Review

"Unconditional Basic Meaning as Digital Public Good"

Jeff Arle, MD, PhD
neuromodulo@gmail.com

Ziesche and Yampolskiy begin by pointing out the 'hiding in plain sight' prediction that AI's advancement will likely 'hollow out' our Ikigai (meaning or purpose for living) by replacing the menial tasks and moderately engaging jobs and physical processes with which humans currently fill their days. I wholeheartedly concur and have been only mildly surprised that few have brought this up to date. Usually there is handwringing about job loss in and of itself and, of course, destruction of the human race entirely; worthy though not the only critiques to hold up as silver crosses to the AI blood lust. But the authors take first steps in laying out the importance of this topic and, indeed, the deep and potentially irretrievable chasm it will send the human experience spiraling into. It's past time this issue becomes part of the hotly debated aspects of AI in our collective lives.

That said, *is* there anything we can do to prevent the consequences (at its worst, a loss of meaning and purpose to the majority of human experience)? The paper offers a provocative, well-scoped thought experiment: If automation and advanced AI gut the familiar sources of purpose, what should public policy do besides redistribute money? The authors sketch a clear, imaginative answer — treat "meaning" as a public commodity and prototype it via government-supported AI-driven virtual ikigai worlds. The paper's strengths are its timely framing, readable taxonomy of ikigai activities (yarigai ('things worth doing'), asobigai ('the value of playing'), hatarakigai, 'work worth doing'), manabigai ('value of learning'), and oshiegai ('value of teaching'), and its careful pairing of a high-level vision with some sense (though weakly fleshed-out at this point) of pragmatic next steps (task forces, pilots, governance models). The draft moves smoothly from diagnosis (i-risks and expanded spare time) to a policy concept that is both novel and at least partly relatable.

The authors make a persuasive case that increased spare time plus disrupted occupational identities create a real civic challenge beyond income insecurity. Linking time-use taxonomy, public-good theory, and ikigai provides an intuitive bridge for policymakers and ethicists to begin tackling these realities further. And, helpfully, their tone is neither utopian nor alarmist: it acknowledges technological opportunities (hyper-personalization, neural interfaces) while enumerating concrete risks (privacy, wireheading, sedentary lifestyles). Finally, there are some actionable recommendations, though I think they rely too much on the digital format (and specifically the use of enriched personalized virtual worlds) to bring meaning, growth, and purpose for what has been lost in jobs and other tasks. There is little

to suggest many would seek out or find much enduring treasure for their lives in such worlds. This could be supported more if possible, in my view, and offering them freely by government, like a library or park, is already minimally utilized by vast swaths of people who *already* have both time and constrained meaning.

In fact, I'd argue the opposite is true, or more likely to occur – that those with more means and purpose in their lives now also make more use of the free offerings that already exist like libraries and parks (to be concrete about it) – but the point being that it is perhaps the ability or effort made to incorporate education, or entertainment, or physical fitness or virtuous contributions to society for oneself, (and for others which then enhances oneself), that are so meaningful or give purpose *because* they are entwined *within* the demands of everyday life. When one has all the time they want and can do anything, nothing has as much meaning, or at least it becomes harder to find as much meaning. Analogously, when the internet enabled anyone to record and disseminate their music, their art, their writing, it all became ubiquitous and passed through radically limited layers of evaluation – yes, better than the autocratic and often unfairly exploitative music or publishing industry, but now lacking in any standard reference of quality whatsoever. This relates directly to some of their comments on income inequality – arguably, such inequalities actually drive innovation and secondarily purpose for many, at all levels. The authors should not assume such inequalities are necessarily something to be 'fixed'. Additionally, and tangentially (as it is also somewhat tangential to the paper itself), their comments related to 'sustainability' are highly fraught… it's a topic unto itself and debatable from multiple sides.

In any case, the concept of "meaning" remains philosophically fuzzy; the paper would benefit from proposed operational measures (engagement quality, wellbeing indices, transferability to offline outcomes) and a suggested evaluation design for pilots. They could (perhaps in future iterations) spend more attention on feasibility: budgetary trade-offs, interstate variation, and how public provision would compete with or regulate private platforms. Finally, safeguards and oversight detail might be assessed more deeply. The privacy, autonomy, and wireheading sections should be expanded into concrete technical, legal, and institutional safeguards (data minimization, third-party audits, exit rights, and multi-stakeholder governance). Can we all agree that porn alone occupies between 5-30% of all internet bandwidth and a third of that comes from VPN use in restrictive countries – so what will keep these virtual purpose-enhancing worlds from simply sinking to the lowest common denominators? But who will decide that's not acceptable? Is it not acceptable?

Ultimately, this is an engaging and original policy-ethics provocation that deserves wider debate. With tighter operationalization, clearer metrics for success, and a sharper governance blueprint, the idea of "unconditional basic meaning" could move from compelling concept to pilotable public policy. It asks an important question: if meaning can

be engineered, who should steward it — and how do we do that without eroding the very autonomy we aim to support?