

Your Existence Matters, but Your Work Is Always up for Debate

Do you know how much money you're worth? Are you charging people for what you're truly worth?

Economic "worth" is a social game just as the concept of money is a social game.

If I say, "I'm worth X amount of dollars", that would be in the same league as me saying "this sheet of paper is worth X amount of dollars" or "this tea leaf is worth X amount of dollars." I can say it, but it doesn't amount to anything until I can get someone to agree with me."

"Worth" is an agreement between two or more parties. No single party gets to decide how much they, you, or anyone else is worth all by themselves.

If I say "I'll give you \$5 dollars to paint my house", you get to say "Painting your house for \$5 is not worth my time because I have better things to do."

If I say "I'll paint your house for 50 million dollars", you get to say "Sorry buddy, I'm not paying you that much for a paint job. It's not worth 50 million bucks to me."

In the first example, I thought the paint job was worth \$5. In the second example, I thought the paint job was worth 50 million.

In both cases, I failed because I didn't get another party to agree with my price. That brings me to this simple, but often overlooked point:

"Worth" is the intersection between what one party is willing to work for and what another party is willing to pay.

Ontological value (how much your existence matters in a philosophical sense) is different from economic value (how much your work matters to someone you're trying to impress for the sake of getting them to give you some of their money).

"I am special" ≠ "You owe me a salary."

"You are special" ≠ "I owe you a salary."

"You are just as important as anyone else" ≠ "Let me write you a check for that cool backflip you just did."

When I woke up this morning, I felt like a million bucks. Are you going to give me a million

bucks for that ecstatic feeling I had when I rolled out of bed?

Economic worth is not an opinion that you have about yourself nor is it an opinion that someone else has about you. It's a social construct generated by your ability to influence other people's behavior through strategic forms of value-creation.

Your existence matters, but if you want people to pay you money, then you have to do work that matters...

...work that matters to someone else's existence besides your own.