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Moncton, NB. - February 4th, 2024

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & MEANING

There is a meaning crisis correlated with the exponential rate of technology; As it disrupts our lives and forces society and its individuals to adapt increasingly quickly, we lose meaning. The challenge to deal with this immediately becomes philosophical, as we have never before needed to define and understand what "meaning" is on such a conscious level.

What is meaning? Do we find it in the practical, day-to-day or is it found in how we perceive ourselves and our personal relationships with the world around us? Somewhere in these questions hides an even more pernicious rabbit hole of a question: *identity*. Mainly, how can we derive meaning from anything without giving it an identity upon which its value can be measured?

These things come face-to-face to affront humanity's generally idealistic view of meaning: We don't like to think about it in quantitative terms because doing so immediately devaluates that which we are trying to give value. Sure, we sometimes recognize that some things are more meaningful than others and we can categorize them in a hierarchy with perfect utility, but beyond this, we must remain vague.

And so on the one hand, to understand meaning is to either quantify it or at least give it a qualitative definition, but on the other, we lose meaning by doing so. Perhaps the reason for this is that we can not actually give it a general definition, as it takes on a different definition for each individual. But we know that some things are universal, and that humans share the same sense of meaning for several things. This leads us to identify what

those things are, and ensure that we have access or the ability to pursue what is meaningful.

For example, we know that connection is meaningful to us- We are not solitary animals. This in conjunction with the fact that culture dictates a lot of how, if, and when we connect with each other, we then know that the answer to preserving meaning in this way has a lot to do with the decisions we make, both as individuals and communities.

So far, we have an overview of meaning; We have a few open questions about it and no link to how it is being impacted by technology we call "artificial intelligence". One way to understand this link is to observe what A.I. does, what it will potentially do, and how it disrupts us even now.

Let us take, for example, repetitive labour. We can be certain that artificial intelligence paired with robotics is replacing human beings here. The question is whether this impacts our meaning positively or negatively- or possibly both. This is where we need to accept a certain definition for "meaning", if we are to determine the answer properly. Earlier, we asked if meaning is derived from the practical day-to-day activities humans do. In other words, are the activities themselves meaningful to us? We know that it depends on which ones we do as individuals- We know that whatever we do, it generally has to make use of our talents, serve a purpose we deem is special, and hopefully generate enough value that we can live comfortably. This being said repetitive labour doesn't meet the criteria of developing our talent, depending on what work we do. If one only needs to dig ditches, they lose a lot of their potential to develop other skills and make use of their natural talents. Otherwise, the craft of blacksmithing can be quite repetitive but it demands certain skills that take a very long time to develop, and there is potential to have variety in what one does. In this way, we can say that A.I

and robotics either frees us to pursue meaning or takes away meaning, depending on the nature of the activity and the particular person who practices it.

This unveils a deeper landscape to explore. First, we know that with the freedom to pursue meaning, we can either invent new activities or be lost as to what to do. Here is where the very rarely asked question lies: *What of our capability to feel meaning?* We are so concerned about our loss of meaning that we have overlooked several courses of action here; To begin with, do we *really* need to derive meaning by identifying with our work? Secondly, how can we expand our ability to derive meaning in general? The semblance of an answer seems to have been provided for in our traditional religions and in philosophy; *However*, they typically only deal with the question of *absolute* meaning: *Why do any of it?* Why remain alive to derive personal meaning in the first place?

Side-stepping this equally important question, we will remain in the practical and personal to tackle our more immediate concerns, which is what is to be done about the meaning crisis brought on by exponential technology? Returning to religion and philosophy, we can say a lot about the status of our moral positions as to their relations to what we do and fail to do as human beings, and a lot of it supplants personal meaning with obscurities or abstractions that effectively tell one how to find meaning for themselves- or it just provides one for them. The better thing and necessity we find ourselves with now is to increase our capability to feel meaning, and here we can quickly deduce how A.I will make this extremely difficult.

Let's look at how this technology will extend our abilities; We may come to a point when the arts are no longer about skill but purely about imagination. We are already observing how A.I is capable of generating images, videos,

and text at the mere request of human beings. This is what can be called "prompt technology", as all is required is the imagination to prompt art and work into existence, using these technologies. The thing is, as we derive meaning from adversity brought on by skills-building activities, how can this be achieved, other than by pure decision to alone? Will people choose to return to more analog tools and methods to generate art and work? For practicality, it seems very unlikely that we will return to pre-A.I technology just to retain meaning, because our survival instincts seem to overrule us at every turn when it comes to the possibility of abundance. We want to remain bountiful at the expense of meaning when it comes to survival anyway.

The question then becomes, if we are left free to express ourselves, *what will we even need to express?* How meaningful is it really, to just prompt art and even entertainment from a place where we lack any true life experience? It seems highly meaningful to us to experience life from a place of non-control, adversity, and even suffering. We are somehow designed to thrive through resistance- Therefore the ultimate conclusion one can arrive at when it comes to tech that removes from us these necessities, is that we must expand our abilities to sense meaning, and this means delving into the world of spirituality- whether it retains its current understanding by humanity or not. We are likely to see a revolution in human experience, whereas the sole focus of our existence is to seek, generate, and experience meaning. While it is divorced from any activities and limitations we are used to now, this will take on practices we can not even imagine, and could possibly destroy us (either inadvertently or by choice).

This brings us back to the previous questions of whether we should quantify meaning, give it an identity, and/or rely on achieving it via how we perceive it. Are they better alternatives? Technically, we are already doing these

things through culture and religion anyway but perhaps now we need to re-evaluate our culture and beliefs, and quick.

Meaning, if it can be better understood, is something proportional to the value we place on the purpose we set for ourselves and our view of reality. That said, we might necessarily have to involve ourselves in the creation of community and philosophy as individuals. We may be entering an era where every person must throw themselves into adversity (which is to say, to expose themselves to challenges and novelty) to form their own culture and "religion". We may now need to face the very real eventuality that what we have worked for as a species- which is power and freedom, is upon us and that it is now something more daunting and perhaps less desirable than we had thought. We must build our own worlds rather than live in one, and this can either remove us from connecting with each other or be the perfect thing to connect us beyond what we thought was possible.

Only time will tell, but not long now.

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