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The Asymmetry of Becoming Skill, Uncertainty, and the Fragmentation of Value in the Age of AI

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Abstract

This paper examines the emerging asymmetry at the heart of contemporary professional life, where individuals are compelled to navigate between two conflicting paradigms of value: one grounded in traditional notions of deep, execution-based expertise, and another centered on the ability to structure, direct, and validate outputs generated by artificial intelligence. As hiring practices diverge, no stable signal remains to indicate which form of competence will be recognized, producing a condition in which the cost of strategic misalignment is disproportionately high. Rather than framing this tension as a technological disruption alone, the paper interprets it as a philosophical crisis of *becoming* where the individual is no longer certain which version of themselves to cultivate. The result is not merely a shift in labor expectations, but a deeper epistemic instability in how skill, effort, and legitimacy are defined. Within this unresolved landscape, the individual confronts an uneven struggle: not against difficulty, but against indeterminacy itself.

Keywords : artificial intelligence, epistemic uncertainty, professional identity, value fragmentation, skill asymmetry, ethical recognition

I. Introduction: The Fracture in the Mirror

The contemporary professional finds themselves before a fractured mirror. In one reflection, they see the figure they have been trained to become: skilled in execution, fluent in technique, capable of producing through sustained effort and accumulated knowledge. In another, they glimpse a different figure entirely: one who orchestrates rather than executes, who validates rather than creates, who prompts artificial systems toward outputs they could not produce alone. The mirror does not simply show two paths it shows two incompatible ontologies of professional being. This is not the familiar narrative of technological displacement, where machines render certain skills obsolete while creating demand for others. That story presumes a sequential logic: old competencies fade, new ones emerge, and the rational actor adapts accordingly. What we confront instead is a condition of *simultaneous incompatibility* a situation where both paradigms persist, neither dominant, and no reliable mechanism exists to signal which will be recognized as legitimate within any given institutional context. The individual must choose which version of themselves to cultivate, yet this

choice must be made in darkness, without knowledge of which criterion will be applied when their competence is evaluated.

This paper argues that the current moment represents not merely a technological transition, but a profound destabilization in the epistemic foundations of professional identity. The crisis is not one of *what to know*, but of *what it means to know*, and more fundamentally, *what it means to become*. When the standards by which skill is recognized become multiple, contradictory, and unpredictably applied, the individual faces not a challenge of adaptation, but an asymmetry of becoming a condition in which the very act of self-cultivation becomes a high-stakes wager against an unknowable future.

II. The Topology of Fragmented Value

To understand the depth of this fragmentation, we must first map the terrain on which it unfolds. The professional landscape has split into what might be termed *divergent evaluation regimes* distinct systems of recognition that do not simply coexist but actively contradict one another in their fundamental premises about what constitutes valuable competence.

The Execution Paradigm remains rooted in modernist assumptions about mastery. Here, value inheres in the capacity to perform complex tasks through internalized expertise. The professional is recognized for their ability to *do*: to write code without external assistance, to draft legal documents from deep knowledge of precedent, to diagnose medical conditions through accumulated clinical experience. This paradigm privileges depth over breadth, tacit knowledge over explicit instruction, and the slow accumulation of capability through deliberate practice. It assumes that legitimate expertise cannot be substituted, that quality emerges from sustained engagement with a domain, and that the professional's value lies precisely in their irreplaceability.

The Orchestration Paradigm emerges from a fundamentally different set of premises. Here, value lies not in execution but in *meta-competence*: the ability to formulate problems, structure inquiries, evaluate outputs, and synthesize results generated by artificial systems. The professional is recognized for their capacity to *direct*: to prompt effectively, to recognize quality, to validate correctness, to integrate AI-generated components into coherent wholes. This paradigm privileges breadth over depth, explicit knowledge over tacit intuition, and the rapid deployment of distributed intelligence over slow personal accumulation. It assumes that legitimate expertise lies in knowing *what to request* rather than *how to produce*, that quality emerges from effective coordination rather than direct creation, and that the professional's value lies precisely in their ability to leverage what they themselves cannot do.

These are not simply different skill sets they represent incompatible theories of professional being. The execution paradigm valorizes *interiority*: the professional as a vessel of accumulated knowledge, their mind a repository of internalized patterns and procedures. The orchestration paradigm valorizes *exteriority*:

the professional as a node in a distributed system, their value residing in their ability to activate and coordinate resources beyond themselves. Yet the individual does not face a clean choice between these paradigms. Both persist simultaneously within the same labor market, sometimes within the same organization, occasionally within the same hiring decision. One position demands demonstration of unassisted technical depth; another seeks evidence of effective AI utilization. One interview panel values the candidate who has “done the work themselves”; another prizes the candidate who “knows how to get results efficiently.” The rational actor cannot simply choose the paradigm with greater market value, because there exists no stable signal indicating which paradigm any given evaluator will apply.

This is the condition I term *value fragmentation* : not the replacement of one standard by another, but the multiplication of mutually exclusive standards without any meta-standard to adjudicate between them. The professional must invest in becoming, yet the very criteria by which their becoming will be judged remain radically indeterminate.

III. The Asymmetry of Strategic Investment

The indeterminacy described above would be merely frustrating if the costs of misalignment were symmetric. But they are not. The individual who invests in deep execution-based expertise pays a profound opportunity cost if their evaluator values orchestration: years of study and practice rendered irrelevant by a hiring manager who seeks AI-literacy instead. Conversely, the individual who develops primarily orchestration skills faces equally severe consequences if their evaluator privileges traditional depth: their capacity to prompt effectively dismissed as “not really knowing” the domain.

Yet this apparent symmetry conceals a deeper asymmetry. The two forms of investment are not equivalent in their temporal structure, their reversibility, or their epistemic character.

Temporal Asymmetry: Execution-based expertise requires sustained, focused investment over extended periods. The accumulation of tacit knowledge, the development of intuitive judgment, the cultivation of deep domain fluency these cannot be compressed. They represent a form of slow capital accumulation, where returns compound gradually but cannot be accelerated beyond certain biological and cognitive limits. Orchestration skills, by contrast, can be acquired more rapidly. Learning to prompt effectively, to evaluate AI outputs, to structure requests for optimal results these are meta-skills that can be developed in compressed timeframes, precisely because they do not require the internalization of domain-specific complexity.

This temporal asymmetry creates a *strategic trap*. The individual who chooses the execution path commits to a long trajectory that cannot easily be abandoned or redirected if the paradigm shifts. The individual who chooses the orchestration path retains greater flexibility but may find themselves dismissed

as lacking “real” expertise if the paradigm does not shift as anticipated. The asymmetry lies not in difficulty but in *irreversibility*: years invested in deep expertise cannot be easily converted into orchestration capability, but orchestration capability can potentially be augmented with deeper knowledge if time and resources permit.

Epistemic Asymmetry: More fundamentally, the two paradigms rest on different theories of knowledge itself. Execution-based expertise embodies a *internalist* epistemology: knowledge resides in the knower, competence manifests as interior capability, and skill is proven through demonstration of unassisted performance. This is the epistemology of the craftsman, the virtuoso, the master practitioner. Orchestration-based competence embodies an *externalist* epistemology: knowledge is distributed across systems, competence manifests as effective coordination, and skill is proven through the quality of outputs regardless of their source. This is the epistemology of the conductor, the curator, the systems thinker.

These epistemic frameworks are not merely different they are incommensurable in their criteria for what counts as genuine knowing. An internalist evaluator will view orchestration as “mere prompting,” lacking true understanding. An externalist evaluator will view execution-focus as inefficient fetishization of process over outcome. Each sees the other as missing the point entirely.

The individual caught between these frameworks faces not merely a choice between skill sets, but a choice between epistemologies between fundamentally different theories of what it means to know and to be competent. And because these theories are incommensurable, there exists no neutral ground from which to evaluate which investment strategy is rational. The choice itself is underdetermined by the available evidence. This is the core of the asymmetry: the individual must make an irreversible, high-stakes investment in one form of becoming, yet possesses no rational basis for preferring one over the other. The struggle is not against difficulty but against the impossibility of rational choice under radical uncertainty.

IV. The Ethical Topology of Institutional Preference

The fragmentation described thus far might be dismissed as a mere coordination problem a temporary market inefficiency that will resolve as standards stabilize. But this framing evades the deeper ethical question: *by what right do evaluating institutions maintain contradictory and arbitrary standards, thereby imposing the costs of indeterminacy upon individuals?*

This question can be approached from three philosophical registers, each revealing a different dimension of the ethical problematic.

The Question of Procedural Justice

From the standpoint of liberal proceduralism, the multiplicity of evaluation standards appears to violate basic norms of fairness. If competence is to be rewarded, and if individuals are to invest rationally in their own development, then the criteria by which competence is recognized must be knowable in advance. The principle of *like cases treated alike* requires not merely that similar candidates be evaluated consistently, but that the standards themselves be coherently related to the actual demands of the role.

When an institution rejects a candidate who has developed orchestration skills in favor of one with execution depth not because the role demands execution, but because the evaluator personally prefers that mode of work we confront a violation of procedural rationality. The decision is arbitrary in the technical sense: it lacks a principled connection between the criterion applied and the institutional purpose served. The preference is *aesthetic* rather than *functional*, rooted in the evaluator's subjective disposition toward certain forms of work rather than in any objective requirement of the position. Yet the institution will argue that it possesses the prerogative to define what it values. This is the logic of institutional autonomy: organizations have the right to establish their own criteria, to privilege certain forms of competence over others, to maintain what they consider to be standards of excellence. But this autonomy is not absolute. It becomes ethically problematic when:

1. The stated criteria bear no rational relationship to performance requirements
2. The criteria shift unpredictably, punishing those who invested in good faith
3. The institution is aware of the disconnect but maintains the preference nonetheless

When these conditions obtain, institutional preference becomes institutional caprice a form of power exercised without justification, imposing costs on individuals without serving any coherent organizational purpose.

The Question of Epistemic Authority

At a deeper level, the conflict between execution and orchestration paradigms raises questions about *epistemic authority*: who has the right to define what counts as genuine expertise?

The traditional answer grounds authority in demonstrated mastery: those who have achieved deep competence within a domain possess the epistemic standing to evaluate others' competence. But this answer assumes a stable relationship between past and future conditions of practice. When technological change introduces new modes of competence, the question arises: do those trained under the old paradigm retain authority to judge the new, or does their very formation within the old paradigm disqualify them from recognizing the legitimacy of the

new ? This is not merely a sociological question about generational conflict. It strikes at the philosophical problem of *epistemic conservatism*: the tendency of established paradigms to defend themselves against alternatives not through rational argument but through the exercise of gatekeeping power. When an evaluator dismisses AI-enhanced work as “not real expertise,” they may be defending not an objective standard but a particular theory of knowledge that privileges their own form of formation.

Yet the reverse holds equally. When an evaluator dismisses execution-based depth as “obsolete,” they may be projecting a technological determinism that forecloses the possibility that certain forms of understanding genuinely require sustained, unassisted engagement with complexity. The ethical problem is that neither position can be adjudicated through appeal to a neutral criterion. Each evaluator operates within an epistemic framework that defines what counts as evidence of competence, and these frameworks themselves are what is at stake. The individual seeking recognition is caught in a performative contradiction: to be recognized, they must demonstrate competence according to standards that they have no way of knowing in advance, and which may be incommensurable with the standards they have internalized.

The Question of Truthfulness in Recognition

Perhaps the deepest ethical issue concerns the relationship between institutional practice and reality itself. When an organization maintains hiring criteria that are disconnected from the actual conditions of successful performance, it creates what might be termed a *recognition gap*: a systematic disconnect between what the institution claims to value and what actually generates value within the role. This gap produces a peculiar form of institutional dishonesty. The organization does not explicitly lie, but it maintains fictions: that unassisted execution is necessary when AI-augmented work would suffice; that orchestration skills are sufficient when deep domain knowledge remains essential; that either paradigm alone is adequate when the role actually requires some synthesis of both.

These fictions would be harmless if they affected only the organization’s own efficiency. But they impose real costs on individuals who must navigate the gap between stated criteria and actual requirements. The candidate who develops orchestration skills in good faith, believing them to be valued, discovers retroactively that the evaluator “really” wanted to see evidence of unassisted depth. The candidate who invests in deep execution, trusting in its continued relevance, finds their expertise dismissed as inefficient when a faster orchestration approach would have been preferred.

The ethical violation lies not in the organization’s freedom to prefer one mode over another, but in its *knowing maintenance of ambiguity*. When an institution is aware that its stated criteria diverge from its actual preferences, or when it is aware that different evaluators within the same organization apply contradictory standards, yet takes no steps to clarify or reconcile these contradictions then it

has abdicated its responsibility toward those who must navigate its evaluation regime.

When standards lose their stability, dishonesty does not become more truthful rather, truthfulness itself becomes less clear. The danger lies not in the possibility that individuals might mislead the system, but in the system's incapacity to define what honesty means in the first place.

V. The Performative Contradiction of Adaptive Presentation

The instability of evaluation criteria creates pressure toward a particular form of strategic behavior: *adaptive misrepresentation*. Faced with unknowable and potentially contradictory standards, the rational actor is incentivized to present different versions of themselves depending on perceived cues about evaluator preferences emphasizing execution depth for traditional panels, highlighting orchestration efficiency for progressive ones, obscuring AI usage when it might be stigmatized, advertising it when it might be valued.

This adaptive strategy appears pragmatically rational: if the system lacks coherent standards, why shouldn't the individual adapt their presentation to maximize recognition? Yet this response generates its own ethical complications.

The Distinction Between Framing and Fabrication

We must first distinguish between two forms of adaptive presentation:

Reframing involves presenting genuine capabilities in different interpretive frames describing the same work as "careful manual verification" to one audience and "efficient AI oversight" to another, highlighting different aspects of one's actual competence depending on what the evaluator is likely to value. This is not dishonesty but *strategic translation*: rendering one's authentic capabilities legible within different evaluative languages.

Fabrication involves claiming capabilities one does not possess stating that one never uses AI when in fact one relies on it extensively, or claiming deep execution skills that have actually been outsourced to artificial systems. This is straightforward dishonesty: misrepresenting the nature and source of one's competence.

The ethical line between these modes seems clear in principle: reframing is legitimate, fabrication is not. But in practice, the distinction becomes unstable precisely because the underlying reality has become ambiguous. When orchestration *is* a form of competence, is emphasizing execution while de-emphasizing orchestration merely strategic framing, or is it a form of concealment that crosses into dishonesty? When the question "did you do this yourself?" lacks a clear

referent because “doing it yourself” with AI assistance is now a coherent mode of work how can the answer be straightforwardly truthful or false ?

The System-Level Effect

More troubling than individual instances of adaptive behavior is the system-level effect of widespread adaptation. When enough individuals engage in strategic presentation, the evaluation system loses its informational content. Evaluators can no longer distinguish between those who genuinely possess deep execution skills and those who are simply skilled at presenting themselves as such. They can no longer identify those who effectively leverage AI from those who merely claim to do so. The signals become noise.

This creates a *semantic collapse* in the labor market: the very categories through which competence is communicated lose their meaning because they no longer reliably track underlying reality. The organization that insists on “no AI” attracts candidates who have learned to conceal their usage, not candidates who actually work without AI. The organization that demands “AI proficiency” attracts candidates who have learned the terminology without developing genuine orchestration skills. The irony is that institutional inflexibility produces the very dishonesty it seeks to avoid. By maintaining rigid and contradictory standards in the face of changing realities, organizations incentivize the strategic opacity that makes genuine evaluation impossible.

The Impossible Demand for Authenticity

At the deepest level, the pressure toward adaptive presentation reveals a performative contradiction in the very concept of authentic professional identity under conditions of fragmented value. The individual is simultaneously told:

- “Be yourself present your genuine capabilities”
- “Adapt to market demands be what employers want”
- “Develop deep expertise become truly skilled”
- “Be efficient use the best available tools”
- “Show integrity be honest about your methods”
- “Be strategic maximize your chances”

These injunctions cannot all be satisfied simultaneously when the standards themselves are contradictory. The demand for authenticity becomes impossible precisely because there exists no stable *authentic self* to present only provisional, strategic constructions that must be continually adjusted in response to perceived evaluator preferences. This is not a failure of individual character but a structural feature of the current moment. When the criteria by which the self is to be recognized become multiple and contradictory, authenticity itself becomes indeterminate. The individual cannot simply “be honest” because the categories through which honesty would be expressed lack stable meaning.

VI. The Ontological Stakes: Becoming Without Telos

The fragmentation of value and the indeterminacy of recognition point toward a deeper philosophical problem: the crisis of *telos* in professional development. Classical conceptions of skill acquisition presume a *developmental trajectory* a path from novice to expert, from apprentice to master, from student to practitioner. This trajectory has structure, direction, and endpoint. One becomes skilled by following the path, and the path itself is knowable because those who have traveled it before can mark the way. But when the standards of mastery fragment, when execution and orchestration emerge as incompatible paradigms, when no stable signal indicates which form of competence will be recognized then the very structure of becoming collapses. The individual faces not a difficult path but an impossible one: *becoming without telos*, development without destination, investment without knowledge of what counts as arrival.

The Temporal Structure of Skilled Becoming

Traditional apprenticeship embodies a particular temporal structure. The novice begins in a state of acknowledged incompetence, gradually accumulates capability through sustained practice, receives feedback that calibrates their development, and eventually achieves recognition as competent within the community of practice. This structure presumes:

1. **Coherent standards** that define what mastery looks like
2. **Stable transmission** of knowledge from those who know to those learning
3. **Delayed gratification** justified by the eventual attainment of recognized competence
4. **Social recognition** that validates the investment once mastery is achieved

Each of these conditions has become unstable. Standards are fragmented rather than coherent. Transmission is complicated when the transmitters themselves were formed under obsolete conditions. Delayed gratification becomes irrational when the future value of present investment is radically uncertain. Social recognition becomes unreliable when different communities apply contradictory criteria. The result is not merely that the path to mastery becomes more difficult, but that the *concept of mastery itself* becomes incoherent. What would it mean to be a master developer when half the community insists mastery requires unassisted fluency while the other half insists it requires effective AI orchestration? The title “master” no longer denotes a stable achievement but marks only the speaker’s allegiance to one paradigm or the other.

The Violence of Indeterminate Futures

This collapse of developmental telos exerts a particular form of violence on the individual. Not the violence of difficulty most forms of skilled becoming are difficult but the violence of *groundlessness*: being required to invest without

knowledge of what one is investing toward, to choose without criteria for choice, to become without confidence that any particular form of becoming will be recognized.

This is what I earlier termed the *asymmetry of becoming*: the individual bears the full cost and risk of developmental investment, yet possesses no rational basis for determining which investment to make. The traditional social contract of apprenticeship “invest now, be recognized later” breaks down when there exists no stable “later” toward which to invest. The individual experiences this breakdown not as freedom but as *vertigo*. Without telos, development loses its structure. Practice becomes arbitrary: why drill execution skills if orchestration will be valued? Why develop orchestration if depth will be required? Every hour invested in one direction is an hour not invested in the other, yet no principle exists to guide the allocation.

This vertigo is phenomenologically distinct from ordinary uncertainty. In ordinary uncertainty, one faces unknown odds but stable outcomes: the entrepreneur does not know if their venture will succeed, but they know what success would look like. In the current condition, even the *outcomes themselves* are indeterminate: success is not merely improbable but undefined, because the criteria by which success would be recognized shift between evaluation contexts.

The Fragmentation of Professional Subjectivity

At the most fundamental level, the crisis of telos produces a fragmentation of professional subjectivity itself. The individual cannot stably answer the question “what am I becoming?” because that question presumes a coherent developmental trajectory toward a recognized form of competence.

Instead, the professional subjectivity splits into multiple provisional identities :

- The execution-focused practitioner who might be valued or dismissed
- The orchestration-focused strategist who might be recognized or rejected

- The hybrid figure attempting both, thereby achieving neither fully
- The adaptive performer who presents differently in different contexts

None of these is the “true self” each is a strategic construction, a bet placed on an unknowable future. The individual’s relationship to their own becoming becomes ironic, distanced, provisional. They cannot fully commit to any developmental path because such commitment would require confidence in its eventual recognition confidence that the current conditions do not warrant. This fragmentation is not a personal failing but a structural feature of the current moment. When value fragments, subjectivity fragments with it. The coherent professional identity presumes a coherent field of recognition, and that field has dissolved.

VII. Toward a Provisional Ethics

If the analysis presented thus far is correct, we face a situation without easy resolution. The fragmentation of value, the indeterminacy of recognition, the collapse of developmental telos these are not problems that can be solved through better information, clearer signaling, or more efficient matching. They are structural features of a transitional moment in which old and new paradigms coexist without any meta-paradigm to adjudicate between them. Yet this very situation demands ethical response. If we cannot resolve the fragmentation, we can at least articulate provisional principles for navigating it both for individuals seeking to develop their capabilities and for institutions responsible for evaluating them.

Principles for Individuals

Acknowledge the Asymmetry: The first step is to recognize that you face not merely a difficult choice but an underdetermined one. No amount of additional information will reveal the “correct” developmental path, because correctness itself is context-dependent and that context is unknowable in advance. This recognition does not resolve the dilemma but clarifies its nature: you are not failing to discern the right answer; there is no right answer to discern.

Cultivate Meta-Competence: In the absence of stable object-level skills, invest in meta-level capabilities that transcend the execution/orchestration divide: judgment, taste, systematic thinking, quality recognition, domain understanding, effective communication. These capacities retain value across paradigmatic shifts because they concern not what tools you use but how well you use whatever tools are available.

Resist Totalization: Do not allow either paradigm to fully colonize your self-understanding. The execution purist who refuses all AI augmentation and the orchestration enthusiast who abandons all deep learning both commit the same error: mistaking a provisional strategic choice for a complete identity. Maintain an ironic distance from your own strategic positioning be willing to adapt without losing the capacity for critical reflection on that very adaptation.

Demand Epistemic Honesty from Institutions: You have the right to know the criteria by which you will be evaluated, even if those criteria are themselves controversial or in flux. When an organization maintains ambiguous or contradictory standards, you are entitled to demand clarification not because they must adopt any particular standard, but because you deserve to know what standard is actually being applied. Epistemic honesty does not require agreement, but it does require transparency.

Principles for Institutions

Acknowledge Your Own Uncertainty: Organizations often present their preferences as objective requirements when they are in fact aesthetic choices

rooted in particular theories of work. Be explicit about this: if you prefer candidates with deep execution skills, acknowledge that this is a preference, not a universal standard. If you value orchestration capability, own that judgment rather than presenting it as self-evident. Epistemic honesty begins with admitting that your standards are not neutral facts but situated choices.

Separate Function from Preference: Distinguish between what the role functionally requires and what your organization culturally prefers. If a position can be performed effectively through AI-augmented work but your culture values unassisted execution, acknowledge this distinction. Candidates deserve to know whether they are being evaluated against performance requirements or cultural fit these are different forms of assessment with different implications for fairness.

Stabilize Where Possible, Clarify Where Not: If your organization can achieve consensus on evaluation standards, codify them and communicate them clearly. If consensus is impossible if different teams or evaluators genuinely hold incompatible views then acknowledge this internal fragmentation openly rather than presenting a false unity. The candidate who knows that different panels will apply different standards can at least prepare accordingly; the candidate misled by apparent consensus has no such opportunity.

Recognize Provisional Authority: Those who evaluate candidates' competence should acknowledge the provisional nature of their own epistemic authority. If you were trained under a paradigm that AI is now disrupting, your expertise gives you insight into certain forms of competence but may blind you to others. Epistemic humility is not relativism you can maintain your standards while acknowledging that they reflect a particular formation rather than universal truth.

Create Transitional Structures: Rather than forcing a binary choice between execution and orchestration paradigms, develop evaluation frameworks that can recognize hybrid competencies. Can candidates demonstrate both domain understanding and effective tool usage? Can they show judgment about when to rely on AI and when to work unassisted? Can they articulate their own strategic positioning within the paradigmatic divide? These more nuanced assessments better reflect the actual complexity of contemporary work.

A Modest Proposal

Perhaps most importantly, both individuals and institutions should resist the temptation toward premature resolution. The current fragmentation is uncomfortable, inefficient, and anxiety-producing but it may also be epistemically honest. We genuinely do not yet know how AI will reshape professional competence, which skills will prove enduringly valuable, what balance between execution and orchestration will prove optimal. The multiplicity of standards, frustrating as it is, reflects genuine uncertainty about a future that has not yet crystallized.

The ethical response is not to prematurely force consensus around either

paradigm, but to *sustain the tension* while working to make it more navigable. This means :

- Individuals developing portfolio careers that hedge across paradigms
- Organizations experimenting with different evaluation approaches
- Both parties communicating more honestly about uncertainty
- Professional communities fostering ongoing dialogue about evolving standards
- Educational institutions preparing students for indeterminacy itself as a condition to be navigated

The goal is not to eliminate the asymmetry of becoming that may prove impossible in transitional moments but to distribute its costs more equitably and to cultivate the intellectual and ethical resources needed to navigate it with integrity.

VIII. Conclusion : Living in the Fragment

We began with the image of the fractured mirror, reflecting incompatible versions of professional being. The analysis has shown that this fracture is not a temporary aberration but a deep structural feature of the current moment one that produces epistemic instability, ethical quandaries, and existential vertigo for individuals seeking to develop their capabilities. The asymmetry of becoming is real: individuals must invest in their own development without stable knowledge of which form of competence will be recognized, while institutions exercise evaluative power without clear justification for contradictory and shifting standards. This asymmetry cannot be fully resolved through individual adaptation or institutional reform alone it is a systemic feature of a period in which paradigms multiply faster than the mechanisms for adjudicating between them.

Yet this very condition of fragmentation may be the appropriate response to genuine uncertainty about the future of work. The proliferation of evaluation standards, frustrating as it is, reflects honest disagreement about what AI means for professional competence. Rather than seeking premature consensus, we might better serve both individuals and institutions by acknowledging the legitimacy of the disagreement while working to make its navigation less violent. This requires a shift in how we think about professional development: from teleological progression toward a fixed endpoint, to *provisional becoming* that remains open to revision; from authentic self-expression toward a stable identity, to *strategic positioning* that maintains critical distance from its own constructions; from evaluation against universal standards, to *contextual recognition* that acknowledges its own situatedness.

The individual navigating this landscape cannot expect certainty, but they can demand honesty. The institution exercising evaluative power cannot claim neutrality, but it can practice transparency. Neither can eliminate the asymmetry,

but both can work to make it more bearable and perhaps, in time, more productive.

We live in the fragment, and will for some time. The question is not whether we can escape fragmentation, but whether we can learn to inhabit it with integrity cultivating capabilities whose value we cannot guarantee, exercising judgment we cannot fully justify, becoming versions of ourselves whose recognition we cannot predict. This is not the condition we would have chosen, but it may be the one we must navigate. The philosophical task is to do so without surrendering either the demand for coherence or the acknowledgment of its current impossibility.

When the standards by which we become cannot themselves be stabilized, the ethical stance is neither stubborn adherence to obsolete certainties nor naive embrace of incoherent novelties but rather the difficult work of navigating between incompatible paradigms while maintaining the capacity to recognize that very incompatibility as the fundamental condition we share.

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Author's Note :

This paper emerges from sustained engagement with the lived experience of professionals navigating the current transition. While the analysis is philosophical, it is grounded in the material realities of those facing genuine uncertainty about how to invest in their own development. My hope is that by articulating the structure of this uncertainty, we might better understand both its ethical dimensions and its potential paths forward.