

## **Beyond Materialism and Spiritualism**

Realism Through the Lens of Awareness Quotient

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# ABSTRACT

Human civilization has oscillated between two philosophical extremes for centuries. Materialism reduces reality to matter and energy, dismissing or diminishing consciousness as epiphenomenal. Spiritualism elevates consciousness while treating the material world as an illusion or an obstacle. Each position corrects the other's most visible excess while generating its own characteristic pathologies. The oscillation itself (not either pole) is the problem.

This paper argues that Realism, understood as complementary realism, provides the genuinely third position that neither compromise nor synthesis between the two extremes can offer. Drawing on the foundational insight that reality manifests as two irreducible and complementary principles (consciousness and energy, neither primary nor illusory) the paper demonstrates that this understanding resolves the three most persistently misunderstood concepts in human development (ego, duality, and freedom) and reorganizes five domains of civilizational concern (economics, healthcare, the environment, technology, and governance) in ways that neither materialism nor spiritualism can produce.

The Holographic Universe metaphor, grounded in both the ancient Vedic Purnamadah Purnamidam mantra and David Bohm's physics of the implicate order (Bohm, 1980; Talbot, 1991), provides the governing image: each part contains the whole, the whole is expressed in every part, and neither part nor whole is more real than the other. This is not oneness; it is the inexhaustible complementarity of the manifest and the unmanifest, the individual and the universal, consciousness and matter.

The Awareness Quotient framework, established in the foundational paper (Sharma, 2026) and demonstrated in practice in the companion paper (Sharma, 2026), is the practical expression of this philosophical position. AQ measures what materialism cannot account for and what spiritualism cannot ground: the development of consciousness within an embodied, relational, ecological life. Realism is the philosophical home AQ has always implied. This paper makes that home explicit.

# INTRODUCTION

There is a pattern in the history of ideas that receives less attention than it deserves: the tendency of dominant worldviews to generate their own negations. When a philosophical position reaches sufficient dominance (when it has organized not just intellectual discourse but the actual structures of social, economic, and institutional life), its characteristic failures become so pronounced that the corrective movement against it gains the force of moral urgency. The correction swings to the opposite extreme. Over time, the opposite extreme generates its own failures. The correction swings back. The pendulum has been in motion, in one form or another, for as long as organized human civilization has asked fundamental questions about the nature of reality.

In the present moment, two versions of this oscillation are simultaneously active and simultaneously destructive. The first is the long arc of Western modernity: the scientific and industrial revolutions generated a materialist worldview of extraordinary power and productivity, which has also produced ecological collapse, the reduction of human beings to economic units, and the emptying of meaning from a world that has been successfully explained but no longer feels explicable as a home for conscious life. The spiritual response to this (in its many forms, from Eastern philosophy's growing Western presence to New Age spirituality to the contemplative revival) corrects materialism's dismissal of consciousness while often producing its own pathologies: world-denial, spiritual bypassing, the weaponization of transcendence against ethical responsibility, the use of unity-consciousness as justification for ignoring real suffering in a world declared ultimately illusory.

The second oscillation is more intimate and plays out in individual lives rather than historical centuries. People who have absorbed materialist culture's message (that worth is measured by output, that consciousness is brain function, that meaning is whatever you can get before you die) often encounter a point of exhaustion or crisis at which that framework simply cannot hold. The spiritual alternative beckons. Meditation, yoga, non-dual philosophy, and consciousness-centered traditions offer relief and genuine insight. But the full swing to the

spiritualist pole produces its own impasse: the material world insists on its reality through bills, relationships, ecological catastrophe, and the simple fact that embodied life requires food, shelter, and care that no amount of inner transcendence can provide. Back swings the pendulum.

This paper's argument is not that the truth lies midway along the arc. Moderation is not wisdom; it is simply a less extreme version of the same binary. The argument is that the pendulum's entire logic needs to be stepped outside of, that the oscillation itself reveals a prior error that neither extreme nor any point between them can correct. That error is the assumption that consciousness and matter are in competition: that you must choose between taking the inner life seriously and taking the outer world seriously, that spirit and matter are enemies whose tension must be managed rather than complements whose relationship must be understood.

They are not enemies. They are the two irreducible principles whose relationship constitutes the reality we actually inhabit. Reality is either zero (unmanifest, pure potentiality, the silence before any arising) or it is two: consciousness and energy arising together as the complementary structure of any manifestation. There is no one that they both reduce to. There is no competition between them because neither is intelligible without the other. Consciousness without matter has nothing to witness. Matter without consciousness is witnessed by no one. The two arise together and require each other for anything (including this argument) to exist at all.

Realism, as this paper uses the term, is the position that takes both seriously without reducing either to the other. To distinguish it from the word's other uses in philosophy and political theory, it will sometimes appear here as complementary realism; realism that honors the complementarity of the two principles rather than insisting on their competition or their resolution into one. But the simpler word captures the essential stance: a realist looks at what is actually there. What is there is both consciousness and matter, the witness and the world, the inner and the outer. Materialism sees half. Spiritualism sees the other half. Realism sees both and holds that together they are required to understand anything fully.

The Awareness Quotient framework, introduced in the foundational paper of this trilogy (Sharma, 2025), is the practical expression of this position. AQ takes consciousness seriously as a real dimension of human potential that can be cultivated and measured, in contrast to materialism's insistence that only computational performance matters. It grounds that cultivation in the embodied, relational, ecological life that matters, constitutes, against spiritualism's temptation toward transcendence that leaves the world behind. The present paper makes explicit the philosophical architecture on which AQ has always rested. It moves from philosophical grounds to psychological application to civilizational implications, because a framework that claims to matter must demonstrate that it matters all the way down.

The paper proceeds as follows. Part I establishes the philosophical ground: the structure of reality as zero or two, the complementarity of the two principles, and why both materialism and spiritualism are half-truths about a whole they cannot see from their respective positions. Part II applies this framework to three concepts that persistent misunderstanding has distorted (ego, duality, and freedom), showing how each distortion follows directly from choosing one principle over the other, and how the Realist view restores each concept to its proper meaning. Part III extends the analysis to five domains of civilizational organization, demonstrating what each looks like when governed by materialism alone, when the spiritualist response fails to improve it, and what Realism produces instead. Part IV draws the threads together into a vision of the paradigm shift made possible by the AQ framework. A methodological note addresses the particular challenges of a paper that simultaneously makes claims across philosophy, psychology, and civilizational analysis.

# PART I

## The Philosophical Ground — Zero, Or Two

Philosophy has a recurring problem with the number one. Confronted with the apparent multiplicity of the world (the endless variety of things, the distinction between self and other, the difference between consciousness and matter), philosophical traditions repeatedly attempt to resolve that multiplicity by finding the single substance, principle, or ground from which everything else is derived. If everything is ultimately one thing, then the apparent divisions are either appearance (idealism: everything is ultimately mind or consciousness), or epiphenomenon (materialism: everything is ultimately matter and its configurations), or illusion to be transcended (non-dual mysticism: reality is undivided, and the appearance of separation is maya).

These moves share a common structure: multiplicity is a problem to be solved by reduction to unity. This paper argues that the premise is wrong. Multiplicity is not a problem. It is a feature of reality that reflects a true aspect of the structure of existence. When reality manifests (when it emerges from the unmanifest ground of pure potentiality into actual existence), it does so as two: consciousness and energy, the witnessing principle and the manifest field, the inside and the outside of what is. These two are not competing substances requiring reconciliation. They are complementary aspects of a single existence that cannot be adequately grasped from either aspect alone.

### 1.1 The Holographic Principle: The Part Contains the Whole

The most precise image available of the relationship between the two principles (and between every individual and the whole of which they are a part) comes from an unexpected convergence of ancient wisdom and modern physics.

From the Isha Upanishad and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Shanti Mantra known as Purnamadah Purnamidam speaks a formulation that has no satisfying translation but requires slow attention:

*Purnamadah purnamidam, purnat purnamudachyate*

*Purnasya purnamadaya, purnamevavashishyate*

That which is whole, this which is whole. From the whole, the whole emerges. When the whole is taken from the whole, what remains is still whole.

This is not a statement about oneness in the sense that non-dual traditions typically use the term. It is not saying that everything is really the same thing, that distinctions are illusions, or that the many are merely appearances of the one. It is saying something more precise and more surprising: that wholeness is inexhaustible, that it is present at every scale, that taking a whole from a whole leaves both intact. The part is not a fragment of the whole. The part is whole in itself while simultaneously expressing the whole that contains it. Both the part and the whole are real. Neither is more real than the other.

David Bohm, one of the most distinguished theoretical physicists of the twentieth century, arrived at a structurally equivalent insight from the side of quantum mechanics. His concept of the implicate and explicate orders, developed in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980), proposes that beneath the surface level of reality we perceive (the world of apparently separate objects and events, what he calls the explicate order), there is a deeper implicate order in which everything is enfolded within everything else. Bohm's primary metaphor for this is the hologram: when a holographic film is cut in half, each half does not contain half of the image but the complete image, slightly less clearly. Every fragment of a holographic film contains the information of the whole. The information is distributed holographically (enfolded into every region) rather than stored locally in specific places (Bohm, 1980).

Michael Talbot's *The Holographic Universe* (1991) extended Bohm's framework to argue that the universe itself operates on holographic principles: each part enfolds the whole, and the

whole is expressed in every part. This is not mysticism dressed in physics language. Bohm was a serious physicist, a student of Oppenheimer, a colleague of Einstein, whose engagement with Krishnamurti produced decades of rigorous dialogue between scientific and contemplative inquiry. The holographic principle is a genuine contribution to the physics of reality's structure.

The convergence between the Purnamadah mantra and Bohm's physics is no coincidence. It is recognition: two traditions of inquiry, separated by millennia and methodology, pointing at the same feature of reality. The feature is this: wholeness is not a property of the totality that is absent from the parts. It is a property of every level of organization simultaneously. The individual human being contains the pattern of the whole. The whole is expressed in every individual. Neither is reduced to the other, and neither is more real than the other.

This holographic principle will serve as the governing image for this paper's argument. When we discuss the relationship between consciousness and matter, between the individual and the collective, between personal development and civilizational transformation, we are always discussing holographic relationships: each level contains and expresses the whole, without any level dissolving into another.

## **1.2 Zero, or Two: The Structure of Manifestation**

The holographic principle describes how reality is organized once it manifests. But what is the structure of reality at the most fundamental level — the level before manifestation, and the irreducible structure that manifestation takes?

The answer this paper proposes is captured in a formulation deceptively simple in its statement and profound in its implications: reality is either zero or two. Never one.

Zero is the unmanifest: pure potentiality before any arising, the silence before sound, the ground from which everything emerges and to which everything returns. It is nothing in the sense of absence or emptiness; it is the inexhaustible fullness that the Purnamadah mantra describes, the implicate order that Bohm describes, the ground of being that contemplative traditions across cultures point toward when they speak of the source. It is prior to all

distinction, including the distinction between consciousness and matter, because distinction itself is a feature of manifestation.

Two is the structure that manifestation takes: consciousness and energy, the witnessing principle, and the manifest field, that which perceives and that which is perceived. These two arise together. They are not sequential; consciousness does not precede matter or emerge from it, and matter does not precede consciousness or generate it. They co-arise as the two irreducible poles of any manifest existence. Every phenomenon, at every scale, has both an inside (its experiential or conscious dimension) and an outside (its energetic or material dimension). Remove either, and the phenomenon does not merely change; it ceases to be.

This is why there is no one. One would require that either consciousness or matter is the real substance of which the other is a derivative or appearance. This is precisely the move that both materialism and spiritualism make, and it is precisely the move that generates their characteristic failures. Materialism: matter is the one real substance; consciousness is what certain material arrangements do. Spiritualism: consciousness is the one real substance; matter is its projection or illusion. Both are ontologically asymmetric: one principle is privileged, the other diminished. Both produce the distortions that follow from that asymmetry.

Complementary realism holds that the asymmetry is the error. The two principles are complementary in the deepest sense: each requires the other, each is incomplete without the other, and their relationship is one of mutual constitution rather than derivation in either direction. This position has structural parallels in several frameworks that arrived at it independently. The ancient Samkhya system describes reality as constituted by Purusha (pure consciousness, the witness) and Prakriti (primordial energy/matter, the field of manifestation) — two irreducible principles whose relationship is the structure of existence itself. (A full treatment of the Samkhya system and its relationship to the position developed here is the subject of a forthcoming paper; what matters for the present argument is the structural parallel.) The yin-yang symbol in Taoist philosophy captures the same insight: not two opposing forces seeking dominance but two complementary principles, each containing the seed of the other, turning together in endless mutual constitution. Bohm's implicate and explicate orders

describe the same structure in the language of physics: the explicate (manifest, distinct, material) perpetually unfolding from and re-folding into the implicate (potential, unified, prior to distinction), neither order more real than the other.

The practical implication of this structure is significant and immediate: you cannot understand any phenomenon (including a human being, including a civilization) by attending only to its material dimension or only to its conscious dimension. Both are always present. Both are always necessary. Any framework that systematically attends to one while dismissing the other will produce distortions in direct proportion to the degree of its one-sidedness. Materialism and spiritualism are both maximally one-sided. Their distortions are therefore maximal, and they have been producing them for long enough that the evidence is comprehensive.

### **1.3 Why Both Half-Truths are Genuine Truths**

Before proceeding to the failures of materialism and spiritualism, an important acknowledgment is required: both positions see something real. The materialist tradition's insights into physical causation, biological evolution, neural processing, and the material conditions of human life are genuine and irreplaceable. The physical world is real. Bodies matter. Material conditions shape consciousness in ways that idealist frameworks have always underestimated. The neuroscience of meditation, the biology of trauma, the ecological science of interconnection — these are contributions of the materialist tradition of inquiry that the Realist position does not reject but incorporates.

Equally, the spiritualist tradition's insights into the nature of awareness, the reality of subjective experience, the inadequacy of purely material explanations for meaning, value, and the quality of conscious life, are genuine and irreplaceable. The hard problem of consciousness (the question of why any physical process should give rise to subjective experience at all, to the felt quality of what it is like to be a conscious being) remains genuinely hard, as Chalmers (1995) has argued with a precision that materialist philosophy of mind has not succeeded in dissolving (Nagel, 1974). Consciousness is real. The witness is real. The inner life is not a by-product of

neural firing that can in principle be fully explained by third-person descriptions of physical processes.

What makes both positions half-truths is not that they see falsely, but that they see only in part and then mistake the part for the whole. Materialism sees the explicate order with extraordinary clarity and denies the implicate. Spiritualism sees the implicate with extraordinary clarity and dismisses the explicate. Each treats its partial vision as complete, and this treatment (not the vision itself) is the source of the distortions that follow.

The Realist position does not require choosing between these genuine insights. It requires holding both. This is not easy. It is considerably harder than committing to either reduction, because it requires maintaining a relationship with complexity rather than resolving it into simplicity. But it is what reality actually demands of anyone who looks at it honestly. And it is what the Awareness Quotient framework, in its insistence on developing consciousness within embodied, relational, ecological life, has always modeled as practice.

## **1.4 AQ as the Practical Expression of Realism**

The four dimensions of the Awareness Quotient framework map precisely onto the philosophical structure described above. Self-awareness and spiritual awareness are the dimensions oriented toward Purusha: the development of the capacity to witness, the deepening of consciousness's relationship with itself, and the cultivation of the witness who observes without being entirely defined by what is observed. Social awareness and environmental awareness are the dimensions oriented toward Prakriti: the development of consciousness's relationship with the manifest world of other beings and natural systems, the recognition of interconnection, the development of empathy and ecological literacy as forms of engaged knowing.

High AQ is not pure inner development (which would be spiritualism applied to psychology) nor pure outer engagement (which would be materialism applied to human development). It is the integration of both: consciousness fully present to itself AND fully present to the world it

inhabits. This integration is the holographic structure operating at the level of individual human development: the inner and the outer, each containing and expressing the other, neither reducible to the other, their relationship the actual substance of a developed human life.

The philosophical argument of this paper is therefore not separate from the AQ framework but its deepest articulation. AQ is not a framework that merely aligns with a philosophical position — it is what complementary realism looks like when applied to the question of human potential and its development. The paper's remaining sections demonstrate this by showing what happens in three key concepts and five civilizational domains when the position is applied consistently.

## PART II

### Three Concepts Philosophy Keeps Getting Wrong

The philosophical framework in Part I has immediate and specific consequences for our understanding of three concepts that recur in both individual development and civilizational discourse: ego, duality, and freedom. Each of these concepts is systematically misunderstood in opposite directions by materialism and spiritualism, and each misunderstanding produces characteristic pathologies visible in both individual lives and social institutions. The Realist view of each follows directly from the structure described in Part I, and in each case, it resolves the apparent contradiction between the two positions by revealing the prior error they share.

#### 2.1 Ego: The Faculty You Have, Not the Enemy You Are

No concept in contemporary discourse generates more confusion than ego. It is deployed across at least two entirely different, mutually incompatible meanings, often without acknowledgment of the incompatibility. The confusion is not a semantic accident; it reflects the simultaneous operation of materialist and spiritualist frameworks in a culture that has inherited both.

##### The Materialist View: Ego Is Everything

Materialist psychology, descending from Freud's structural model, treats the ego as the executive center of personality: the organized, reality-testing dimension of the self that navigates the external world (Freud, 1923). In contemporary popular usage, this has expanded further: the ego is your identity, your self-concept, the "I" that you are. From the materialist perspective, there is nothing beyond the ego — no witness observing it, no consciousness transcending it, no awareness of which the ego is merely one expression. You are your ego. Strengthening it, protecting it, and expressing it are therefore not just legitimate but necessary. Self-esteem programs, assertiveness training, and personal branding are the cultural institutions of ego-maximization that follow from treating ego as the totality of self.

The pathologies are characteristic and visible. Ego inflation: when ego is everything, making it larger becomes the goal, and the person organized around this goal becomes simultaneously accomplished and insufferable — capable and narcissistic, successful and unable to learn from failure. Existential fragility: if you are your ego, then any challenge to it is an existential threat. Criticism does not merely sting; it threatens annihilation. Others' success does not merely provoke comparison; it diminishes you. The defended ego spends enormous energy on protection that serves no constructive purpose and prevents precisely the learning that development requires. Competitive zero-sum relating: if ego is all there is, then relationships become competitions between separate egos for scarce resources — status, recognition, love, attention. Collaboration is always provisional, always strategic, always underlain by the implicit question of who benefits more.

### **The Spiritualist View: Ego Is the Enemy**

Many contemplative and spiritual traditions teach what seems the opposite: ego is the problem. The separate self is the illusion that must be seen through. Liberation requires ego dissolution — the recognition that the "I" you have been defending and inflating is a construction, not a reality, and that freedom lies in releasing identification with it. This position has genuine insight at its core: the total identification with ego that materialism encourages is a genuine source of suffering, and the practices that loosen that identification (meditation, self-inquiry, contemplative investigation of the nature of the self) produce real relief.

But the prescription that follows from this insight (not loosen ego identification but destroy the ego) produces its own distinct pathologies. Welwood (1984) identified the most common as spiritual bypassing: the use of spiritual concepts to avoid psychological work. If the ego is the enemy, then the unprocessed trauma, the unacknowledged wound, the unconscious pattern that drives behavior from below awareness can all be dismissed as "ego" — as precisely what the spiritual path requires transcending rather than as precisely what requires compassionate attention and integration. Self-negation masquerades as enlightenment. The person who has genuinely dissolved excessive ego identification and the person who has simply suppressed

their needs in the name of spiritual attainment look superficially similar; their inner lives are radically different, and the difference shows in the quality of their relationships and their capacity for genuine presence.

Additionally, the ego has legitimate functions that its destruction would eliminate. Without the ego's boundary-making capacity, there is no distinction between self and other, and therefore no basis for consent, responsibility, or the kind of individual moral agency that ethics requires. Without the ego's capacity to integrate experience into a continuous self, there is no psychological coherence and no stable platform for development. The ego is not the enemy of spiritual development. Total identification with the ego (mistaking the faculty for the totality of what you are) is the obstacle. These are entirely different problems requiring entirely different responses.

### **The Realist View: A Faculty You Have and Are Not**

Complementary realism resolves the confusion by returning to the holographic structure. The ego, understood in Vedantic psychology as *ahamkara* (the individuating principle, the owning function that creates the sense of "I" and "mine"), is the point at which the universal becomes particular (in the Samkhya tradition; for a full treatment, see the forthcoming paper). It is the explicate expression of the implicate whole, the specific address at which consciousness inhabits the material world. As a holographic fragment contains the whole while being genuinely distinct from every other fragment, the individual ego is both genuinely particular and a specific expression of something universal. Both are true simultaneously.

The practical resolution is captured in a formulation that requires holding both poles: "I have an ego, but I am not my ego." You have an ego — a necessary faculty for individuated existence in the world, for identity, boundaries, agency, responsibility, and relationship. Without it, there is no enlightenment but psychosis: the dissolution of the boundary between self and world that sanity requires. AND you are not your ego — you are the awareness in which the ego arises and operates, the witness that can observe the ego's activities, patterns, and defenses without being entirely governed by them. The awareness is prior to the ego and larger than it.

Recognizing this (not as a philosophical position but as a direct experiential discovery available through the practices described in the companion paper) is what creates the space between ego activation and conscious response in which genuine freedom becomes available.

This is neither ego inflation (materialism's error) nor ego destruction (spiritualism's error). It is a conscious relationship with the ego: using it when it serves, observing it when it limits, neither defending it as your ultimate identity nor attacking it as your spiritual enemy. The mature person has a strong, healthy ego and is simultaneously not imprisoned by it, exactly as a healthy hand is both capable and available to be set down when its work is complete.

## **2.2 Duality: The Structure of Existence, Not the Problem to Solve**

Duality (the apparent distinction between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside) is treated by both materialism and spiritualism as something to be explained away. Materialism explains it away by reduction: distinctions are real but ultimately reducible to configurations of the same underlying matter. Spiritualism explains it away by transcendence: distinctions are illusory overlays on an undifferentiated unity. Both explanatory moves share the assumption that duality is problematic, that a fully adequate account of reality would dissolve it. This assumption is wrong.

### **The Materialist View: Separation Is Ultimate**

Materialist ontology treats distinction as the basic feature of reality: objects are fundamentally separate, interacting through external forces, existing independently in different regions of space and time (Bohm, 1980, describes this as the "mechanistic order"). From this perspective, the universe is atomistic at bottom, and apparent connections between separate entities are either explicable as physical forces or as illusions generated by the limited perspective of organisms evolved to detect patterns. Consciousness (the one thing that seems to resist this account most stubbornly) is declared either to be a physical process fully explicable in material terms or to be, in an eliminative materialist fashion, not quite real in the way that neurons and synapses are real.

The social consequences are not merely derivable from this ontology; they are its faithful expression. If separation is ultimate, then zero-sum competition is natural: your gain is my loss, your success diminishes my resources, and the rational strategy for a separate self in a world of separate selves is to maximize its own advantage. Environmental exploitation follows the same logic: if nature is a collection of separate objects rather than a system of which I am a part, then extracting its resources is rational management of external assets rather than self-harm. And the meaninglessness that characterizes late materialist culture is the inevitable conclusion of an ontology in which consciousness is a temporary arrangement of matter in a universe that has no inside: there is no one home to find anything meaningful.

### **The Spiritualist View: Separation Is Illusion**

The spiritualist response identifies duality itself as the problem. The experience of being a distinct self in a world of distinct others is declared to be maya, illusion, the fundamental misapprehension that must be dissolved through spiritual practice. The goal of non-dual traditions in this interpretation is the recognition that separation never existed: everything is Brahman, everything is Consciousness, everything is the One appearing as many. This recognition, when it arrives, dissolves the suffering that separation generates because it dissolves the separation itself.

The insight is genuine. The experience of isolated selfhood (the sense of being a fundamentally separate entity in a world of fundamentally separate others) is genuinely a source of suffering and genuinely susceptible to transformation through contemplative investigation. But the prescription that follows (that the solution is the dissolution of all distinction into undifferentiated unity) produces its own failures. If separation is simply an illusion, then real distinctions that matter (between consent and coercion, between harm and benefit, between one person's experience and another's) have no ultimate basis. Ethics requires that these distinctions be real, not illusory. Justice requires that the harm done to a specific person by a specific action be genuine, not merely an appearance within undivided consciousness. The

spiritualist dissolution of duality, taken to its logical conclusion, produces the ethical paralysis that the companion paper describes as spiritual bypassing at the civilizational scale.

## **The Realist View: The Holographic Both**

Complementary realism refuses both reductions because the holographic principle requires both: the part is genuinely distinct, AND it contains and expresses the whole. Applied to duality: individual existence is genuinely real, AND it is constituted by its connections to everything else. Your experience is genuinely yours, AND it is inseparable from the relationships, natural systems, and consciousness that produced you and continue to sustain you. Both are true simultaneously. Neither is more real than the other.

The Purnamadah mantra makes this precise. The whole is whole. The part is whole. Taking the whole from the whole leaves the whole intact. This is not a statement about the unreality of distinction; it is a statement about the inexhaustible nature of wholeness at every scale. The fragment of holographic film is genuinely a fragment: it has a specific location on the film, specific optical properties, and specific boundaries that distinguish it from other fragments. AND it contains the complete image of the whole. Both are true. Neither cancels the other.

The practical consequences of holding both are significant. Ethics is restored: the distinct person has genuine standing, genuine needs, and genuine rights that cannot be dissolved into collectivity or declared illusory in the name of unity-consciousness. The ethical force of compassion is also restored: we attend to others' suffering not as an unfortunate feature of a world of illusions but as the suffering of beings who are both genuinely distinct and genuinely our kin, holographic expressions of the same whole we express. Environmental ethics is grounded: natural systems are not external resources (materialism) or illusory phenomena (spiritualism) but the Prakriti from which human consciousness emerged and on which it continues to depend genuinely other than us AND genuinely constitutive of us. The relational ethics of presence (the recognition that the other person's experience matters irreducibly) is grounded in exactly this: they are distinct (so their experience is genuinely theirs) and connected (so it is not entirely foreign to ours).

## **2.3 Freedom: Conscious Choice, Not Maximum Options, and Not Desirelessness**

Freedom is perhaps the concept most directly organized around the consciousness-matter complementarity, because freedom is precisely the capacity that arises from the relationship between the two principles: the capacity of consciousness to witness the movement of energy/matter rather than simply being swept along by it, and thereby to act from awareness rather than conditioning.

### **The Materialist View: Freedom as Maximum Choice**

Liberal materialist culture equates freedom with the maximum range of available options and the minimum of external constraint. You are free when you can do whatever you want, buy whatever you choose, express whatever impulse arises, and pursue whatever desire emerges. Freedom is the absence of limitation. More options mean more freedom. The ideal is unlimited choice.

This formulation confuses freedom with optionality, and the confusion produces characteristic pathologies. Schwartz (2004) documents the paradox of choice: beyond a certain threshold, increasing options produces not liberation but anxiety, not satisfaction but regret, not freedom but the paralysis of infinite possibility. More seriously, unlimited choice without wisdom about what matters (without consciousness developed enough to distinguish genuine preference from conditioned response) is not freedom but the enactment of conditioning mistaken for autonomous choice. The person controlled by addiction "freely" chooses the substance. The person shaped by childhood wounds "freely" repeats the patterns those wounds established. The consumer whose desires have been engineered by marketing "freely" pursues the satisfactions that advertising has made to feel like needs. None of this is freedom in any meaningful sense. It is conditioning experienced from the inside as a choice.

## **The Spiritualist View: Freedom as Desirelessness**

Many contemplative traditions teach the opposite: freedom requires the transcendence of desire itself. The Buddhist formulation of *tanha* (craving as the root of suffering) and various yogic teachings on *vairagya* (detachment) converge on the view that liberation requires attaining a state in which desire has been so thoroughly purified that it no longer arises compulsively. Freedom is desirelessness. The free person needs nothing, wants nothing, clings to nothing.

Again, the insight is genuine: much of what passes for desire in ordinary experience is not genuine preference but compulsive craving; automatic responses to stimuli that produce suffering rather than satisfaction, that enslave rather than liberate. The practices that develop the capacity to observe desire without being automatically controlled by it are liberating in the meaningful sense. But the prescriptive conclusion (eliminate desire entirely) is both psychologically impossible and spiritually confused. Trying to eliminate desire through force produces suppression rather than liberation: the desire remains, operating beneath awareness, while the surface presents the performance of desirelessness. And the deeper confusion: if desire were fully eliminated, the person would have no motivation to act at all. All action, including spiritual practice, requires the desire for a different state than the one currently occupied. Total desirelessness is either death or an advanced state of only a few contemplative masters; it is not a practical target for human beings living in the world.

## **The Realist View: Conscious Choice Aligned with Awareness**

Freedom in the Realist sense is neither unlimited optionality nor desirelessness. It is the expression of the witness, of consciousness's capacity for a different relationship with the movement of conditioned energy than simply being identical to it. Pure energy/matter moves by necessity: causes produce effects automatically, conditions generate responses mechanically. Consciousness introduces the possibility of a gap: not the breaking of causal chains (which is impossible) but the witnessing of them, which creates the space in which a conscious response rather than an automatic reaction becomes available. Freedom is what happens in that gap.

This understanding has two inseparable dimensions. The first is negative: freedom from the compulsive enactment of conditioning, from being controlled by patterns established before awareness was present enough to choose, from the reactive repetition of wounds and habits that run on autopilot. This is not the elimination of conditioning (impossible) but the development of enough awareness to observe it, which is sufficient to interrupt its automatic expression and make a different response available. The second dimension is positive: freedom for the conscious pursuit of what matters, for acting from values rather than compulsion, for contributing with intention rather than drifting, for the expression of what the companion paper calls AQ's spiritual awareness dimension: meaning, purpose, the orientation of a life toward what is worth orienting toward.

The practical test of freedom in this sense is not "Can I do whatever I want?" but "Am I doing what I am doing from awareness or from conditioning?" The aware person may have fewer options in the external sense (they may choose not to pursue options that conditioning would automatically select) and be freer in the meaningful sense: more truly the author of their choices, more accurately expressing their actual values, more capable of the kind of creative contribution that emerges when consciousness is not entirely consumed by the management of reactive patterns.

Each of the three concepts examined here (ego, duality, freedom) reveals the same underlying structure: both materialism and spiritualism see a genuine truth and then overextend it into a reduction that distorts everything downstream. The Realist view restores each concept by refusing the reduction: holding both the material and the conscious dimensions of each concept without resolving either into the other. This is not compromise but integration, and it is the integration that AQ practice embodies, domain by domain, in the living of an actual human life.

## PART III

### Civilizational Applications — What Realism Builds

Philosophy earns its authority by illuminating practice, not by perfecting its internal consistency in isolation from the world. The test of the philosophical framework developed in Part I and demonstrated conceptually in Part II is whether it produces different and better outcomes when applied to the actual domains in which human civilization is organized. Five such domains follow. Each is examined through the same structure: how the materialist organization of that domain has produced its characteristic failures; how the spiritualist response has failed to improve matters; and what complementary realism (taking both consciousness and matter seriously as irreducible dimensions of the domain) produces instead.

#### 3.1 Economics: From Output to Flourishing

The modern economic system is among the most successful applications of the materialist framework in human history. It has produced material abundance, technological capability, and standards of living that would have been inconceivable to any previous era. It has also produced ecological destruction at a civilizational scale, chronic meaninglessness in populations of unprecedented material comfort, and an accelerating automation of precisely the cognitive work around which contemporary economic identity is organized. These failures are not accidents of implementation; they are the predictable consequences of an economic framework organized entirely around the Prakriti dimension of human life while treating the Purusha dimension as either irrelevant or reducible to a form of material preference.

Materialist economics measures what energy and matter produce: goods, services, transactions, and GDP. In this framework, human beings are productive units whose value lies in their capacity to generate economic output. Consciousness appears in the economic calculus only insofar as it affects productivity, as motivation, cognitive performance, or consumer preference. The quality of awareness, the development of wisdom, the cultivation of empathy

and ethical reasoning — these are not economic values in the materialist framework unless they can be demonstrated to increase measurable output. The result is an economic system that is extraordinarily effective at optimizing Prakriti while systematically discounting Purusha, and which therefore produces plenty without meaning, efficiency without flourishing, growth without wisdom about what growth is for.

The spiritualist response (voluntary simplicity, withdrawal from economic participation, the rejection of material ambition as spiritually corrosive) contains the genuine insight that endless material accumulation does not produce the flourishing that its pursuit promises. But it has never produced an economic system. Its prescriptions, however valid as individual spiritual practice, cannot feed eight billion people or address the material preconditions for the development of consciousness that poverty systematically destroys. The person struggling for physical survival is not free to develop awareness, not because awareness is unavailable to the poor, but because the cognitive and emotional resources required for sustained contemplative practice are genuinely constrained by material insecurity. Material sufficiency is a precondition for the development that spiritualism rightly identifies as central.

Complementary realism produces an economics that takes both dimensions seriously: material sufficiency as the necessary condition for the development of consciousness, and the development of consciousness as the purpose that material sufficiency is meant to serve. This reorientation has specific implications. Care work (the domain in which human presence, empathic attunement, and emotional intelligence are the primary economic contribution) is currently among the most systematically undervalued categories of human labor precisely because its value is constituted by the Purusha dimension that materialist economics cannot account for (England, 2005). As artificial intelligence assumes responsibility for an expanding range of cognitive and computational tasks, the comparative advantage of human workers will increasingly reside in this very dimension: consciousness, creativity, wisdom, and the quality of presence that no computational system can replicate. An economics organized around this reality would compensate care, creativity, and wisdom at rates that reflect their genuine scarcity

and value, rather than discounting them as unproductive compared to cognitive tasks that machines now perform more efficiently.

Universal basic income, in this framework, is not charity but the economic precondition for AQ development at scale (Yang, 2018; Standing, 2017). When material survival depends entirely on selling labor that competes with machines, the cognitive and emotional resources available for awareness development are systematically consumed by anxiety. Decoupling survival from labor competition frees those resources to develop precisely what cannot be automated. This is not a retreat from productivity but a redefinition of it: productivity measured not only by economic output but by the quality of consciousness that an economy produces and sustains in its participants.

Stakeholder capitalism, as articulated by Mackey and Sisodia (2014), moves in the same direction: from the narrow optimization of shareholder returns (which machines can increasingly optimize more efficiently than human decision-makers) toward the complex balancing of stakeholder well-being that requires exactly the systems awareness, ethical reasoning, and long-term perspective that AQ development cultivates. Graeber's analysis of "bullshit jobs" (2018) (positions that their occupants recognize as contributing nothing of genuine value) identifies the cultural pathology that follows from organizing work around economic metrics that have lost contact with any meaningful account of what human contribution is actually for. Reduced working hours, as the automation of routine cognitive work proceeds, create the temporal space for the development of awareness, creative contribution, and genuine relationships that constitute a human life organized around flourishing rather than output (Graeber, 2018).

### **3.2 Healthcare: The Person Behind the Patient**

Modern medicine's achievements are among the most unambiguous goods that the materialist tradition of inquiry has produced. The germ theory of disease, surgical technique, antibiotics, vaccines, and organ transplantation — these are genuine triumphs of the materialist application of scientific method to the body understood as a biological system. No serious Realist position

dismisses them or proposes replacing them with anything less rigorous. The question is not whether materialist medicine works where it works, but whether its framework is adequate to the full range of human health.

It is not. The body is not only Prakriti. The person who inhabits the body is not only a biological system. The relationship between consciousness and health (between the quality of awareness a person brings to their life and the physiological states that quality of awareness produces) is not a peripheral concern for integrative medicine enthusiasts. It is the central fact that chronic disease epidemiology has established comprehensively. Chronic stress (the sustained activation of the fight-or-flight response in the absence of acute physical threat) drives inflammation, immune dysfunction, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic disorder (Sapolsky, 2004). Stress is not a physical event but a conscious event: it is the relationship between a person's awareness and the situations they inhabit that determines whether those situations elicit chronic stress responses. Mindfulness-based stress reduction, developed by Kabat-Zinn and validated in numerous clinical trials, demonstrates that systematic training in awareness reduces measurable physiological stress markers and improves outcomes across multiple chronic conditions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Goyal et al., 2014). This is not alternative medicine. It is the evidence base for taking the Purusha dimension of health as seriously as the Prakriti dimension.

The spiritualist response to materialist medicine (healing through intention alone, the body as obstacle to transcendence, illness as spiritual failure or karmic consequence) produces its own pathologies in the form of denial, delayed treatment, and the cruelty of implying that suffering people have brought their conditions upon themselves through insufficient spiritual development. Dismissing the genuine efficacy of biological medicine in the name of a holistic framework that has not established equivalent evidence is not Realism but its opposite: a different form of one-sidedness.

Complementary realism in healthcare produces what integrative medicine aspires to but rarely fully achieves: genuine integration of the biological and the conscious dimensions of health, with each modality applied where its evidence base is strongest and where the condition calls for it. Van der Kolk's work on trauma demonstrates that many of the conditions most resistant

to purely pharmacological treatment (post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative conditions, the physical symptoms of unprocessed emotional experience) require approaches that address consciousness and the body simultaneously rather than treating either in isolation (van der Kolk, 2014). Boyle et al. (2009) demonstrated that purpose in life is a measurable predictor of longevity among community-dwelling older adults, establishing what matters subjectively as a variable with objective health consequences. The person is the irreducible pair (consciousness embodied), and healthcare that attends to only one dimension is treating half the patient.

### **3.3 The Environment: Wisdom as Species-Survival Capacity**

The environmental crisis is the place where the failure of materialism without consciousness is most consequential and most legible. We have applied extraordinary computational intelligence to the extraction of natural resources and the optimization of industrial processes and produced, as the cumulative result of those applications, conditions that threaten the ecological stability on which human civilization depends. The intelligence paradox is stark: we are intelligent enough to build the technologies that have destabilized the climate and collapsed biodiversity at a civilizational scale, and apparently not wise enough to stop. The gap between what we can do and what we have understood is the gap between IQ and AQ, between computational power and ecological consciousness.

The materialist framing of the environmental crisis is characteristically materialist: it is a resource management problem, solvable by better technology, more efficient systems, and correct price signals that internalize the costs currently externalized onto the atmosphere and future generations. These are not wrong responses (they are necessary responses), but they are responses organized entirely within the Prakriti framework that generated the problem. They optimize the system. They do not question the values that organized the system in the first place. Geoengineering, carbon capture, efficiency improvements — these apply more of the same instrumental intelligence to the consequences of instrumental intelligence, without addressing the consciousness dimension: the values, the relationship with nature, the sense of what human life is for that produced the extractive orientation in the first place.

The spiritualist response (withdrawal from industrial civilization, the declaration of nature as sacred and therefore beyond human intervention, the romantic regression toward pre-technological subsistence) cannot address a crisis that has already produced climate disruption, extinction cascades, and pollution loads that require both technological and cultural responses. The scale of what has already been set in motion cannot be addressed by individual withdrawal or communal simplicity alone, however genuine those responses may be as personal practices and cultural reorientations.

Complementary realism produces what indigenous ecological traditions have preserved and what systems ecology increasingly validates: a reciprocal relationship with natural systems that takes both the material and the conscious dimensions of that relationship seriously (Kimmerer, 2013). Capra's systems view of life demonstrates that living systems are not collections of separate objects interacting through external forces, but rather integrated webs of relationships in which every element is constituted by its connections (Capra, 1996). This is the scientific articulation of the holographic principle applied to ecology: every organism enfolds information about the whole system; every disruption propagates through the whole; the boundary between organism and environment is a useful abstraction, not an ontological division. Meadows' systems thinking framework provides the practical tools for navigating this understanding: feedback loops, leverage points, and the systemic consequences of interventions that attend only to local optimization without regard for systemic effect (Meadows, 2008).

Environmental consciousness, in the AQ framework, is not sentiment but capacity: the developed ability to perceive natural systems accurately, to understand one's participation in them, and to act with awareness of consequences that extend beyond immediate self-interest in time and space. This is what Realism requires of those who inhabit an ecological crisis: not the transcendence of material reality (spiritualism) nor the pure optimization of material resources (materialism) but the conscious participation in the material world as the Prakriti from which consciousness itself emerged and on which it continues to depend — what the

Purnamadah mantra describes as the inexhaustible wholeness present at every scale, including the ecological scale.

### **3.4 Technology: Serving Consciousness or Hijacking It**

Technology is the most powerful amplification of Prakriti's capabilities available to human beings — the systematic extension of what energy and matter can do through the directed application of human intelligence to manipulate natural forces. The question Realism asks of every technology is not whether it works (most technologies work extraordinarily well at what they are designed to do) but whether what it is designed to do serves the development of consciousness or undermines it. This question of materialism cannot be asked because, within the materialist framework, consciousness is not the relevant variable. It is the question that spiritualism can only answer with rejection. It is the question that Realism makes both possible and necessary.

The attention economy (social media platforms, smartphones, streaming services) is the most consequential contemporary instance of technology designed without this question being asked. These systems are engineered with extraordinary sophistication to maximize a single metric: engagement, defined as time on platform and behavioral return. The variable reward schedules, infinite scroll, notification triggers, and recommendation algorithms that constitute these systems are direct applications of behavioral psychology to the problem of capturing and retaining human attention (Alter, 2017; Harris, 2017). They are extraordinarily effective at what they do. What they do is the systematic fragmentation of sustained attention, the replacement of genuine connection with performative posturing, the substitution of reactive scrolling for the kind of sustained, present, reflective engagement that awareness development requires.

The result is visible in population-level data: rising rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness in precisely the demographic cohorts most intensively engaged with these systems; declining capacity for sustained attention and deep reading; the replacement of inner quiet (the condition in which awareness can most readily deepen) with the perpetual stimulation that makes inner quiet feel unbearable. This is not a side effect of attention economy technology. It

is its mechanism of value creation: the monetization of human attention requires that attention be perpetually captured, perpetually stimulated, and perpetually returned. A population developing deep awareness would be less profitable to these systems. The systems are therefore organized, at their most fundamental level, in opposition to the development of awareness.

Conscious technology design (the application of the Realist question to technology development) is not anti-technology. It is the insistence that technology serve the purpose that consciousness, not computational performance metrics, defines. Attention respect: technology that helps users accomplish what they came for and then gets out of the way rather than engineering reasons for them to stay. Presence support: features that facilitate the kind of sustained, undistracted engagement that both contemplative practice and deep work require. Genuine connection over performative metrics: platforms organized around the quality of exchange rather than the quantity of engagement. Transparency and user agency: systems that users understand and can govern, rather than systems that govern users through optimization they cannot see. Ethical AI design: the insistence, in the development of increasingly capable artificial systems, that human flourishing rather than engagement or profit be the primary optimization target (Jonas, 1984).

This last point merits emphasis. As artificial intelligence systems become more capable of autonomous action in the world, the question of what values guide their operation becomes not merely practical but civilizational. AI systems optimize for what they are given, and if what they are given are the metrics of a culture that has not examined its values, those metrics will reflect conditioned preferences rather than genuine human flourishing. The alignment problem in AI safety is, at its deepest level, an awareness problem: you cannot align artificial intelligence with human values if the humans doing the aligning have not done the work of understanding what their values actually are. This is precisely the work that AQ development describes. This is why the development of human awareness and the responsible development of artificial intelligence are not separate projects.

### 3.5 Governance: A Glimpse of Planetary Civilization

The nation-state system that has organized global politics for the past several centuries is the political expression of materialist philosophy extended across history: sovereign territories, each defined by its distinction from all others, pursuing interests understood primarily as the maximization of material power and security in a zero-sum international arena. This system has produced genuine goods alongside its catastrophes: the rule of law within bounded communities, the protection of particular cultural traditions, and the accountability of states to their citizens through democratic institutions. These goods are real and should not be carelessly discarded in the name of any universalist vision.

But the nation-state system is structurally incapable of addressing the class of problems that do not respect borders — climate change, pandemic, nuclear proliferation, AI governance, and the regulation of global financial systems. These are problems that arise at the level of the whole, while the political architecture for addressing them exists only at the level of the part. The nation-state system lacks the structural capacity to act as a whole on problems that are, by their nature, problems of the whole. This is not a failure of political will; it is a structural mismatch between the governance architecture and the scale of the challenges it must address.

The spiritualist response (cosmopolitan universalism, the declaration that we are all citizens of the world and that national boundaries are obstacles to human solidarity) has the right intuition and the wrong politics. Real distinctions between communities, cultures, histories, and interests cannot be wished away by invoking unity-consciousness. The governance architecture that works for diverse human communities must honor both the unity that makes collective action possible and the distinction that makes community, identity, and particular belonging real. Dissolving distinction into abstract universalism produces not planetary civilization but cultural homogenization and the loss of human diversity, which is itself a form of ecological richness.

Complementary realism suggests a political architecture organized on the same principle as the holographic structure: each part expressing the whole, the whole expressed in every part, without either being dissolved into the other. Genuine recognition of the interdependence that

planetary-scale challenges require (the capacity to act collectively on shared threats) alongside genuine preservation of the distinction that cultural and community particularity requires. This is not a blueprint for specific institutions; those require the kind of sustained political analysis that the forthcoming book *The Transition: From Nation-States to Integrated Planetary Civilization* undertakes at length. What matters for this paper is the structural principle: the same complementarity that resolves ego, duality, and freedom at the individual level, and reorganizes economics, healthcare, the environment, and technology at the civilizational level, also provides the philosophical ground for imagining governance beyond the oscillation between nationalist materialism and cosmopolitan idealism. Planetary civilization, properly understood, is the governance expression of the holographic principle: a whole that is whole in each of its parts, and parts that are each whole while expressing the whole.

## PART IV

### The Paradigm Shift — AQ as Civilizational Architecture

The analysis across three concepts and five domains reveals a consistent pattern. Materialism, in each domain, produces characteristic failures by ignoring the dimension of consciousness. The spiritualist response fails to improve matters by dismissing or transcending the material dimension. And complementary realism (taking both dimensions seriously, holding both without resolving either into the other) produces a third arrangement that neither pole could generate alone. The pattern is not coincidental. It reflects the underlying philosophical structure: when you systematically ignore either the Purusha or the Prakriti dimension of any domain of human life, you produce distortions that the neglected dimension will eventually and inevitably correct — or the neglect will produce failures large enough to force the correction.

The paradigm shift being described here is not a revolution that replaces existing institutions with new ones. Revolutions of that kind have a long history of replacing one form of one-sidedness with another. The shift is more fundamental and, in its way, more demanding: a change in the consciousness that animates institutions, rather than in the institutions themselves. The same economic structures, healthcare systems, educational architectures, governance institutions, and technologies produce radically different outcomes when the people operating them bring comprehensive awareness to their operation because the decisions they make, the priorities they set, the trade-offs they refuse, and the values they actually honor (as opposed to the values they profess) are all functions of the awareness they have developed.

This is the deepest implication of the holographic principle applied to the relationship between personal development and civilizational transformation. Each individual human being, in this view, is a holographic fragment of the civilization they inhabit: containing within themselves the pattern of the whole, expressing the whole through their particular existence, and contributing to the whole through the quality of awareness they bring to every action. A civilization of

people who have not done the work of developing comprehensive awareness will produce the civilization we currently have: extraordinary in its material capability, impoverished in its wisdom, capable of solving technical problems of enormous complexity, and incapable of addressing the simpler but deeper question of what all that capability is for. A civilization of people who have done the work (who bring genuine self-awareness to their professional decisions, genuine empathy to their relationships, genuine ecological consciousness to their consumption, genuine ethical reasoning to their political choices) will produce something different, not because the institutions have changed but because the consciousness operating them has.

This is why AQ is not merely a personal development framework. The foundational paper argued that awareness is the irreplaceable dimension of human potential (Sharma, 2026). The practice paper demonstrated what developing that awareness looks like across the domains of a life (Sharma, 2026). This paper has argued that the philosophical structure supporting the AQ framework (complementary realism and the recognition of consciousness and energy as the two irreducible principles of manifest reality) also provides the philosophical basis for reimagining how human civilization organizes itself across all domains. Personal development and civilizational transformation are the same project at different scales. The quality of collective life is a function of the quality of collective consciousness. And collective consciousness is not an abstraction; it is the sum of the individual awareness that each person either develops or fails to develop, multiplied holographically through every institution, relationship, and decision that influences their development.

The urgency of this project is not rhetorical. The environmental crisis, the AI transition, and the governance failures of the nation-state system in the face of planetary challenges are not distant concerns. They are the present-tense consequences of generations of civilizational development that have maximized Prakriti while neglecting Purusha. Correcting that neglect cannot wait for the perfect institutional conditions or the right political leadership. It begins wherever an individual decides to take their own consciousness seriously; to develop awareness rather than simply deploy intelligence, to become a Realist in the full sense of the word:

someone who sees both dimensions of what is actually there and responds to both with honesty, care, and sustained attention.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This paper makes claims across at least three distinct domains of inquiry: philosophy (concerning the nature of consciousness and matter), applied psychology (concerning ego, duality, and freedom), and civilizational analysis (concerning economics, healthcare, the environment, technology, and governance). Each domain has its own standards of evidence, its own scholarly traditions, and its own criteria for what constitutes a valid argument. A paper that moves across all three simultaneously requires explicit methodological justification.

The philosophical claims (particularly the claim that reality is either zero or two, and that consciousness and energy are irreducible complementary principles) are presented as a philosophical position to be engaged with on its merits, not as a settled consensus. The position draws on ancient Vedantic frameworks (particularly what will be developed as a forthcoming paper on Samkhya philosophy and the author's interpretive contribution to that tradition), on the physics of Bohm's implicate and explicate orders, and on the convergences between these and other frameworks that the paper identifies. That multiple independent traditions of inquiry converge on structural parallels is offered as evidence for the position's coherence, not as proof of its truth. The invitation is a philosophical engagement.

The applied psychology claims (concerning the materialist and spiritualist misunderstandings of ego, duality, and freedom) draw on established psychological literature where relevant (Freud, 1923; Welwood, 1984; Schwartz, 2004), on contemplative traditions cited with appropriate acknowledgment of their diversity, and on phenomenological analysis of the patterns that follow from each position. These claims are more empirically grounded than the philosophical claims but less formally validated than a full systematic review would require. They are offered as analytically rigorous phenomenology rather than experimental psychology.

The civilizational claims draw on empirical literature in each domain (economic research, health outcomes data, ecological science, and technology effects research) alongside the philosophical and phenomenological analysis. The empirical evidence is cited specifically and accurately; the

interpretive framework through which that evidence is organized is the complementary realist position developed in Part I. A reader who accepts the empirical evidence but rejects the philosophical framework will read the civilizational analysis differently from one who accepts both. This is acknowledged and welcomed: the paper's contribution is not the empirical findings themselves but the integrative framework that makes their connections visible.

The tradition of independent scholarship (which has produced foundational contributions to evolutionary biology, genetics, systems theory, and consciousness studies) demonstrates that institutional affiliation is neither necessary nor sufficient for intellectual rigor. The relevant criteria are the quality of reasoning, the honesty in handling evidence, the transparency of the methodology, and the coherence of the contribution. These criteria are applied here with the seriousness the project demands.

## CONCLUSION

The pendulum image with which this paper began is worth returning to. Materialism has organized much of modern civilization around the optimization of Prakriti: the manifest, the measurable, the material. It has produced extraordinary achievements and produced, through the systematic neglect of the Purusha dimension, the crises that currently define our civilizational moment. Spiritualism has offered consciousness as the corrective (the witness, the inner life, the transcendent) and produced its own pathologies through the systematic dismissal of Prakriti, of the material conditions without which consciousness cannot develop, of the embodied, relational, ecological reality that no amount of inner transcendence can make irrelevant.

The path forward is not the midpoint of the arc. It is not a careful calibration of how much materialism and how much spiritualism to apply. That calculation still accepts the terms of the binary — it still assumes that the two positions are exhaustive of the possibilities, that the real choice is only about proportion. Complementary realism refuses those terms. It begins with a different premise: that the two principles whose relationship has been organized as competition are, in reality, complementary; that their relationship is the actual structure of existence; and that a framework adequate to that structure will be different from any arrangement of the two positions it transcends.

The ancient Vedic mantra says it first and most precisely: purnamadah purnamidam. That which is whole, this which is whole. From the whole, the whole emerges. When the whole is taken from the whole, what remains is whole. Bohm's physics says it in the language of the implicate order: every fragment of the holographic film contains the complete image. Every part enfolds the whole. The whole is present at every scale, in every expression, without being diminished by any of them. This is the philosophical image that Realism requires and that neither materialism nor spiritualism can generate because both, in their different ways, require that the one be more real than the other, and this requirement is precisely what the holographic principle refutes.

The three papers that constitute this trilogy have argued a single claim at three different scales. The foundational AQ paper argues that consciousness (not computational intelligence) is the irreplaceable dimension of human potential, the capacity that machines cannot replicate and that the AI age has made urgently necessary to develop (Sharma, 2026). The practice paper demonstrates what developing that consciousness looks like in the specific domains of a human life: in personal practice, in professional conduct, in how we teach, in how we collaborate with AI, and in how we inhabit our relationships (Sharma, 2026). This paper has argued the deepest version of the same claim: that consciousness is not just a human capacity to be developed but a fundamental principle of reality to be honored — that the universe itself is organized around the relationship between awareness and matter, and that civilizations organized in ignorance of that relationship will produce what ours has produced, while civilizations that take it seriously will produce something different.

Realism (complementary realism) is not a middle position. It is a higher-order position: above the question that divides materialism from spiritualism, rather than between them. It does not ask “How much consciousness, how much matter?” It asks, with genuine curiosity and without prior commitment to either reduction: “What is actually here?” The answer is both: the two principles in relationship, the inside and outside of a single existence, the witness and the world it inhabits — the whole present in the part, the part expressing the whole, neither diminishing the other, neither more real, both required.

A Realist sees this. It is what AQ, at its philosophical depth, has always been pointing toward, and it is what a civilization organized around this understanding (rather than around either of the half-truths that have governed it until now) would look like from the inside: not perfect, not without conflict, not free from the material constraints that embodied existence entails, but genuinely oriented toward the full reality of what we are: conscious matter, embodied awareness, the whole present in every part and awake to itself.

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