can identify and extract pieces of a political-theological ethic from Augustine to the extent that we believe his analysis of the spiritual formation of a political ruler can be faithfully applied to our own contemporary context. When undertaken in this register, Augustine's political-theological vision has much to offer our contemporary moment.[19]

It is also worth noting that what we now regularly refer to as "economics" is very much in consideration in Augustine's analysis of "commonwealth"—the nature of the shared community/group that constitutes both the city of God and the earthly city. As Augustine acknowledges in his reference to Cicero's definition of "commonwealth" in *De Re Publica,* a *populus* or *commonwealth* is a group united *juris consensus et utilitatis communio*. Members of a commonwealth are thus bound together by a shared sense of (1) what is right, and (2) a partnership for the common good.

[18] Williams, 123–26.

[19] Williams, 128.

Both authors agree that no commonwealth could actually exist without justice.[20] Within such a framework, proper political life begins with arguments regarding what constitutes legitimate claims of social groupings and some guaranteed access to the basic necessities that sustain earthly life. Williams notes that such guaranteed, basic access is "not too far from access to 'the means of production', perhaps; there are worse translations of utilitas!"[21] Augustine's reading of the limits of earthly commonwealths thus has profound economic implications. The earthly city, like any city, assumes certain ways of producing wealth, ways of distributing that wealth, ways of using that wealth, and ways of structuring a society according to the breakdown of that wealth. There are thus certain economic standards which a group must adhere to in order to properly qualify as a commonwealth.

For this reason, it is one of my basic contentions in this chapter that we cannot properly develop an Augustinian vision of contemporary political life without simultaneously sketching something of an Augustinian economic life. There is no mode of political engagement that is not inherently bound up with the production, distribution, and use of wealth. This basic principle is as true for our contemporary age as it was for the Roman empire.

The Two Cities

Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* develops by way of a comparison and contrast between two cities: the earthly city and the city of God. As Peter Brown has rightfully noted, the City of God makes great use of this juxtaposition—it is, arguably, the text's most basic literary device, and "Augustine deliberately uses it to contrive a 'stereoscopic' effect."[22] In Augustine's telling, these two cities function

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[20] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:II.21; Cicero, *Cicero: De Re Publica*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), I.25; II.44; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*, 10n.26.

[21] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: Reading the City of God," 111–12.

[22] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 305.

according to "different faiths, different hopes, and different loves, until at last they are separated by the final judgment and each receives its own end, of which there is no end."[23] According to Augustine, the city of God is not distinct from the earthly city in time or space. The kingdom of God has been established in Christ, though its full implementation has yet to occur. In their time in the world before the eventual return of Christ, the two cities both make use of the same temporal goods and are both afflicted by temporal evils. The two cities, while distinct in their ends, are inseparable during the *saeculum*, though they work from the same materials, time, and space toward very different ends.[24] The earthly city makes false gods for itself out of anything at hand, whereas the heavenly city serves the one true God while on pilgrimage to its true, eventual home.[25] Their distinction thus rests in the ends and spirit to and through which their loves and power are directed.[26] As such, the task of the city of God is to navigate the *saeculum* in light of that coming end; it must treat the ideologies, structures, and practices of the world as both contingent and provisional.[27] And this is precisely what motivates Augustine's criticism of the Roman commonwealth: they refused to acknowledge the temporal, limited, and relative nature of the values on which their society was built and thereby failed to give God what God is due.[28]

According to Augustine, the earthly city's injustice does not stem from the temporal goods through which it sustains itself; the problem, rather, is in the earthly city's use of those goods. It would

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[23] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XVIII.54; pg. 345.

[24] Augustine, 2:XIV.4; pg. 103.

[25] Augustine, 2:XVIII.54; pg. 345.

[26] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: Reading the City of God," 118.

[27] My own short summation and telling of DCD is very much shaped and informed by Luke Bretherton's brief summary of the same. See Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 82.

[28] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XVIII.54; XIX.23; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 1:X.4, 5, 19-20; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 307.

thus be wrong to think of the temporal goods both cities use as anything other than good. The goods that make possible temporal peace and daily life are certainly good gifts from God "meant to serve the peace of mortals."[29] They are, in fact, the basic necessities that make possible a life wherein one can deliberate regarding the nature of the common good and be freed to pursue their highest ends. But when those higher goods are neglected, or if the lower goods are themselves over-valued at the expense of higher goods, "misery will necessarily follow."[30] This is why he writes, "Use of the things necessary to this mortal life is common to both kinds of people and to both kinds of household, but each uses them for its own very different end."[31] Improper use of temporal goods leads to a loss of both eternal and temporal goods alike.

The earthly and heavenly cities are thus both concerned with the production, use, and distribution of earthly goods. Each functions according to its distinct economic model, and the eternal destiny of each city is very much bound up with their relation to such earthly goods. The task for the Christian, therefore, is to receive and use those goods in service of humanity's higher purposes. That is, earthly goods are to be used in service of one's enjoyment of God, as a set of tools through which one is formed and trained toward knowledge and love of God. Proper use of earthly goods leads to the acquisition of higher goods—"the peace of immortality and the glory and honor appropriate to it, in an eternal life meant for the enjoyment of God and of one's neighbor in God."[32] The Christian should therefore make use of temporal goods "like a pilgrim."[33] Members of the *civitas peregrina* are

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[29] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIX.13; pg. 370.

[30] Augustine, 2:XV.4; pg. 143.

[31] Augustine, 2:XIX.17; pg. 374.

[32] Augustine, 2:XIX.13; pg. 370.

[33] Augustine, 2:XIX.17; pg. 374.

thus not to abandon society and its goods altogether. They are, Augustine seems to believe, responsible for a much more delicate mode of engagement. They are to make use of those goods in equitable, just ways, maintaining a proper balance and awareness of the vast range of objects and directions toward which their love is directed.[34] The Christian must avoid being captivated by such goods while still not avoiding them altogether; the Christian must use those goods for the sake of the enjoyment of God, even within a context that works to actively prohibit that possibility.

Happiness, in this framework, is attained eschatologically. The city of God will enter into the fullness of joy only when it encounters Christ face to face in the wake of his return. The city of God's pilgrimage in the world, then, is marked by hope of that coming future, and it must thus journey with patient anticipation of what will be but is not yet. Citizens of that city are to patiently endure the evils that characterize a fallen world "until we attain those goods where everything will afford us inexpressible delight and there will be nothing left that we have to endure."[35] Maintaining hope thus depends on properly navigating the finitude of the world and the evils operative therein. While Augustine thinks that the evils of any age are ultimately traced back to the consequences of sin, life itself is now "constricted by the bonds of death." The earthly city inevitably organizes society according to pride and domination rather than justice under God's rule.[36] Rather than seeking to construct or identify some lasting mode of happiness in that context, Augustine argues that Christians should name their misery and cry out to God for help: "How much more perceptive it would be, how much more worthy of a human being, for him to recognize the human misery laid bare by those necessities, to detest that misery's grip on him, and, if he is devout in his wisdom, to cry out to God,

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[34] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 325.

[35] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIX.4; pg. 358–59.

[36] Augustine, 2:XIX.4; pg. 358.

Deliver me from my necessities (PS 15:17)!:"[37] They must patiently and wisely endure "the woes which this condemned life has deserved, having the foresight to be thankful that it will all come to an end, faithfully and patiently awaiting the happiness which the emancipated life of the future is going to have without end."[38] The task of being Christian within such a context must be characterized by a certain endurance of suffering, a learning to suffer the inevitable distension that results from being in such a time and being in time itself.[39]

For Augustine, the faithful are to train in virtue in order to properly endure the pains of the world and be prepared for the new age yet to come. Growth in virtue, which Augustine repeatedly argues is only ever made possible by the grace of Christ, can and does lead to earthly peace, to the extent that it is possible for humans to have such peace. As Augustine notes, "Virtue is true virtue only when it directs all the goods of which it makes good use, and directs all that it does in making good use of both goods and evils, and directs itself as well, to the end where our peace will be so unsurpassed that it could not possibly be better or greater."[40] That earthly peace—again, to the extent it is possible—depends on a properly ordered set of loves that gives rise to a proper relation to (i.e. production, distribution, use, and understanding of) the city's temporal goods.

Faithful Christian political and economic life, in this model, entails attempting to "stick out" of the norms of operative society without overestimating the potential of inaugurating some alternative, Christian utopia.[41] Earthly peace thus depends on accepting the limited range of

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[37] Augustine, 2:XIX.6, 19; pg. 358, 361.

[38] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII.16.20; pg. 462–63.

[39] Augustine, *Confessiones*, bk. 11; Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 10–12, 32.

[40] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XIX.10; pg. 364.

[41] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 338–39.

possibilities for happiness in this life and nonetheless seeking to navigate the finitude of the world in light of the justice and love that characterizes the coming age.

Engagement

Such a narrative has profound and timely implications for navigating contemporary economic life within a global, capitalist system.[42] Capitalism is but one organized way of arranging, producing, distributing, and using the goods of the earth. This argument presupposes a certain set of problematic limitations operative in capitalism, which thereby position this model in irrevocable tension with the heavenly city as a just commonwealth. That is, given the ways in which wealth concentrates in fewer and fewer hands, the ways in which capitalist culture tends to treat all things in terms of their market value, the ways in which unrestricted market systems negatively impact structures and practices of education and democratic politics, and the deeply racist roots of the structure itself, this author presupposes that the norms and system of capitalism (the modes of production, distribution, and use it prescribes, fosters, and normalizes) stand in irresolvable tension with the city of God as a just commonwealth. The city of God produces, distributes, and uses temporal goods in ways shaped and determined by the final end that is the love and knowledge of God, which is an altogether distinct approach to that of contemporary capitalism.[43] The former offers some guaranteed access to the basic

[42] Luke Bretherton has done a wonderful job of sketching the nuanced nature of this relationship in Augustinian terms, and my own analysis is very much informed by his astute analysis, even as I diverge from certain elements of his articulation of the task of engaging capitalism. See Luke Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 351–52. It is also worth clarifying that I am not trying to articulate any sort of direct correlation between the economic structures of the late Roman empire and contemporary capitalism; my argument simply does not depend on establishing any analogous relationship between the two. Rather, I am suggesting that some of the ethical principles salvageable from Augustine's analysis of the commonwealth (with its previously established economic elements) should inform our own relationship to the ways in which we collectively produce, distribute, and use wealth in contemporary society.

[43] For notes on the structural fostering of inequality, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Reprint edition (Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2017); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013); Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*.

necessities that sustain earthly life to all constituent members, and the latter arranges those necessities in terms of competition such that many struggle to survive.

Given that such earthly cities are characterized by the disorientation of love and misunderstanding of humanity's final end—i.e. communion with God—they are incapable of delivering justice. Apart from the grace of Christ, one is bound to pursue one's own prideful purposes, thereby limiting the proper ordering of love and virtue that constitutes justice.[44] Within such a context, the possibility of the heavenly city's eventual happiness depends on properly navigating imperial structures more concerned with personal glory and domination than just distribution and the maintenance of a shared public access to the basic necessities of life.[45] The heavenly city is to produce, use, distribute, and relate to temporal goods in a manner shaped and determined by the coming reality of Christ's return. The earthly economy and the heavenly economy make use of the same temporal goods in their shared time and space, but they do so in dramatically different fashions and toward ultimately distinct ends. Christianity and capitalism, to borrow an image from Kathryn Tanner, are situated in terms of two distinct vectors that begin from the same point and head in opposite directions.[46]

It is worth noting here that Augustine was emphatically not worried about the disrupting effects such an alternative system of value might have on any operative political or economic system. For instance, when Nectarius—a leading townsman of Calama—pleaded with Augustine to modify

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[44] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 83.

[45] At the same time, Augustine stresses the import of noting the civic (though ultimately disordered) virtues of Rome. An Augustinian mode of economic life must acknowledge that capitalism is capable of certain forms of civic virtue, even as it stands under judgment. It need not be denied that capitalism is capable of fostering profound modes of innovation, scientific discovery, relative stability, and monetary wealth. Treating capitalism within the two-city model enables us to acknowledge those civic virtues while insisting on their relative and ultimately unjust nature. Even in the midst of its scientific innovation and storehouses of wealth, the earthly city will stand to judgment for its failure regarding the true justice that is grounded in Jesus Christ.

[46] Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 2005.

the punishments he gave after a series of riots, Augustine explained that his navigation of the temporal realm was to always be influenced by the eschatological realities of the city of God. It simply did not matter that such principles disrupted the operative norms of the earthly city's affairs. Augustine, after all, was more concerned with the values and practices a different, far-better country: "Please pardon us if our country, up above, has to cause trouble to your own."[47]

City of God Conclusions

Augustine's *City of God* thus gives us pieces of a political-theological ethic that has profound economic implications regarding engagement with the economic structures that so vividly animate our contemporary world. Within the context of contemporary capitalism, faithful economic life should be characterized by community organizing and theologically-motivated economic acts, through which those aspiring to be counted amongst the city of God seek to foster earthly peace and make use of the city's temporal goods in hope and love for all. According to this Augustinian vision, there can be no finished, final form of economic life—hence his understanding of the import of criticizing idolatrous political (and economic) systems. The task of faithful life in the midst of structures and systems marked by the drive for self-possession and domination is to foster virtue and peace to whatever extent possible. Faithful economic witness must critically name (and thereby delimit) the ideologies of domination and lust that characterize contemporary capitalism and seek to foster peace within the necessarily limited conditions of the *saeculum*. The city of God should function according to an economic vision altogether distinct from the norms of contemporary capitalism, even within the structures and culture of contemporary capitalism itself.

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[47] Saint Augustine, *Letters 1-99*, vol. II/1, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1997), ep. 91, 2. Quoted in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, First Edition, Forty-Fifth Anniversary edition (Berkeley; New York: University of California Press, 2013), 286.

Post-Work Discourse

Intro to Post-Work Discourse

One of the most interesting set of responses to contemporary capitalism to emerge in the wake of the 2008 recession is post-work criticism. Post-work discourse, in its broadest form, argues that any possibility for economic justice and a good life exists beyond the bounds of work. We have over-estimated the potential of work to provide us with meaning, fulfillment, justice, and security for far too long. Post-work theorists tend to argue that wage labor typically constitutes a crude form of servitude that inevitably places one within an endless hierarchy of bureaucracy and oppression. We encounter domination, calls for subordination, and capitulation while toiling in ways that only marginally benefit us. We are thus not free in our work, which is all the more problematic given the amount we work and the deeply held cultural assumptions regarding the profundity and ethical import of work. Attempts to create full-employment, raise the minimum wage, or implement practices of personal well-being in the workplace are thus unsatisfactory. Post-work theorists suggest that these are merely attempts to make a damnable system and cluster of beliefs more sustainable. Freedom and the potential for true democracy, they argue, exist outside of work, which is why post-work theorists regularly call for the abolition of work, increased automation, universal basic incomes, and a reduction of working hours.[48]

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[48] See Weeks, *The Problem with Work*; Peter Frase, *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2016); Andre Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, 1 edition (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); James Livingston, *No More Work: Why Full Employment Is a Bad Idea* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy: Essays by Paul Lafargue*, Anniversary edition (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011). And for a particularly succinct overview of post-work discourse, see Jason Resnikoff, "The Problem with Post-Work: Work and the Work Ethic as Units of Historical Analysis," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 94 (ed 2018): 207–18.

In this section, I focus on Kathi Weeks's post-work contributions in particular.[49] I take her text, *The Problem With Work,* to be the most clear and compelling articulation of the post-work framework.[50] I also believe that her vision has the most resonance with an Augustinian theological framework. That is, Weeks' vision of economic life, as I will show, critically names (and thereby delimits) the ideologies of domination and lust that serve contemporary capitalism, while also spelling out some practical demands through which we might foster some scale of economic peace and justice in the *saeculum*. This is a vision of economic life that avoids capitulation to the status quo, escapism, and over-estimation of the possibilities for just alternatives. As such, much of Weeks' post-work vision should animate an Augustinian anti-work ethic.

Kathi Weeks

Broadly speaking, Weeks aims to graft political relations of power and authority into labor conversations. She proposes work as a political problem of freedom.[51] In so doing, she develops a feminist political theory of work that poses work as both a machine of inequalities as well as a political problem of freedom.[52] In the end, she sketches a sort of post-work politic that names a particular mode of engagement, which features both ideological commitments and practical proposals.

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[49] As I mentioned above, I have left Week's use of "post-work" in place whenever writing in reference to her scholarship. Weeks regularly bounces between "antiwork" and "postwork" on a temporal scale, particularly in reference to an "antiwork politics" or "antiwork critique" and "postwork imaginaries." I take Weeks to understand "antiwork politics and critique" as a means to inaugurating a "postwork imaginary." The latter is a reference utopic society that is emphatically not arranged around productivism or work-centered identity. It will thus exist in the wake of a society build around productivist work-ethics (hence the post-work term). "Antiwork" describes her call for a non-normative, ethical relation to work within the larger system of contemporary capitalism. I thus follow Weeks in my use of "anti-work," given that I am much less interested in the inauguration of that utopic society than I am with just, equitable questions of work within contemporary capitalism.

[50] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*.

[51] Weeks, 35.

[52] Weeks, 23.

Weeks is arguably at her best when interrogating the ethical discourse surrounding work and capitalism's work ethic. Drawing on Weber's work on the protestant work ethic, she traces the development of this work ethic through various manifestations up to today. We are, in fact, very much still indebted to it. The dominant ethical discourse of work is more crucial to the system's functioning today than ever before, and Weeks tries to show this while also revealing the vulnerabilities of the discourse itself.

Weeks makes three particular claims regarding capitalism's pervasive and disciplinary work ethic: (1) we cannot address the structures of work without also addressing the ethics on which they are grounded; (2) the ethical discourse has been stable for some time, but it is nonetheless vulnerable to such modes of critique; and (3) insubordination to this work ethic is more subversive now than it ever has been. According to Weeks, we live in a work culture wherein work is our highest good and the standard for all of life.

In so doing, Weeks is very intentionally drawing on the autonomist strand of the Marxist tradition. She sees traditional Marxism as being primarily concerned with a criticism of alienating, exploitative labor structures, but that standard mode of enquiry never questions or criticizes capitalism's overvaluation of work altogether.[53] In contrast to much of the Marxist tradition, she calls for a refusal of work—not creative or productive activity—as a way of challenging both the current laboring structures of the work society and the prominence of its work ethic discourse. It is worth noting, too, that Marx makes a very similar set of suggestions in the third volume of Capital.[54]

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[53] Weeks, 5.

[54] As Marx writes, in the third volume of *Capital*, "The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper….Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish when this realm of necessity as its basis.

Weeks calls for a rejection of work as the rejection of the ideology that orients all of reality and rationality around work—"productivism."[55] Such a refusal, though, does not entail sitting on one's hands or stopping productive activity altogether; it is a refusal of the moralizing discourse of work, of work as the standard through which we view the world, understand citizenship, and value each other. The autonomist, post-work proposal is "to reduce the time spent at work, thereby offering the possibility to pursue opportunities for pleasure and creativity that are outside the economic realm of possibility."[56] On this point, Weeks writes that reusing work is "the enrichment of subjectivity, the expansion of need and the cultivation of an element or quality of desire that exceeds existing modes of satisfaction."[57]

In addition to autonomism, Weeks also draws a good deal from the feminist "wages for housework" movement of the 1970s, which was aimed at highlighting the unpaid value of reproductive labor. The goal of that movement was, at least in part, to demonstrate the fundamentally necessary nature that reproductive labor plays in capitalism's maintenance. This movement "was a means by which to constitute a feminist and anticapitalistic political collectivity whose ultimate aim was the radical transformation of the institutions of work and family."[58] For these theorists, women's freedom began at the precise point their necessary domestic labor ended. This is why Weeks quotes

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The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite." Karl Marx, *Capital Volume III: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, Reissue edition (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Classics, 1993), 958–59.

[55] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 99.

[56] Weeks, 103.

[57] Weeks, 103.

[58] Weeks, 136.

Silvia Federici's insistence that forcing the recognition of domestic labor as legitimate work was "the first step towards refusing to do it."[59]

Weeks engages with and draws on those various traditions to sketch something of a post-work political imaginary wherein she articulates a couple of crucial, practical proposals to shift our cultural relation to (and understanding of) work: universal basic income and a reduction of working hours. Drawing in the logic of refusal she sees in the "wages for housework" movement, Weeks articulates the need for a universal basic income. Such a system, she insists, must altogether avoid conditions for payment. That is, the pay need not be based on any sort of participation in wage work or community contribution.[60] Such a conditionless pay-out, she thinks, could enable a re-thinking of the nature and function of work, as well as a different relation to work altogether. That UBI would upend the struggle for survival many folks experience in relation to wage labor, and it would shift us away from our over-dependence on wage labor structures. Within such a model, wage work would become a choice. Universal basic income is also a helpful alternative to the "precariousness and invasiveness—as well as the social hierarchies created by—the welfare system."[61] For Weeks, basic income severs the connection between income and work-ethic. This would open up a critical perspective on the wage system and its place in the perpetuation of oppressive work schemas.

Weeks also calls for a thirty-hour work-week. Working six hours a day without losing any pay would be a huge step forward, Weeks argues. Such a move would alter public consciousness of work, distancing us from capital's control while also challenging household norms of sexuality and gender. She writes, "In addition to identifying a specific concrete goal, the movement for shorter hours can

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[59] Weeks, 124.

[60] Weeks, 138–39.

[61] Weeks, 138.

also serve to provoke an interrogation of the basic structure of work and the needs, desires, and expectations that are attached to it."[62] She champions the traditional labor movement's call for increased time "for what we will."[63] The extra time outside of work, then, could be used to confront the delimiting structures of work and family in their present manifestation. Given that she's trying to redistribute unpaid work (reproductive labor), the extra time away from work can (should the individual so decide) go toward community life, political life, the pursuit of pleasure, and even some community organizing to upend "the conditions of work and family life" that animate our world so forcefully.[64] Weeks is therefore contesting the general assumption that less work means more family time (and therefore more gendered divisions of reproductive labor). She notes, "Taking aim at, rather than appropriating, normative discourses of the family, the demand for shorter hours is conceived here as a demand for, among other benefits, more time to imagine, experiment with, and participate in the relationships of intimacy and sociality that we choose."[65]

Post-Work Conclusion

The refusal of work (i.e. an anti-work ethic) is more of a path than a goal, more of a way of journeying than a finalized state of affairs (i.e. a postwork imaginary). It is quite fitting for those interested in undertaking pilgrimage. When engaged in this manner, the refusal of work "creates the conditions for the construction of subjects whose needs and desires are no longer as consistent with

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[62] Weeks, 153.

[63] Weeks, 151ff.

[64] Weeks, 168.

[65] Weeks, 34.

the social mechanisms within which they are supposed to be mediated and contained."[66] Anti-work is thus a path to alternative formation, which has great resonance with an Augustinian framework and anthropology. Post-work discourse helps us make tangible something of an Augustinian approach to work and ways of relating to work. It calls for a mode of agency that resists abstraction and utopic over-estimation while naming, criticizing, and refusing the ideologies of work in capitalism.[67]

An Augustinian Anti-Work Ethic

Anti-Work: The Critical Element

The Augustinian anti-work ethic I am sketching here has two key elements: one critical, the other constructive. In the first sense, this Augustinian anti-work ethic serves as a critical analysis of capitalism's work ethics and our deeply-held assumptions about work within that system. To take on this anti-work ethic is to begin divesting from the operative logics of capitalism: productivism, over-work, and the valuation of all of life in relation to one's work. In the second sense, this anti-work ethic prescribes some practical alternatives through which we might cultivate an alternative conception of and relation to work in light of the hope of that coming future wherein work ends altogether. I begin with the first, critical element of this anti-work ethic.

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[66] Weeks, 100.

[67] I believe that the role "utopia" plays in Weeks' analysis is loosely analogous to Augustine's sense of "eschaton." The vision of utopia Weeks puts forward is capable of significant social reforms, but it also serves as a critical force that provokes imaginations and mobilizations toward different futures. For Weeks, utopic discourse aims to stir up utopic praxis, promoting a sort of cognitive dissonance in the present so as to cultivate the imagination of different futures. Such utopic demands serve as effective means through which to inspire critical thinking, political imagination, and action. For Augustine, the eschaton places comparable provocative demands on Christians and inspires a similar sort of cognitive dissonance between the status quo of human social institutions and the City of God. Augustine certainly does not believe humans are capable of instantiating the just commonwealth that is the City of God in and through human political institutions, but he does, like Weeks, think that eschaton should stir up a particular mode of ethical practice in the present.

First, this Augustinian anti-work ethic insists that we are not created for work. In Augustine's telling, we are actually created for purposelessness. Joy and delight rest at the heart of the grace that comes to us as good news. We are created to delight in God, for God's own delight, and nothing we can do in and through our own capacities is capable of enabling such enjoyment.[68] That is, we are ultimately created to delight in a God who has no need for us, and nothing we can do is to be considered more valuable or important than such endless delight.[69] We are certainly called to reform ourselves into the image of God though our own active, deliberate agencies, but we mistake our own natures and capacities when we assume we can produce or actualize something of ourselves in and through our own agencies, ideas, or practices.[70] In fact, Christians traditionally recognize that toilsome work and hard work is the result of the fall; work is a form of punishment and therefore part of the cluster of realities from which God is redeeming humanity.[71] As we see in Augustine's Genesis commentaries, Adam and Eve did something comparable to working in the garden, but it was totally free of toil. He writes, "Labor was not a hardship then, but a spontaneous experience of joy. The things created by God grew more exuberantly and fruitfully through the concurrent labor of man, resulting in more copious praise of the Creator himself."[72] It is only after the fall that work becomes a hard, toilsome activity marked by a divine curse. To think with Augustine about Mary and Martha

[68] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 214; Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016.

[69] Mathewes, "On Using the World," 213–14.

[70] Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 207.

[71] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 2012, 2:XXII.22; Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augutine Toward Labor," 250.

[72] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," in *On Genesis* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2004), 8.8; Quoted in Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Attitude of St. Augustine Toward Labor," in *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of the Very Reverend Georges Vasilievich Florovsky*, ed. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 249.

in relation to work, is to insist that our work must be used in service of our enjoyment of God; the former shall end and the latter will last.

Second, this anti-work ethic insists that our productive work is not itself the primary source of value in the world. As Kathryn Tanner has recently noted, "The materials upon which we work have value prior to our activity insofar as they form the non-purposive 'products' of God's creative activity."[73] Given the nature of God's creation and preservation, Augustine notes that it is for good reason that we do not treat farmers as the sole creators of their crops. As previously established, the series of acts by which farmers grow crops—while certainly toilsome, demanding, and fragile—is fostering the actualization of a potentiality the exists exterior the farmer herself. For Augustine, God is the ground of the potential and process through which a seed becomes a bush yielding fruit, even if that occurs through and depends upon the correlating agency of the farmer.[74] In this sense, the worker (who depends on God for their being, agency, and own range of potentialities) only ever formalizes or organizes pre-existing material, which also derives its existence from God. God can thus be said to have created the craftsperson's body, the mind that animates and exerts some form of control over that body, the very materials the mind directs the body to work upon, and the skill and capacity that enables a creative worker to visualize and actualize a plan.[75] The goodness of any action or thing thus ultimately stems from God's own goodness. Such an approach recognizes the potential and creative goodness of humans transforming objects of nature through their own productive capacities for the sake of addressing a pressing need. But this Augustinian anti-work ethic insists that any productive act humanity undertakes always already depends on a distinctly transcendent God for

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[73] Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 208.

[74] Augustine, "De Genesi Ad Litteram," 5.6.18; pg. 285.

[75] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XI.5.7; pg. 288–89.

its viability and possibility.[76] Value simply does not enter the world exclusively through my own agential capacities, as though my own work were some portal to divinity; use-value always depends on a generous, transcendent God that created the stuff being worked on as well as the potentiality of human agency that transforms that pre-existing natural entity.[77]

Third, this Augustinian anti-work ethic insists that productive output should have no bearing on my relation with others. To value my neighbor in terms of their productive potential is, for Augustine, to fail to love them humanly. Part of the Christian economic task is to cultivate earthly peace to whatever extent possible in order that my neighbor's livelihood, survival, and earthly peace is not conditional upon any form of productive output.

Fourth, and finally, this Augustinian anti-work ethic insists that our work-ethic has no part or place in God's purposes. As Kathryn Tanner has persuasively noted, God's creation and salvation of humans is emphatically not for the sake of them undertaking some additional productive activity.[78] God's agency is itself non-productive in this sense: "The fundamentally non-purposive, and in that sense non-productive, activity of God should underlie all our productive activity, assuring its fundamental value, whatever our particular capacities and their measure of success."[79] There is simply no room for a legitimating work-ethic in this framework.

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[76] Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 46.

[77] Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 208.

[78] Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 206.

[79] Tanner, 208.

Anti-Work: The Constructive Element

In the second, constructive sense, this Augustinian anti-work ethic prescribes some practical steps through which we might cultivate an alternative conception of and relation to work in light of hope in that coming future wherein work ends altogether. This Augustinian anti-work ethic contains a number of practical, economic demands and proposals, which will necessarily involve both macro and micro shifts. Such shifts are aimed at enabling an Augustinian anti-work ethic that accounts for the non-escapable tasks of Martha in a way that is informed by Mary's contemplative rest and refusal of work.

To take on this anti-work ethic, we must begin imagining small-scale shifts, animated by virtue, that enable alternative relations to the systems and structures we currently inhabit. Refusing the logic of capitalism entails learning to think and speak differently about our work and ourselves in relation to work, which (in my own academic context) should necessarily impact the ways in which we visit professional meetings, professional development trainings, and the university's career center. To take on this anti-work ethic is to throw off the alliances we created between our personal identities and our professional statuses.

On a macro level, to insist on this anti-work ethic is to call for a universal basic income and a reduction of the work week. This universal basic income should not pay according to one's contributions; that is the very crux of capitalist logic, whereas the good news of Christ attests that each individual is valued (and retains their value) apart from any productive contribution they may or may not undertake.[80] A universal basic income would disrupt deeply held assumptions that one's quality of life should depend on one's productive potential and disciplined work ethic, and it would begin shifting us away from our over-dependence on wage labor practices. For those who want to

[80] Tanner, 213–14.

continue working, we must reduce the hours of the work week in order to continue decentralizing work from our personal identities and to cultivate life outside of work. To reduce working hours is to free us from over-work, to remind us of all that work cannot deliver, and to create the space necessary to undertake miscellaneous endeavors outside of work. The reduction of working hours would thus directly confront capitalism's drive toward professionalism and productivity.

None the less, I do not think that a universal basic income, 30-hour work weeks, and the death of capitalism's work ethic will eliminate economic injustice or instantiate a utopia. I merely hope to suggest that such structural shifts fit with the Augustinian vision of work I have been trying to sketch. Such shifts, I believe, can better ensure a limited, shareable peace during the *saeculum*. These proposals must be read as a constructive starting point for those interested in undertaking the work of constructing economic peace and engaging the city for its betterment. The issue is not that work has no value in itself, and the goal is not to abolish productive activity through and through. Rather, the refusal of work is aimed at establishing a corrective to our over-estimation of what work can deliver. To refuse work is to insist with Weeks that "there are other ways to organize and distribute that activity and to remind us that it is also possible to be creative outside the boundaries of work."[81] The refusal of work thus shifts from our tendency toward overwork to make space for the pursuit of other non-productive interests outside of work, all while naming and criticizing the crude forms of vice operative in today's economic structures. Only then might we be able to begin using ourselves for the enjoyment of God.

[81] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 12.

Conclusion

This Augustinian anti-work ethic provides us with a set of resources for faithful economic life in our contemporary world. It frames our address in terms of a proper hope, reminding us both of the reasons for engagement and the scale of what we might properly expect from those outcomes and systems. It also provides us with a sort of middle ground between so many models through which theologians address capitalism: cultural isolation, structural preservation, or some delayed utopic imagination that ultimately enables a lack of concrete engagement in the present nature of things.

Such an anti-work ethic is no individual enterprise; it is best fostered in community. When carried out in community, this Augustinian anti-work ethic has the potential to re-shape Christian communal life and make possible charitable modes of relationality foreclosed into today's economic structures. To insist on a value structure totally independent of the productive capacities of the constitutive members of that community is to make possible alternative modes of formation, becoming, surviving, and shared life. Whereas capitalism tends to view itself in an all-encompassing manner, as the natural norm and permanent fixture that structures and orders contemporary life, the Christian community that takes on this anti-work ethic functions as a charitable, imaginative alternative. It does not operate in isolation or at a distance from contemporary capitalism, but it cuts through the heart of that economy in a disruptive manner, thereby revealing the emptiness of capitalism's anthropological vision and its work-related demands.[82]

To refuse work is to throw off what is expected of us and to go with Mary to the feet of Christ. Such a refusal can and should alter our understanding of and relation to the necessary tasks that accompany being human in the *saeculum*. Would that we built a world wherein the theoretical and practical gaps between Mary and Martha ceased to exist, wherein we cultivated such a radically

[82] Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 219.

alternative conception of work that even our reproductive labors could be undertaken in a liturgical fashion, shaped by virtue and directed toward enjoyment of God in hope of their ultimate abolition.

Conclusion

On the What and the Why of this Project

I am among the number who write while developing and develop while writing. Hence, if I said something that is either lacking in caution or lacking in learning, which is rightly reprehended not only by others who can see it but also by myself, because I ought to be able to see it, at least afterwards if I am developing, it should come as no surprise, nor should I be saddened over it. Rather, it should be pardoned, and I should be grateful, not because I made a mistake but because it is criticized. For a man loves himself far too wrongly if he wants others to remain in error in order that his own error may remain hidden.

Augustine
Ep. 143

Project Conclusion

It is worth noting what exactly has been established in this argument. I will thus conclude with a brief re-articulation of the argument I have developed here so as to demonstrate the various ways in which the elements of this dissertation hang together and to highlight what is at stake in the validity of the argument. That is, I want to clarify precisely what it is that I take myself to have established herein, why it matters, and what is to be done in the wake of such an argument.

As I noted at the beginning of this project, contemporary America is facing a number of serious, work-related issues. We inhabit a culture that insists our life's meaning is bound up in our work, we experience constant pressures at work to be more efficient and productive, and we know the ways in which our work-structures contribute to a seemingly ever-growing, corrosive system of poverty and oppression. The majority of Americans hate their work, and yet we continue working at dangerous rates given our deeply engrained work-ethics, even to the degree that we tend to treat our work as the ground of our identities. These problems, I argue, largely stem from our cultural

assumptions regarding the import of our work and the nature of our work ethics. Those work ethics give rise to particular forms of work and structure our understanding of what we are responsible for and capable of in the act of work itself.

This, along with a cluster of other labor-related problems (i.e. automation, wage depression, wage theft, the rise of a flexible labor force, a lack of worker representation, over-work, and productivism) has rightfully caused a host of theologians to take up the question of work from a theological perspective. As I demonstrated in chapter one, these theological addresses tend to unfold according to a similar pattern, which I have entitled "The God as Worker" model. I demonstrate the existence of this pattern through a close reading of three contemporary theologians' addresses to those previously articulated work-related issues (Darby Ray, David Jensen, and Douglas Meeks), and I do so by identifying the overlapping logic and structure that animates all three of those theological proposals. The similarity of those proposals, I argue, constitutes a pattern; their addresses unfold according to a singular model. According to this pattern, God, as an active agent, is said to work in creation and redemption much like the creatures created in God's image. Further, this line of argumentation goes, humans are invited to work like God and are said to have the capacity to participate with God's ongoing work in the world—establishing God's coming kingdom on earth. As such, the constructive theological address to work-related issues is to imitate God's work in creation and redemption in our own work lives.

I take two primary issues with the "God as worker" model. The first is that such a line of address depends on the rejection, neglect, or misunderstanding of classical forms of transcendence. That classical doctrine, when rightfully understood, problematizes the straightforward comparison of divine and human agencies and thereby highlights the doctrinal binds such proposals work themselves into. In order to address the woes of capitalist labor by turning to divine agency, such proposals inadvertently mischaracterize the nature of divine agency as such. According to Augustine and a

classical doctrine of transcendence (a doctrine certainly present in Augustine's theological system but also shared by thinkers beyond Augustine), God cannot possibly fall under the rules of that which God created. That is, God cannot logically be both the efficient cause of an interlocking order and a constituent member of that order.[83] This principle is all-too-often said to legitimate problematic forms of social relations, such as patriarchy, dualism, or even wage-labor and property ownership. But, it must be noted that such (problematic) forms of relationality are still only patterns within an overarching system which, it has already been noted, is said to be totally dependent on a God outside it. God does not fall within such a frame of reference, and God's transcendence, therefore, cannot legitimate or give rise to dominating forms of social relationality.[84] Further, at least to the extent that one affirms classical doctrines of divine transcendence, God's agency cannot be said to serve as a coherent pattern after which human work can coherently be modeled. God simply does not work in the ways that humans do.

The second problem with the "God as Worker" model lies in its lack of clarity regarding the nature of work as such. When reading proposals that unfold according to the "God as Worker" model, one is often left wondering what exactly is meant by "work." The lack of conceptual clarity leads to a number of perplexing outcomes. When "work" and "labor" are treated synonymously and rendered as the mode through which humans image God, one is left wondering which precise activities constitute such imaging. That is, does my cooking, cleaning, and cleaning myself image God in the same way that my professional endeavors do? And when all productive activities are included in my "imaging" of God, what is so unique about the category of work? The inverse is just as problematic,

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[83] Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," 2016, 67.

[84] "God's action cannot *compete* with created agency, God does not have to overcome a rival presence, the creative power of God is not power exercised unilaterally over some other force, but is itself the ground of all power and all agency within creation." (Williams, "Good for Nothing?," 72)

though. If by "work" one simply means the activities for which I am compensated, how are we to understand the distinction between reproductive labor and commodified labor? Or what are we to say about the intrinsic, essential shift one must go through (i.e. that on no longer images God) in the wake of being fired due to a downsizing? Relatedly, what is it about the context of labor within capitalism that somehow enables one's agency to count as imaging God in this approach?

The lack of analysis of "work" also has significant consequences regarding the type of ethical proposals one puts forward. Meeks and Ray, for example, seem to recognize work as a basic, ontological good; it is, after all, one of the ways through which we image God. As such, the problem with work lies in the structures and norms of contemporary capitalism, which prevent us from working in properly human ways and thereby imaging God in our work. As such, the ethical proposals tend to take contemporary work structures as their target, and they are aimed at re-instating work as a proper human good.[85] The context in which work unfolds is problematic, but the agency itself is ontologically good. This, however, overlooks the Biblical ideas that work is a temporary, cursed mode of agency, and it thereby overestimates the potential for justice and happiness in our work.

In contrast to this vision, I have argued that "toilsome work" is a category only coherent in a life of sin, and it is a mode of agency that will eventually be abolished. In contrast to the singular, all-encompassing category of "work," I use a few different terms to speak of the various contexts in which modes of productive agency take place. I use the term "work" to represent productive agency, "labor" to refer to work commodified and sold in capitalism, "work ethic" to represent the general culture that builds up around the sell of labor, and "reproductive labor" to signify a form of uncompensated (and still highly exploited) work, which is, ironically, not technically considered labor

[85] Jeremy Posadas has done a wonderful job of noting the operative assumptions regarding the ontologically necessary status of work in many of these contemporary theological proposals. See Posadas, "The Refusal of Work in Christian Ethics and Theology."

within this matrix; hence the feminist discourse that has been problematizing the ways in which capitalism overlooks and exploits this mode of work in depending on it without paying for it.

In this project, I have taken aim at the assumptions regarding labor within capitalism (i.e. work sold as a commodity within capitalism) and the underlying, associated cultural tendencies that accompany such a wide-scale practice, which I refer to in terms of capitalism's "work ethic." That is, I am not interested in problematizing or contesting productive agency as such. Rather, the problems at hand are as follows: (1) the way in which that work is commodified and sold as labor in contemporary capitalism, and (2) the culture that has built up around that basic economic practice. These problems thus lie in capitalism's work-ethics and power dynamics more than in productive agency itself.

I am, in fact, suggesting that Augustine offers us the resources for a very particular Christian understanding of how we ought to relate to and direct our own productive agencies. I have argued that Augustine's is a Christian understanding of work that stands in stark contrast to the operative norms and practices of how one relates to and directs their productive capacities (i.e. labor and reproductive labor) in contemporary capitalism. In so doing, I have drawn on that theological tradition so as to question our deeply held cultural assumptions regarding work, some of which I think ultimately animate the God as worker model. As such, I take the constructive proposals regarding ethical intervention that emerge from the God as Worker model lacking. In misunderstanding the nature of work, such proposals assume and thereby reify an over-estimation of the potential for justice, happiness, and flourishing in and through work.

When taken together, these two problems warrant another mode of theological address to work-related issues. The task of this project has been to develop such a theology of work. More particularly, the task of this project (after identifying and problematizing the God as Worker model) has been to develop a theology of work that (1) is not patterned after any mode of divine agency, (2)

that does not render work as the avenue through which humans image God, (3) that distinguishes between a host of types of work, some of which are problematic and non-essential and some of which are inescapable, and (4) that takes the toilsome nature of work stemming from the fall seriously enough to warrant questioning the category of work in capitalism (i.e. labor) altogether.

As I show at the end of the first chapter, developing a theology of work without violating a classical doctrine of transcendence requires treating work as a distinctly creaturely activity. The benefits of starting with theological anthropology were (and remain) twofold: it enabled me to avoid attributing such creaturely modes of agency to God, and it also enabled me to develop a more detailed definition of work than is typically included in such models.

The task of the second chapter was to sketch this alternative theology of work by articulating the place of work within Augustine's theological anthropology. As I argued there, to think with Augustine about the nature of work requires getting clear on both the sort of thing a human being is and the ends for which it was created. And for Augustine, the first thing we can and should say about ourselves is, in fact, not about ourselves at all. Rather, we should begin with words of thanksgiving to the gratuitous source of our being. We are only, and always, secondary effects of God's gracious love. In coming to terms with our true beginning, shows us our true ends—gratuitous praise and love of the one who gives us life.[86] Such a form of love and intellection is made possible through the highest functioning of the soul. But, for Augustine, the human is the not the only creature that has a soul; so too do plants and animals. Augustine thus develops a hierarchy of sorts in order to highlight the extent to which the human soul resembles and diverges from other souls. Rather than thinking of these as discrete levels or areas of the soul, Augustine's treatment revolves around various powers or functions that different souls may or may not be capable of carrying out.

[86] Mathewes, "Book One: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning," 11.

According to Augustine, the human's being, structure, and bodily nature cannot be understood apart from its most basic animal functions. Indeed, many of the defining characteristics of our humanity are, in fact, animal functions. All animals, he explains, have some form of memory, sensation, and will. All animals have five senses, and this enables something quite like a form of knowledge (though he will ultimately argue that it does not count as what we would properly designate knowledge in the human sense).[87] Animals are driven by an instinct for survival, and they actively work to avoid death. Augustine thus develops a theological anthropology wherein the human is classified as a particular sort of "animal" (fraught as Derrida reveals the sweeping category to be).

Nonetheless, Augustine thinks that it is the capacity of the human mind for knowledge that ultimately distinguishes the human from other animals. The human is thus rendered as a rational, mortal, and grammarian animal.[88] We are reasoning, thinking, choosing, comprehending, loving animals, and no other animal, Augustine argues, is capable of such intellectual agency. Humanity's unique intellectual capacities have powerful implications too—they make possible our knowing God and ourselves.

All of this matters for the purpose of this project—developing a theology of work (in general) and identifying the place of work in Augustine's theological anthropology (in particular)—in that we are not the sort of animals whose final calling or ultimate destiny is contained within the plane of bodily of survival. These animal phenomena and functions simply cannot deliver our happiness. According to Augustine's theorization of the soul, work is enabled by *animatio* and *sensus*—the two capacities of the soul that humans and other animals all share. According to this Augustinian anthropology, our productive agency (i.e. work) therefore has nothing to do with the image of God.

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[87] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 137–39. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, XI.27.

[88] Augustine, *De Quantitate Animae*, 137.

Human beings, much like other sorts of animals, have particular sorts of physical (food, clothing, shelter) and social (meaningful activity, identity, and community) needs that must be satisfied by way of a certain type of work and that give rise to a creaturely—or more precisely, animal—life. In contrast to the assumptions that animate much of the "God as Worker" model, this Augustinian approach stresses that work is a necessary but non-central mode of animal agency. That is, work is a basic animal function—it is not distinctly human. This, I believe, is a vision that stands in stark contrast to the role work plays in our popular psyche and theological schemas.

The real force of this analysis rests in the insight that we are not workers first; we are worshipers. And work, I argue, can only be properly understood in terms of that higher calling of worship. The import of this analysis of work is to demonstrate, then, that work is not all that important in Augustine's theological anthropology. And whatever meaning work is capable of delivering for us, it must be properly situated within and in service of our final calling of knowing and loving God. It is thus important to remember that Augustine never abandons the lower forms of bodily, animalistic activities for the sake of prioritizing the intellectual pursuits alone. Quite the opposite, in fact. His treatment of inner and outer (or higher and lower) forms of agency function in tandem, as a sort of composite whole. There can be no inner function that is not taking serious the self's material needs. The problem is thus not with our productive activities as much as the ways we tend to over-value those productive capacities in the context of contemporary capitalism.[89]

The crux of chapter two, then, was my suggestion that work is a broad animal phenomenon. That insight, I argued, can be creatively deployed against any economic, ideological, or theological treatment work that over-emphasizes our productive capacities. That is, acknowledging that work is an animal activity rather than anything uniquely human forces us to sit with our own animal natures

[89] Thompson, "Workism Is Making Americans Miserable."

in a new way. It offers us a new evaluative framework through which to make sense of the role of work within a broader theological anthropology.

But how are we to undertake this necessary, animalistic mode of agency so as to avoid its over-estimation? It was in beginning to answer this question in the third chapter that this project shifted to its constructive portion. The task of the third chapter was to develop an economic reading of Augustine's use/enjoyment framework in order to identify the relation between one's highest calling of worship (articulated in Augustinian terms as the "enjoyment of God") and work (articulated in Augustinian terms as the "using oneself"). Work, I argued, should be imagined as a mode of "using oneself" for the sake of enjoying God. When read in this manner, the category of worship has some real import for the ways in which we think about and undertake work. Augustine's use/enjoyment framework thus enables us to use worship as something of a standard when imagining an Augustinian vision of work. Worship provides us with a series of basic insights regarding a Christian vision of work: worship limits work, directs work, clarifies work, and prepares us for work. But the economic reading of the use/enjoyment model also provides me with the theoretical foundation and conceptual model through which the requirements for a just, Christian vision of work can be developed (chapter 4) and a mode of relating to work in our contemporary context can be envisioned (chapter 5).

In chapter four, I sketched what such a vision of work—work as use of oneself for the enjoyment of God—actually looks like. Augustine's short treatise on work—*On the Work of the Monks*—examines the nature and function of monastic work, which he thinks is more highly ordered and intentional than work in a non-monastic context. Work, he argues, can only be properly understood and carried out when placed under humanity's final aims and purposes. When read in such a manner, work properly situated in relation to one's final end—work as use of oneself for the enjoyment of God—entails situating one's work in a broader life of liturgy. Within the context of the

monastery, it seems, one can relate to and undertake their work in alternative ways such that the work itself is grafted into one's larger life of worship and formation.

Rather than treating work in the monastic context as some idealistic escape from the realities of public, economic life, I ultimately identified some practical models for non-monastic work therein. That is, I drew on Augustine's theological treatment of monastic work in order to identify something of the nature and import of non-monastic work properly aimed toward God in our contemporary world. The most crucial distinction is not that of location—it is not as though the walls of the monastery or the monastic vow somehow transforms one's work in any necessary or magical manner. The real difference is in virtue. The goodness of the monks' work (at least those properly following the rule rather than those refusing work altogether) is that it is directed towards the proper end and animated by the theological virtues. This is why, for Augustine and Agamben alike, something of the monastic approach to work is readily available to those outside the monastic context. This is particularly true given that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are intrinsic to the life of the believer and provide something of a structure and framework of Christian existence.[90]

Rooting that difference in virtue is significant, particularly given my goal of developing a properly theological treatment of work. This is a mode of agency undertaken in response to God and God's efficacious gift of transformative grace. The virtues are, ultimately, a matter of preparation. In our lives in the world, we are being prepared for—made worthy of—what is to come in the new creation. In so doing, the virtues work on our dispositions and teach us to be more open to God's grace.[91] For Augustine, growing in virtue entails being made fit for a life in which we take a full share in God's beauty and goodness, and we come to inhabit such modes of being in a proper use of

[90] Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 20.

[91] Mathewes, 12–13.

ourselves and the world. This virtuous transformation funds alternative ways of being and doing in the world, such that the same activities are properly undertaken and redirected toward the love of God and others.

As I demonstrated at the end of the fourth chapter, that distinction has much to offer our contemporary moment, particularly when considering a Christian treatment of work. When seen from such a perspective, grace's transformation of work comes into clear view. Grace transforms the believer to the extent that they can undertake work in a virtuous manner, and work is hereby re-oriented toward enjoyment of God, proper use of the world, and love of others. "Liturgical work" is thus a mode of work made possible by the transformative power of grace. It is the work of the transformed self, wherein one's disordered loves are re-directed to the extent that one properly uses others, the world, and one's self for the enjoyment of God. When grace transforms our loves and desires, work takes on a new meaning and shape, and that new shape—i.e. work being situated in a broader life of liturgy—features a new relation to time, others, our selves, and God. What I have termed "liturgical work" is thus a mode of work made possible by the transformative power of grace that can and should contest the operative norms and power dynamics animating work in contemporary capitalism.

The transformation of time, self, relationality, and relation to God that happens by way of this "liturgical work" is not some particular, historical phenomenon whose possibilities passed away with Augustine or late antiquity. In fact, I think the transformational possibilities of "liturgical work" are all the more relevant for our context given the economic changes that have unfolded since Augustine's day. That is, the real force of such transformation is all the more crucial given our contemporary assumptions about and relations to work in capitalism. This is not to suggest that the potential of the monastic context and virtuously-informed "liturgical work" easily translates into contemporary capitalism and everyday work experiences. Quite the opposite, in fact. As I established in the fifth

chapter, this vision of "liturgical work" stands in real tension with our contemporary economic assumptions and values, and those tensions must be further explored and analyzed if this potential I am pointing to in liturgical work is to have any real contemporary import.

By this point in the argument, the basic theological vision was set. From a theological perspective, human work is a necessary mode of animal agency that should coincide with a life of liturgy to the degree that one can no longer distinguish between work and a way of Christian life. Any constructive theological treatment of work only makes sense when work is treated in service of humanity's final calling of knowing and loving God. Any proper "use" must be directed toward humanity's final calling, which Augustine speaks of in terms of "the enjoyment of God." This does not, however, denigrate other forms of human agency and activity as much as it speaks of the end toward which they are to be directed. The self—and its work—can only be properly used, loved, and related to when placed in service of one's enjoyment of God. Worship is therefore the lens through which the shape of the human's work—its nature and place within the order of creation and the purpose of its activities—comes into clear perspective.

And none the less, one rightfully wonders about the viability of such a theological vision in our contemporary world. That is, after articulating the basic theological vision, the question becomes how we are to actually relate to, conceive of, and undertake work within our contemporary world, marked as it is by global capitalism. How are we supposed to think about and relate to work given the disjunction between this vision of work as liturgy and contemporary capitalism? The fifth and final chapter of this project was aimed at answering this question, and I ultimately argued that to think with Augustine regarding the question of work is to refuse capitalism's work ethic and work-related demands.

I framed this Augustinian anti-work ethic around a brief set of comments Augustine makes regarding Mary and Martha in *De Trinitate*. Augustine reads Mary and Martha in terms of two

competing modes of agency and work, and such a reading has profound implications for the Augustinian anti-work ethic I developed in the last chapter. According to his reading of Luke 10, Mary symbolizes that joy and contemplation which the faithful will eventually undertake in an unceasing manner. It is Mary, at the Lord's feet, intent upon the Lord's words and "at rest from all activity and intent upon the truth" that images our final, eternal calling. It is important to note, though, that Augustine does not vilify or condemn Martha's work. The point for Augustine is not that Martha chose the bad option; it is that Mary chose the better.[92] Martha is simply doing what needs doing. Mary is a representative of humanity's highest, contemplative pursuits, whereas Martha represents the unfortunate economic realities of a life carried out in a sinful world. Augustine thus prioritizes Mary's contemplative, worshipful refusal of work while simultaneously noting the realities of inhabiting a sinful world wherein work is cursed and still necessary. Mary's vision is thus not altogether unavailable to us today, even as we continue waiting on Christ's return. Living into that vision entails navigating the demands of economic life in the world in hope of the abolition of those demands.[93] Such demands must be tolerated rather than loved, and we should strive to inhabit Mary's rest in the midst of a system that demands Martha's work.

Augustine is a helpful resource for navigating questions regarding faithfulness in the context of capitalism precisely because so much of *De Civitate Dei* is aimed at noting how a faithful Christian should behave within a sinful, limited political system. This is particularly true given that what we now regularly refer to as "economics" is very much in consideration in Augustine's analysis of "commonwealth"—the nature of the shared community/group that constitutes both the city of God and the earthly city. As I showed, the earthly and heavenly cities are thus both concerned with the

[92] Augustine, *Sermons Volume 4: 94A-147A*, III/4 (94A-147A):sermon 103; pg. 78.

[93] Augustine, III/4 (94A-147A):sermon 104; pg. 83–84.

production, use, and distribution of earthly goods. Each functions according to its distinct economic model, and the eternal destiny of each city is very much bound up with their relation to such earthly goods. The task for the Christian, therefore, is to receive and use those goods in service of humanity's higher purposes. That is, earthly goods are to be used in service of one's enjoyment of God, as a set of tools through which one is formed and trained toward knowledge and love of God. Earthly peace thus depends on accepting the limited range of possibilities for happiness in this life and nonetheless seeking to navigate the finitude of the world in light of the justice and love that characterizes the coming age. Earthly peace—to the extent it is possible—depends on a properly ordered set of loves and the exercise of virtue, which gives rise to a proper relation to (that is, production, distribution, use, and understanding of) the city's temporal goods. The city of God should function according to an economic vision altogether distinct from the norms of contemporary capitalism, even within the structures and culture of contemporary capitalism itself.

This alternative model, which I phrased as Augustinian anti-work ethic, has two primary components: one critical and the other constructive. In the first sense, this Augustinian anti-work ethic serves as a critical analysis of capitalism's work ethics and our deeply-held assumptions about work within that system. The Augustinian anti-work ethic suggests that we are not created for work, that our productive work is not itself the primary source of value in the world, that productive output should have no bearing on my relation with others, and that our work-ethic has no part or place in God's purposes. In the second, constructive sense, this Augustinian anti-work ethic prescribes some practical alternatives through which we might cultivate an alternative conception of and relation to work: a universal basic income and a reduction of the work week. That alternative conception of work is phrased in light of our shared hope in a coming future wherein work ends altogether.

I do not think that a universal basic income, 30-hour work weeks, and the death of capitalism's work ethic will eliminate injustice or instantiate a utopia. I merely hope to suggest that such structural

shifts fit with the Augustinian vision of work I have been trying to sketch. Such shifts, I believe, can better ensure a limited, shareable peace during the *saeculum*. These proposals must therefore be read as a constructive starting point for those interested in situating their work within a larger life of liturgy, of "using oneself" for the sake of "enjoying God." The issue is not that work has no value in itself, and the goal is not to abolish productive activity through and through. Rather, the refusal of work is aimed at establishing a corrective to our over-estimation of what work can deliver. To refuse work is to insist with Weeks that "there are other ways to organize and distribute that activity and to remind us that it is also possible to be creative outside the boundaries of work."[94] The refusal of work thus shifts from our tendency away from overwork to make space for the pursuit of other non-productive interests outside of work, all while naming and criticizing the crude forms of vice operative in today's economic structures. Only then might we have the space in which to undertake our work in a liturgical manner.

Contributions (Or Why Any of This Matters)

To the extent that this argument has been successful, this project should intervene in both economic theology and Augustinian studies alike. I have identified and problematized a pattern through which contemporary theologians regularly address work-related issues. In contrast to that pattern and its problematic doctrinal implications, I have developed a constructive theology of "liturgical work"—work as animal agency to be used in service of one's enjoyment of God—out of Augustine's theological system. This treatment of work takes seriously the ontological necessity of work, the cursed nature of that work in a postlapsarian world, the ways in which work has nothing to do with the image of God, the problematic over-estimation (and exploitation) of work in capitalism,

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[94] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 12.

and the ways in which work will eventually be abolished altogether in the eschaton. I also developed a corresponding, theological, anti-work ethic through which to address those work-related issues while also avoiding the problematic doctrinal implications of the "God as worker" model.

At the same time, this dissertation should push Augustinian studies toward an engagement with economic issues—an area I believe to be drastically under-explored in Augustine's thought. I have sketched the nature and place of work within Augustine's theological system, and I have developed an economic reading of Augustine's *usi/frui* distinction on which a larger Augustinian economic theology can and should be built. In so doing, I have identified the economic implications of Augustine's political theology: we cannot properly develop an Augustinian vision of contemporary political life without simultaneously sketching something of an Augustinian economic life. There is no mode of political life that is not inherently bound up with the production, distribution, and use of wealth, and the potential for an existent commonwealth depends on a just economic arrangement for all involved parties. This basic principle is as true for our contemporary age as it was for the Roman empire.

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