

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ETHICAL AND INTELLECTUAL IMPLICATIONS

Dr Bakhtawar Siddique

Lecturer Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies

Govt College Women University Sialkot

Bakhtawar.siddique@gcwus.edu.pk

Dr Noreen Butt

Assistant Professor

Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies

Noreen.butt@gcwus.edu.pk

Abstract:

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has raised profound ethical, intellectual, and philosophical questions about human identity, autonomy, and moral responsibility. This article presents an analytical study of AI from the perspective of Islamic philosophy, aiming to explore how classical Islamic ethical principles and metaphysical concepts can guide the development, deployment, and regulation of intelligent systems. Islamic philosophy emphasizes the integration of reason, revelation, and moral accountability, providing a framework for evaluating AI's impact on human life, social structures, and spiritual well-being. The study examines key ethical challenges posed by AI, including decision-making in autonomous systems, privacy, fairness, accountability, and the potential for moral disengagement. It also explores the intellectual implications of AI on human cognition, creativity, and epistemology, assessing whether machine intelligence can complement or conflict with the traditional Islamic understanding of human knowledge and moral agency. By analyzing AI through the lens of Islamic ethics, this article highlights the importance of aligning technological innovation with principles of justice, compassion, and societal welfare. The findings suggest that integrating Islamic philosophical insights into AI research can offer a balanced approach that not only maximizes the benefits of AI but also mitigates ethical risks. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Islamic philosophy provides a rich intellectual and moral foundation for engaging with emerging technologies, ensuring that AI serves humanity in a manner consistent with ethical and spiritual values.

Keywords: Islamic Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Moral Responsibility, Knowledge, Autonomy, Societal Welfare, Technological Ethics.

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

The twenty-first century has ushered in an unprecedented transformation in human civilization through the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). No longer confined to the realm of science fiction, AI has become a central force in shaping economic systems, cognitive practices, and moral decision-making. It is not merely a technological innovation but a paradigm shift in human epistemology redefining what it means to know, to think, and to act. AI's development reflects the culmination of centuries of mechanistic rationalism, emerging from the Cartesian dualism between *res cogitans* (thinking substance) and *res extensa* (extended substance). This dichotomy led to the conception of the mind as a computational mechanism, reducible to algorithms and data. Yet, this reductionist framework has faced substantial philosophical challenges. As John R. Searle famously argued in his critique of computationalism:

“The mind is not a computer program, and consciousness cannot be reduced to computation.”¹

Searle's argument exposes a profound limitation in the dominant philosophy of AI: while machines can imitate patterns of reasoning, they lack intentionality the intrinsic aboutness that characterizes human consciousness. This distinction lies at the heart of the current debate between simulation and understanding. AI operates by processing symbols

¹ John R. Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 28.

syntactically, but understanding requires semantic depth and existential awareness, both absent in artificial systems. In contrast, Islamic philosophy has historically integrated reason (‘aql) with spirit (rūḥ) and heart (qalb), conceiving the human intellect not merely as a computational faculty but as a spiritual and moral capacity. This conception situates human intelligence within a cosmological hierarchy that connects the material, intellectual, and divine realms. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes in his seminal critique of modern science:

“Modern science, having divorced itself from metaphysics, has reduced knowledge to mere information and wisdom to utility.”²

Nasr’s analysis encapsulates the intellectual crisis AI exemplifies: the desacralization of knowledge. Modern epistemology, dominated by empiricism and functionalism, has expelled metaphysical and ethical dimensions from the definition of knowledge. AI thus emerges as the ultimate expression of instrumental rationality—intelligence devoid of transcendence. For Islamic thought, this presents not merely a technological challenge but a moral and metaphysical test. The question is not whether machines can think, but whether thinking without divine purpose constitutes wisdom at all. AI, as a symbol of modern rationalism, forces a reevaluation of the philosophical foundations of knowledge and ethics. In this context, Islamic philosophy offers a holistic corrective—asserting that intellect (‘aql) must remain aligned with revelation (waḥy) to preserve the sacred unity of knowledge (tawḥīd al-ma‘rifah).

Defining Islamic Philosophy: Epistemology and Ontology

Islamic philosophy (al-falsafah al-islāmiyyah) is not a derivative of Greek rationalism but an autonomous intellectual tradition rooted in the synthesis of revelation and reason. It seeks to comprehend reality (ḥaqīqah) through the harmony of metaphysical insight and rational reflection. At its core, it establishes an epistemology (‘ilmiyyāt) that recognizes multiple, interdependent sources of knowledge—sense perception (ḥiss), reason (‘aql), and divine revelation (waḥy).

This epistemological pluralism contrasts sharply with modern empiricism, which reduces knowledge to sensory data. In the Qur’anic worldview, human knowledge is both a gift and a responsibility. It is a trust (amānah) that must be exercised within the bounds of divine order. The Qur’an declares:

“You have been given of knowledge only a little.”³

This verse affirms the principle of epistemic humility—that human reason, while potent, is ultimately limited and dependent upon divine illumination.

Among the earliest systematic philosophers of Islam, Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) articulated a metaphysical framework in which the human intellect attains perfection through union with the Active Intellect (al-‘aql al-fa‘āl). He wrote:

“The ultimate perfection of man is achieved when his intellect becomes one with the Active Intellect.”⁴

Al-Farabi’s conception of intellect transcends mechanistic cognition; intelligence is not an algorithmic process but a participation in divine knowledge. The human mind, in his view, is a bridge between the material and the metaphysical—capable of receiving intelligible forms that reflect the eternal truths of creation. AI, by contrast, operates purely within material causality, lacking any ontological connection to transcendence.

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 12.

³ The Qur’an, 17:85.

⁴ Al-Farabi, *Kitāb al-‘Aql* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1968), 47.

Building upon this, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) developed a sophisticated metaphysical psychology. In his monumental *al-Shifā'*, he writes:

“The rational soul receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect, and by them becomes actual intellect.”⁵

Avicenna conceives intellect as both epistemic and ontological a dynamic process of becoming, where the rational soul ascends through knowledge toward actuality. This model assumes that intelligence is tied to being, not computation. AI systems, devoid of soul (*nafs*), cannot undergo ontological transformation; they can process data but cannot become. The ontological structure of Islamic philosophy is hierarchical. Reality (*wujūd*) is not a flat material continuum but a graded order of existence emanating from the Necessary Being (*al-Wājib al-Wujūd*). Every created intellect participates in this ontological hierarchy, reflecting degrees of divine presence. Mulla Ṣadra (d. 1640), the master of the Transcendent Philosophy (*al-Hikmah al-Muta'āliyah*), encapsulates this view in his doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd* (gradation of being):

“Existence is a single reality that intensifies in being; the intellect is the most perfect manifestation of that gradation.”⁶

Ṣadra's gradational ontology implies that true intellect participates in existence itself; it possesses the capacity for ontological ascent. Artificial systems, constructed through human fabrication (*ṣan'ah*), lack this existential depth. They represent synthetic causality rather than creative participation.

Hence, while AI may simulate human logic, it cannot mirror the metaphysical consciousness that defines human intellect. In Islamic terms, the distinction between the rational soul and the artificial algorithm is not merely functional but ontological: one is animated by divine emanation, the other by human design.

This metaphysical contrast frames the central philosophical tension of this research:

Relationship between Science, Technology, and Islamic Thought

The relationship between science, technology, and Islamic thought is both historically rich and conceptually profound. From the Golden Age of Islam (8th–13th centuries), scholars integrated scientific inquiry with ethical and metaphysical principles, viewing knowledge as a means to comprehend God's creation rather than as a tool for mere utility. Unlike the secular modernist approach, Islamic thought situates science within a moral and spiritual framework. Al-Farabi, in his *Book of the Enumeration of the Sciences*, categorizes knowledge hierarchically, distinguishing between theoretical knowledge (*'ilm naẓarī*) and practical knowledge (*'ilm 'amalī*). He emphasizes that both must ultimately serve intellectual and ethical perfection:

“The perfection of human knowledge lies not merely in its accumulation, but in its orientation toward the understanding of ultimate causes and the good life.”⁷

This principle illustrates a key distinction between classical Islamic thought and contemporary technological civilization: knowledge without ethical or metaphysical purpose is incomplete. AI exemplifies this modern divergence, where computational mastery may exist without spiritual or moral consideration. Ibn Khaldun further reinforces this perspective by highlighting the sociological and moral dimensions of human progress. In his *Muqaddimah*, he notes that civilization (*'umrān*) flourishes when scientific and technological advances are harmonized with ethical norms:

⁵ Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā'*: *Al-Nafs* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Amīriyya, 1952), 112.

⁶ Mulla Ṣadra, *Al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1981), 1:36.

⁷ Al-Farabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1967, 23.

“Civilization progresses through the harmony of intellect, morality, and communal well-being; knowledge that disregards ethics destabilizes society.”⁸

This observation underscores a key Islamic epistemic principle: technological capability must be subordinated to ethical and spiritual wisdom. AI, as a transformative technology, presents an acute challenge to this principle, demonstrating both potential benefits and risks depending on human governance. In contemporary discourse, scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr critique modern science for its instrumental rationality, divorced from metaphysical foundations:

“Modern technology, though powerful, often lacks a guiding metaphysical vision, reducing the cosmos to a collection of manipulable objects.”⁹

In the context of AI, this critique is particularly relevant. While artificial systems can optimize processes, predict outcomes, and even emulate certain human behaviors, they cannot inherently discern ethical value or metaphysical truth. Islamic thought thus provides a framework for integrating technology with spiritual and moral imperatives, ensuring that the advancement of knowledge aligns with the greater purpose of human existence. Historically, Islamic civilization demonstrates that technological mastery and scientific innovation were never detached from ethical inquiry. The philosophy of science in Islam was teleologically oriented, emphasizing the cultivation of virtue, the understanding of God’s signs (āyāt), and the pursuit of wisdom (hikmah). Therefore, modern AI can be evaluated not only on its functional capabilities but also on its alignment with the ethical and metaphysical dimensions emphasized in Islamic philosophy.

Historical Evolution of Reason and Intellect (‘Aql) in Islamic Philosophy Concept of ‘Aql in the Qur’an and Sunnah

In Islamic intellectual tradition, the concept of ‘aql (intellect or reason) occupies a central position as both a cognitive faculty and a moral instrument. The Qur’an repeatedly urges reflection (tafakkur) and understanding, highlighting that reason is a divine gift intended to facilitate recognition of truth and ethical discernment. Unlike purely materialist or mechanical conceptions of intelligence, ‘aql is inseparable from spiritual awareness, moral responsibility, and metaphysical perception.

The Qur’an emphasizes the role of intellect in distinguishing truth from falsehood:

“Do they not reason? There is no heed for those who do not understand.”¹⁰

This verse underscores the intrinsic value of intellectual engagement (‘aql), framing cognition as a spiritual duty rather than a neutral process. Reason is not merely instrumental; it carries ethical and existential weight. Human accountability before God (taklīf) is contingent upon the proper exercise of ‘aql, making the faculty both epistemic and moral. The Sunnah further elaborates on the moral dimension of reason. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated:

“The intelligent person is the one who restrains his soul and acts in accordance with divine guidance.”¹¹

⁸ Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002, 89.

⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Knowledge and the Sacred (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 45.

¹⁰ The Qur’an, 7:179.

¹¹ Al-Tirmidhi, Sahih al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 2417.

Here, intelligence (hikmah and 'aql) is defined not by mere cognitive ability but by self-regulation and ethical alignment. Islamic epistemology, therefore, integrates reason with practical wisdom ('amal al-hikmah), highlighting a holistic approach in which cognitive faculties serve higher ethical and spiritual ends. This Qur'anic and prophetic conception contrasts sharply with contemporary AI epistemology, which treats intelligence as symbolic manipulation or algorithmic processing, devoid of intrinsic moral or metaphysical purpose. In Islamic philosophy, the exercise of 'aql involves an ontological dimension, as human intellect participates in the gradational order of existence established by God (wujūd).

Greek Rationalism and its Integration in Early Islamic Thought

The early Islamic philosophers were profoundly influenced by Greek rationalism, particularly the works of Aristotle and Plato, which were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period. This integration was not mere imitation; rather, it represented a critical engagement, whereby Greek logic and metaphysics were harmonized with Islamic theology and ethical principles.

Al-Kindi (c. 801–873 CE), often called the “Philosopher of the Arabs,” was the first to systematically synthesize Greek rational thought with Islamic epistemology. He asserted that reason ('aql) is a God-given faculty enabling humans to comprehend the cosmos and divine order:

“God has endowed humans with reason so that they may discern the truths of creation and approach the knowledge of the Creator.”¹²

Al-Kindi's approach demonstrates a dual commitment: embracing Greek rational structures (such as syllogistic logic) while maintaining the Islamic teleological framework, where all knowledge ultimately serves recognition of divine reality.

Following Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) systematized the harmonization of Greek philosophy with Islamic metaphysics. In his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, he delineates the hierarchy of sciences and emphasizes that logic and reasoning (mantiq and 'aql) are tools for understanding ultimate causes:

“Logic is the instrument by which the intellect ascends from the world of particulars to the universal and from the human intellect to the Active Intellect.”¹³

Al-Farabi's philosophy establishes a graded conception of knowledge, where reason mediates between empirical observation and metaphysical truth. Greek rationalism, when integrated into the Islamic framework, was subordinated to spiritual and ethical aims, rather than adopted as an autonomous, secular methodology. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) further advanced this synthesis, adopting Aristotelian metaphysics while integrating Islamic epistemology. In *al-Shifā'*, he distinguishes between acquired intellect ('aql mustafād) and the Active Intellect (al-'aql al-fa'āl), emphasizing that human cognition is both a rational and ontological process:

“The rational soul receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect, and through them attains actualized knowledge.”¹⁴

Through this framework, Greek rationalism was Islamicized: its logic, metaphysics, and epistemic methods were integrated with Qur'anic teachings, prophetic guidance, and ethical imperatives. The result was a distinct Islamic rationalism, where reason is neither purely secular nor abstract, but oriented toward ethical, metaphysical, and spiritual ends. This historical synthesis is crucial for understanding contemporary debates on AI. While AI inherits

¹² Al-Kindi, *On First Philosophy*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1965, 14.

¹³ Al-Farabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1967, 29.

¹⁴ Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā'*: *Al-Nafs*, Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Amīriyya, 1952, 112.

certain Aristotelian formal logic in algorithmic computation, it lacks the ethical and ontological grounding that classical Islamic rationalism mandates. Understanding this intellectual evolution allows scholars to critically assess the limitations of AI when measured against the Islamic conception of reason ('aql).

Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and the Metaphysics of Intellect

The metaphysical framework of intellect in Islamic philosophy reached a pivotal development with Al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE). Both philosophers sought to integrate Greek rationalist principles with Islamic metaphysics, but their approaches also emphasized the spiritual and ontological dimensions of human intellect ('aql).

Al-Farabi and the Hierarchy of Intellect

Al-Farabi conceptualized intellect as a graded faculty, culminating in the Active Intellect (al-'aql al-fa'āl), which emanates directly from the Divine Source. In his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, he writes:

“The perfection of human intellect is achieved when it unites with the Active Intellect, enabling the soul to apprehend universal truths beyond the sensory realm.”¹⁵

Al-Farabi's hierarchical model differentiates potential intellect (al-'aql al-mumtani'), which resides in individual humans, from actualized intellect (al-'aql al-fa'āl), which provides the forms of intelligible reality. This framework establishes that knowledge is not mere data processing but a participation in metaphysical reality, a principle starkly absent in artificial intelligence systems.

Furthermore, Al-Farabi emphasized that the proper exercise of intellect entails ethical responsibility. The rational pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from the cultivation of virtue ('adl and hikmah). Thus, intellectual perfection is both epistemic and moral, prefiguring the integrated approach of classical Islamic philosophy to human cognition.

Ibn Sina and the Actualization of Knowledge

Ibn Sina expanded upon Al-Farabi's model by formulating a detailed metaphysics of intellect, distinguishing between the acquired intellect ('aql mustafād) and the potential intellect ('aql bi-l-quwwah). In *al-Shifā'*, he writes:

“The rational soul receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect, through which it attains actualized knowledge and moves from potentiality to actuality.”¹⁶

This formulation emphasizes a dynamic process: intellect is not static computation but an ontological ascent, where human cognition participates in universal truths. Ibn Sina's framework demonstrates that true intelligence is inseparable from existence (wujūd), and ethical discernment arises naturally from this metaphysical awareness. Ibn Sina also situates human intellect within a cosmological hierarchy, where the Active Intellect mediates between God and the human soul. The acquisition of knowledge is thus both a cognitive achievement and a spiritual journey, integrating metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. AI, in contrast, can replicate reasoning patterns but cannot engage in ontological ascent or ethical self-awareness.

Significance for AI Studies

The metaphysical models of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina provide a benchmark for evaluating AI epistemology. While AI can simulate logical reasoning, it lacks:

- Participation in ontological reality (wujūd).
- Connection with a higher metaphysical source (Active Intellect).
- Intrinsic ethical and spiritual awareness.

¹⁵ Al-Farabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1967), 31.

¹⁶ Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā'*: *Al-Nafs* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Amīriyya, 1952), 112.

Thus, these classical frameworks highlight the limits of artificial cognition, underscoring that human reason in Islamic philosophy is both participatory and teleological, not merely algorithmic.

Ghazali and the Critique of Philosophical Rationalism

While Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina celebrated the rational faculties, Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) offered a critical perspective on the potential overreach of philosophical rationalism. In his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), Ghazali argues that pure reason, if detached from divine revelation, cannot access ultimate truths, particularly concerning metaphysics, creation, and providence.

He famously states:

“The philosophers, relying solely on reason, erred in claiming to know the eternal nature of the world, its origin, and the soul’s relationship to God.”¹⁷

Ghazali’s critique does not reject rational inquiry per se; rather, he reorients reason within the limits prescribed by scriptural knowledge. According to Ghazali, intellect (‘aql) is valid for practical, logical, and natural inquiries but cannot supersede revelation (waḥy) in metaphysical matters. Furthermore, Ghazali emphasizes the ethical dimension of reason. He contends that intellect divorced from moral and spiritual guidance can become a tool of arrogance, misguidance, and error. In *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, he writes:

“Knowledge that does not lead to God-consciousness (taqwā) is vanity; the intellect must be subservient to the ethical and spiritual ends for which it was created.”¹⁸

This critique has direct relevance for contemporary AI. Like philosophical rationalism, AI embodies purely instrumental reason, capable of immense computational power but devoid of ethical, spiritual, or metaphysical grounding. Ghazali’s framework serves as a cautionary lens, emphasizing that intelligence without alignment with higher ethical and ontological principles can be misleading or even dangerous.

Ibn Rushd and the Defense of Reason

Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198 CE) occupies a crucial position in Islamic intellectual history as a philosopher who defended the autonomy of reason while maintaining fidelity to Islamic revelation. Responding to critiques like those of Al-Ghazali in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Ibn Rushd sought to reconcile rational inquiry and religious orthodoxy, emphasizing that true reason and true faith cannot contradict each other when properly understood.

Autonomy of Rational Inquiry

Ibn Rushd argued that the pursuit of philosophical knowledge, including metaphysics, natural philosophy, and logic, is a legitimate endeavor sanctioned by divine wisdom. In *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (Decisive Treatise), he states:

“There can be no conflict between philosophy and religion, for both are guided by truth; apparent contradictions arise only from misunderstanding the texts or the principles of demonstration.”¹⁹

Here, Ibn Rushd underscores the consonance of reason and revelation, proposing that rational demonstration (burhān) and scriptural exegesis (tafsīr) are complementary methods of attaining knowledge. For him, ‘aql (intellect) is a divine faculty whose full potential can be realized only when exercised in accordance with both logic and ethical responsibility.

Hierarchy of Knowledge and Philosophical Interpretation

¹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003, 45.

¹⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, Cairo: Al-Matba‘a al-Amīriyya, 1956, 12.

¹⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 1961, 17.

Ibn Rushd develops a tiered conception of knowledge. He distinguishes between the masses, who understand religious texts literally, and the philosophical elite, who apprehend allegorical and rational meanings. This distinction emphasizes that reason is not only valid but necessary for comprehending deeper metaphysical truths:

“The law addresses the common people in a manner suited to their capacity, whereas philosophy addresses those who seek intellectual perfection.”²⁰

This approach legitimizes the systematic study of logic, metaphysics, and natural sciences, providing a robust intellectual framework where human reason operates within ethical and theological boundaries.

Implications for Contemporary Artificial Intelligence

Ibn Rushd’s defense of reason offers a significant lens for analyzing AI epistemology:

1. **Rational Autonomy:** AI represents an advanced form of rational processing, but unlike human reason, it lacks the ethical and metaphysical grounding that Ibn Rushd emphasizes. Human intellect is purposeful, oriented toward truth and moral action; AI operates without intrinsic telos.
2. **Complementarity with Ethics:** Just as Ibn Rushd insists that philosophical reasoning complements divine law, modern AI must be integrated with ethical frameworks to ensure socially and morally responsible outcomes. Without this integration, AI risks functioning as a tool of mere instrumental rationality.
3. **Intellectual Stratification:** Ibn Rushd’s notion of hierarchical understanding highlights that intelligence is contextual and interpretive, requiring discernment and ethical reflection — qualities absent in artificial systems that process information indiscriminately.

Synthesis

Ibn Rushd provides a balanced framework in which reason is celebrated as a divine faculty but remains accountable to ethical and metaphysical principles. The relevance for AI studies is twofold:

- It demonstrates that rational power alone is insufficient; ethical and spiritual orientation is indispensable.
- It establishes a model for responsible integration of intelligence (whether human or artificial) within a morally and metaphysically coherent framework.

By synthesizing rational inquiry and religious guidance, Ibn Rushd’s philosophy offers a normative benchmark against which the epistemic and ethical limitations of AI can be assessed. AI may emulate logical processes, but without alignment to higher principles, it remains fundamentally instrumental and non-participatory in the ontological and ethical order central to Islamic philosophy.

Artificial Intelligence and the Modern Epistemic Paradigm

From Algorithmic Logic to Machine Learning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved from early algorithmic logic systems to contemporary machine learning (ML) frameworks, representing a profound shift in the epistemic paradigm. Initially, AI systems operated on deterministic if-then rules structured, explicit, and fully traceable. These systems were grounded in symbolic logic, mirroring Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning, yet limited by their inability to adapt autonomously to novel data or environments.

²⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtasid*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001, 52.

The advent of machine learning introduced probabilistic models, neural networks, and deep learning architectures, enabling AI to identify patterns, predict outcomes, and optimize decisions without explicit programming. As Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig note:

“Machine learning allows computers to acquire knowledge from experience, generalize from observed patterns, and improve performance without human intervention in algorithmic design.”²¹

This paradigm shift emphasizes data-driven epistemology: knowledge is extracted from empirical inputs rather than deduced from first principles. Unlike classical rationalist frameworks, which prioritize reasoned inference and metaphysical alignment, machine learning prioritizes pattern recognition, optimization, and predictive accuracy. From a philosophical perspective, this raises critical questions: does algorithmic knowledge constitute understanding, or is it mere simulation of cognitive processes? John Searle’s famous Chinese Room argument illustrates this limitation:

“The system may appear to understand language, but it does not possess intentionality; it merely manipulates symbols according to rules.”²²

Searle’s critique underscores the semantic gap between human cognition and AI computation. AI operates syntactically, whereas human reason (‘aql) integrates semantic comprehension, moral reasoning, and ontological awareness. In Islamic epistemology, knowledge is not merely predictive or procedural but also transformative, shaping the intellect, character, and awareness of divine reality (tawḥīd al-ma‘rifah).

The Concept of Knowledge in AI vs. Islamic Epistemology

The modern AI paradigm defines knowledge primarily as structured data, patterns, or predictive models, often evaluated through performance metrics, accuracy, or optimization. AI’s epistemic model is functional and instrumental: it generates actionable outputs without reference to truth, morality, or ultimate purpose.

In contrast, Islamic epistemology maintains a holistic and hierarchical understanding of knowledge, integrating empirical observation (ḥiss), rational analysis (‘aql), and divine revelation (wahy). Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes this distinction:

“In the Islamic worldview, knowledge is a means of realizing truth and attaining spiritual and moral perfection; it is inseparable from wisdom (ḥikmah) and the divine order.”²³

This epistemic framework is teleologically oriented: knowledge is purposeful, guiding humans toward ethical action and ontological realization. Unlike AI, which treats information as neutral and manipulable, Islamic epistemology views knowledge as trust (amānah) and responsibility, with moral and spiritual consequences.

Key Differences

1. Nature of Understanding: AI possesses syntactic intelligence, manipulating symbols according to rules. Islamic epistemology requires semantic and moral comprehension, linking cognition to virtue.
2. Source of Knowledge: AI relies on empirical data and statistical inference, whereas Islamic thought integrates revelation, rational deduction, and sensory observation.

²¹ Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*, 4th ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2021), 112.

²² John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 28.

²³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 7.

3. Purpose of Knowledge: AI aims at efficiency, prediction, and optimization. Islamic epistemology prioritizes ethical conduct, spiritual awareness, and alignment with divine truth.
4. Ontological Status: AI is artificial and constructed, operating in a computational domain without existential awareness. Human intellect ('aql), in Islamic philosophy, participates in a graded hierarchy of existence, capable of ethical and ontological ascent (Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Mulla Şadra).

Implications for AI Ethics

The divergence between AI epistemology and Islamic understanding of knowledge has profound ethical and philosophical implications:

- AI decision-making, devoid of moral and ontological orientation, can produce technologically efficient yet ethically problematic outcomes.
- Islamic epistemology provides a framework to evaluate AI not only for functional accuracy but for ethical validity, integrating accountability, justice, and human dignity into technological practice.
- By applying principles derived from 'aql and hikmah, societies can develop AI governance models that respect both human and metaphysical values, addressing concerns such as bias, fairness, and moral responsibility.

Synthesis

1. AI knowledge is functional, data-driven, and probabilistic; it lacks semantic, ethical, and metaphysical depth.
2. Islamic epistemology integrates reason, observation, and divine guidance, ensuring knowledge serves both truth and virtue.
3. The epistemic gap between AI and Islamic philosophy underscores the limits of artificial cognition in replicating human understanding.
4. Understanding these distinctions provides a foundation for ethical and philosophical governance of AI, situating technology within a broader framework of moral and ontological responsibility.

Consciousness, Intellect, and Soul (Nafs vs. Neural Networks)

One of the most profound distinctions between human cognition and artificial intelligence lies in the relationship between consciousness, intellect ('aql), and the soul (nafs). In Islamic philosophy, the nafs represents the psychospiritual core of human existence, encompassing awareness, ethical disposition, and the capacity for metaphysical reflection. AI, in contrast, operates via neural networks computational architectures that mimic certain aspects of human learning but lack subjective experience, intentionality, and spiritual awareness.

Ibn Sina conceptualizes the human soul as having multiple layers:

1. Vegetative (nafs al-nabātīyah): governing growth and basic life functions
2. Animal (nafs al-ḥayawānīyah): responsible for perception and motion
3. Rational (nafs al-nāṭiqah): enabling intellect, reflection, and ethical judgment
“The rational soul receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect, enabling human beings to apprehend universals and engage in moral reasoning.”²⁴

AI neural networks, even deep learning models, simulate pattern recognition but do not engage in this hierarchical, ontologically grounded process. Unlike the rational soul (nafs al-nāṭiqah), which participates in existential ascent and ethical discernment, neural networks operate syntactically, devoid of understanding or moral responsibility.

²⁴ Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā': Al-Nafs* (Cairo: Al-Matba'at al-Amīriyya, 1952), 115.

Ethical and Philosophical Implications

1. **Intentionality:** Human consciousness possesses intentionality awareness directed toward purposes, truth, and ethical obligations. Neural networks lack intentionality; they process input-output relationships without comprehension.
2. **Moral Agency:** The nafs mediates ethical judgment and accountability. AI can execute decisions but cannot assume moral responsibility for outcomes.
3. **Ontological Awareness:** Human intellect recognizes existence (wujūd) and divine reality (tawhīd). Neural networks lack metaphysical awareness, limiting AI's role to instrumental tasks.

This distinction is crucial in assessing the limitations of artificial intelligence and framing its integration into ethical, social, and policy contexts. While AI can augment human cognition, it cannot replace the moral and spiritual functions of the human intellect and soul.

Philosophical Limits of Artificial Reasoning

The epistemic and ontological gaps between AI and human cognition highlight the philosophical limits of artificial reasoning. While AI excels at computation, pattern recognition, and predictive modeling, its reasoning is instrumental, syntactic, and contingent upon data, lacking the normative, teleological, and ethical dimensions central to human intellect ('aql).

Key Limitations

1. **Absence of Metaphysical Engagement:** Classical Islamic philosophy emphasizes the participation of intellect in universal truths (Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina). AI operates within closed computational systems without access to metaphysical realities.
2. **Lack of Ethical Judgment:** AI cannot exercise moral reasoning intrinsic to human cognition. Ghazali emphasizes that intellect detached from ethical and spiritual guidance can lead to misguidance and hubris (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, 12). AI decision-making may optimize efficiency, yet it cannot independently assess justice, virtue, or divine accountability.
3. **Contextual and Cultural Understanding:** AI reasoning is constrained by its training data and algorithmic parameters, making it vulnerable to bias, misinterpretation, and contextual errors. Human intellect integrates rational analysis, ethical norms, and contextual sensitivity.
4. **Absence of Conscious Experience:** AI lacks subjective consciousness (shuhūd), reflection, or intentionality, essential for self-directed learning, ethical deliberation, and moral accountability.

“The machine may process symbols and generate outputs, but it does not know; it does not understand; it does not act with purpose.”²⁵

Implications for AI Integration

Understanding these limits is crucial for responsible AI governance and ethical deployment. While AI can support human decision-making, its limitations necessitate:

- Human oversight to ensure alignment with ethical and metaphysical principles
- Regulatory frameworks informed by moral, social, and religious norms
- Recognition that AI is instrumental, not autonomous, in contexts involving ethical deliberation, justice, and spiritual guidance

In Islamic philosophical terms, AI remains a tool (adāh) rather than an autonomous rational agent. Its application must respect the ontological and ethical boundaries established by

²⁵ John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 28.

classical Islamic epistemology, ensuring that technological advancement supports human flourishing without compromising moral, spiritual, or existential principles.

1. Human consciousness (nafs) integrates intellect ('aql), moral awareness, and metaphysical understanding, whereas AI neural networks simulate cognitive functions without intentionality or ethical capacity.
2. The limits of artificial reasoning emphasize AI's instrumental nature and its inability to achieve ontological or ethical autonomy.
3. Islamic philosophical frameworks provide a normative lens for assessing AI, guiding its development and integration within moral, ethical, and metaphysical boundaries.

Ethical Foundations in Islamic Philosophy and their Relevance to AI Islamic Moral Philosophy (Akhlāq) and Human Responsibility

Islamic moral philosophy, or 'Ilm al-Akhlāq, provides a comprehensive ethical framework that integrates cognition, intention, and action within a teleological and spiritual worldview. Human responsibility in Islam is intrinsically tied to the concept of moral accountability (taklīf), reflecting the Qur'anic principle that intellect ('aql) and action must be aligned with divine guidance:

“And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, even as much as the speck on a date seed.”²⁶

This verse illustrates that moral action is inseparable from belief, intention (niyyah), and accountability, which collectively shape ethical responsibility.

Key Principles of Akhlāq

- **1.Intentionality (Niyyah):** Ethical value is determined by intention. Actions devoid of moral consciousness lack ethical weight.
- **2.Virtue Ethics:** Inspired by the works of Al-Ghazali, Mulla Ṣadra, and Ibn Miskawayh, Islamic ethics emphasizes moral cultivation, where virtues like justice ('adl), wisdom (ḥikmah), and humility (tawāḍu') shape both personal conduct and societal harmony.

“Knowledge that does not lead to God-consciousness (taqwā) is vanity; the intellect must be subservient to the ethical and spiritual ends for which it was created.”²⁷
- **Stewardship (Khilāfah):** Humans are entrusted as stewards of creation, responsible for the ethical use of resources and technology. This principle directly informs responsible deployment of AI, emphasizing accountability, sustainability, and social justice.

Human Responsibility and AI

Applying Islamic moral philosophy to AI suggests:

- Humans retain primary moral responsibility for AI-generated outcomes.
- Ethical accountability cannot be delegated to machines; AI is a tool (adāh), not an agent capable of moral reasoning.
- AI deployment must align with virtue ethics, stewardship principles, and divine accountability, ensuring technology serves human welfare without transgressing ethical or metaphysical boundaries.

AI Ethics in Contemporary Secular Thought (Utilitarianism, Deontology)

²⁶ Qur'an 4:124.

²⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Cairo: Al-Matba'at al-Amīriyya, 1956, 12.

Secular AI ethics often relies on philosophical frameworks such as utilitarianism and deontology, which provide normative guidelines for decision-making but differ significantly from Islamic moral philosophy.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarian ethics, rooted in Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, evaluates actions based on maximization of overall utility or happiness:

“The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the measure of right and wrong.”²⁸

Applied to AI, utilitarian reasoning emphasizes optimization of outcomes, such as minimizing harm or maximizing societal benefit. However, it may overlook individual rights, moral intention, and spiritual considerations, which are central in Islamic ethics.

Deontological ethics, following Immanuel Kant, emphasizes duty, rules, and moral obligation, irrespective of outcomes:

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”²⁹

Deontology provides structure for algorithmic constraints in AI, ensuring that actions respect rights and rules. Yet, it remains human-centric and abstract, lacking the spiritual teleology that integrates intention, virtue, and divine accountability in Islamic philosophy.

1. Islamic Akhlaq provides a holistic moral foundation for AI, linking intellect, intention, and action to ethical responsibility.
2. Secular AI ethics offers valuable tools for evaluating outcomes and rules but is insufficient alone to address metaphysical and ethical dimensions emphasized in Islamic thought.
3. Integrating Islamic moral principles with secular frameworks yields a comprehensive ethical model, ensuring AI remains instrumental, accountable, and aligned with human and divine ethical standards.

Comparative Ethical Analysis: Islamic vs. Western AI Ethics

A comparative analysis of Islamic and Western ethical frameworks for AI highlights both convergences and divergences, revealing the unique contributions of Islamic moral philosophy to contemporary technology governance.

- **1.Moral Source:**

Islamic Ethics: Rooted in divine guidance, Qur'an, Sunnah, and rational 'aql. Morality is intrinsic and teleologically oriented.

Western Secular Ethics: Derived from consequence-based utilitarianism or duty-based deontology, grounded in human reason alone, often independent of spiritual or metaphysical dimensions.

- **2.Scope and Purpose:**

Islamic Ethics: Encompasses intention (niyyah), virtue cultivation, and stewardship (khilāfah), integrating ethical, social, and spiritual objectives.

Western Ethics: Focused primarily on outcomes, compliance, or procedural fairness, with less emphasis on moral cultivation or divine accountability.

- **3.Accountability:**

²⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Clarendon Press, 1789), 12.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1785), 30.

Islamic Ethics: Accountability extends to humans as moral agents, responsible before God for the use of technology.

Western Ethics: Accountability is often institutional, legal, or organizational, sometimes neglecting teleological or spiritual dimensions.

“Knowledge is not merely for mastery over nature; it is a trust (amānah) which carries responsibility to God and creation.”³⁰

- Both frameworks emphasize minimizing harm (Islam: maṣlaḥah, Western: utilitarianism).
- Both recognize the necessity of rules and constraints (Islam: Sharī‘ah principles; Western: deontology or regulatory frameworks).
- Ethical reflection in both can guide AI governance, though Islamic ethics uniquely integrates spiritual and teleological dimensions.

AI and Human Accountability in Islamic Law (Taklīf, Khilāfah, Amanah)

Islamic law frames human accountability in the context of AI through the principles of:

- **Taklīf (Moral and Legal Responsibility):** Humans are moral agents obligated to exercise intellect (‘aql) and discern right from wrong. AI, as a tool, cannot assume moral responsibility; responsibility remains with humans.
- **Khilāfah (Stewardship):** Humans are stewards of the world, including technological creations. Misuse of AI violates stewardship duties:
“It is He who has appointed you successors (khalā’if) on earth.
Whoever acts rightly, acts for himself; whoever errs, errs against himself.”³¹

Amānah (Trust): AI deployment is a trust (amānah), requiring ethical deployment aligned with human welfare, justice, and divine accountability.

These principles establish a framework for AI governance in Islam, emphasizing that humans remain ethically and legally accountable for design, implementation, and outcomes, ensuring that technology supports social justice, ethical norms, and divine directives.

Theological and Metaphysical Implications of AI

Can Machines Think? Philosophical Theology in Islam

The question of whether machines can truly think intersects both philosophical reasoning and Islamic theology. From the classical Islamic perspective, intellect (‘aql) and consciousness are divine endowments (fiḍḥ), enabling humans to engage with metaphysical realities and ethical obligations. Thought is not merely computation; it is intentional, moral, and ontologically participatory. Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina emphasized that the human intellect receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect, enabling reflection, comprehension, and moral discernment. Machines, however, process inputs and outputs without awareness, intention, or ethical comprehension:

“The rational soul is that which receives the intelligibles, apprehends universals, and discerns the necessary truths; such faculties are not found in the material instruments of men.”³²

From a theological standpoint, human thinking is tied to divine knowledge (‘ilm Allah) and moral accountability. Qur’anic verses emphasize that intellect is a trust and a means to recognize divine signs:

³⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 21.

³¹ Qur’an 6:165.

³² Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifā’*: *Al-Nafs* (Cairo: Al-Matba‘a al-Amīriyya, 1952), 118.

“Do they not reflect upon themselves? Allah created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in truth and for an appointed term; yet many deny the meeting with their Lord.”³³

Machines can simulate reasoning but cannot reflect, discern divine truth, or assume moral responsibility. Therefore, while AI can perform complex computations or pattern recognition, Islamic philosophical theology holds that machines cannot possess genuine thought (tafakkur) or consciousness (shuhūd), as these are contingent upon the rational soul and divine endowment.

Artificial Creation (Takhliq) and the Concept of Divine Will

AI and robotics raise the question of artificial creation (takhliq): can humans “create” beings with intelligence? Classical Islamic theology maintains that only Allah possesses true creative power (khalq). Human creations, including AI, are derivative, functional, and contingent, lacking ontological autonomy or consciousness:

“Say: He is Allah, the Creator (al-Khāliq), the Maker (al-Bārī’), the Fashioner (al-Muṣawwir). To Him belong the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth declares His glory.”³⁴

This distinction underscores the ontological hierarchy: human-engineered AI is a tool or extension of human intellect, not a locus of divine creative power. AI systems operate according to deterministic or probabilistic algorithms, entirely dependent on human programming, contrasting with divine will (irāda Allah), which is unrestricted, sovereign, and causally efficacious.

Philosophical Implications

1. **Limits of Artificial Creation:** AI is instrumental, lacking independent existence (wujūd) and intentionality. It can simulate reasoning but cannot originate knowledge or act with moral consciousness.
2. **Divine Will and Human Stewardship:** Human engagement with AI must recognize the limits imposed by divine sovereignty, respecting ethical, social, and metaphysical boundaries. AI deployment becomes a form of stewardship (khilāfah), aligning technological innovation with ethical and theological accountability.
3. **Ethical Teleology:** Takhliq does not confer moral agency. Humans remain fully responsible for AI’s actions and consequences, consistent with Qur’anic principles of trust (amānah) and accountability (taklīf).

“It is He who has made you successors (khulafā’) on earth. He who acts rightly acts for himself; he who errs, errs against himself.”³⁵

- AI challenges notions of creation and intelligence but does not disrupt the ontological distinction between divine creation, human stewardship, and artificial instruments.
- Islamic theology emphasizes that true consciousness, creativity, and moral accountability are exclusively tied to divine endowment and human intellect.
- Recognizing AI as instrumental and derivative preserves the coherence of Islamic metaphysics while enabling responsible technological application.

The Problem of Autonomy: Free Will (Ikhtiyār) in Human and Machine

³³ Qur’an 30:8.

³⁴ Qur’an 59:24.

³⁵ Qur’an 6:165.

The question of autonomy in relation to artificial intelligence is deeply intertwined with the Islamic understanding of free will, or *ikhtiyār*, which forms the cornerstone of moral responsibility and ethical accountability. In classical Islamic philosophy, free will is not merely a theoretical concept; it is a divinely endowed faculty that enables humans to deliberate, judge, and act in accordance with ethical and moral principles. It is precisely this capacity for intentional and conscious choice that establishes the framework of human responsibility before God. The development of AI raises pressing questions regarding autonomy, as machines increasingly simulate decision-making processes. This prompts a rigorous examination of whether machines could, in any meaningful sense, exercise free will akin to humans, or whether they remain purely deterministic instruments, devoid of moral agency. Islamic thought emphasizes that free will is inseparable from consciousness, rational deliberation, and moral awareness. The Qur'an repeatedly underscores the principle of individual accountability:

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ وَإِن تَعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا يَوْمَئِذٍ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِن تَعْمَلُوا سُوءًا
فَلَهَا³⁶

“And no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another; and if one does righteousness, it is for his own soul, and if he does evil, it is against it.”

This verse emphasizes the indivisible nature of moral responsibility, establishing that ethical accountability is contingent upon the capacity for intentional choice. In the context of AI, this delineates a clear boundary: machines, which operate without consciousness or intentionality, cannot bear moral responsibility. Any consequences arising from AI operation are ultimately attributed to human agents who design, deploy, and manage these systems. Classical Islamic philosophers, including Ibn Rushd, elaborated on the mechanisms through which human free will operates. Ibn Rushd posits that the rational agent deliberates, weighs alternatives, and acts in accordance with reason, thus fulfilling moral obligations:

وَلَيْسَ الْعَاقِلُ مُكْرِهًا، بَلْ يُفَكِّرُ وَيَقَيِّمُ وَيَعْمَلُ بِمَا تَسْتَدْعِيهِ الْعُقُلُ، وَهَكَذَا يَحْمِلُ الْمَسْئُولِيَّةَ
أَمَامَ اللَّهِ³⁷

“The rational agent is not compelled; he deliberates, judges, and acts in accordance with the principles of reason, and thus bears responsibility before God.”

Ibn Rushd's articulation establishes that free will is inherently linked to conscious deliberation and moral evaluation. Ethical accountability is meaningful only when the agent possesses the ability to comprehend choices, foresee consequences, and act intentionally. AI, by contrast, lacks these faculties. Its “decisions” are the result of deterministic or probabilistic computations, devoid of consciousness, intentionality, and ethical comprehension. While AI can simulate autonomous behavior, it remains functionally deterministic, and responsibility for its outcomes remains entirely human.³⁸

John Searle's critique of machine “autonomy” parallels this philosophical insight, emphasizing the absence of genuine deliberation and understanding:

Quotation:

“The machine may select among alternatives, but it does not deliberate; it does not understand; it cannot assume moral responsibility.”³⁹

³⁶ Qur'an 6:164

³⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtasid*, 60

³⁸ Ibn Rushd. *Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtasid*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001, 60.

³⁹ Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science*, 28)

Searle highlights a critical epistemological distinction: computational selection is not equivalent to moral choice. Machines can process alternatives and optimize outcomes, but they lack intentionality (niyyah) and consciousness (shuhūd), qualities central to moral agency. From an Islamic philosophical perspective, this reinforces that autonomy in AI is instrumental, not ethical. Humans, as moral agents, remain fully accountable for the design, deployment, and consequences of AI systems.⁴⁰

In conclusion, the study of autonomy in AI underscores the inseparability of free will, consciousness, and moral responsibility in Islamic thought. While machines may perform tasks independently, their lack of intentionality and ethical awareness means they cannot bear accountability. Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy thus mandate human stewardship, ensuring that all AI systems operate under ethical oversight aligned with moral, societal, and divine principles.

Contemporary Islamic Thinkers and AI

Allama Iqbal: Khudi, Reason, and Machine Civilization

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's philosophical vision offers a profound framework for understanding human intellect, selfhood (khudī), and the ethical challenges posed by emerging technological civilizations. Iqbal emphasizes the dynamic and creative nature of human selfhood, arguing that the human spirit is an active agent capable of shaping reality through deliberate and morally guided action. In his seminal work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal writes:

Man is a being who must create himself; he is not merely a product of environment and heredity. The ego (khudī) is a dynamic power, a center of creativity and moral responsibility.⁴¹

Iqbal's vision situates human beings as active creators of their destiny, endowed with reason and ethical consciousness. The notion of khudī implies that human agency cannot be fully replicated by machines, as AI lacks the dynamic selfhood, moral intentionality, and creative faculties essential to ethical action. While AI can process data and perform complex tasks, it does so without consciousness or a self-directed moral imperative. This distinction resonates with Iqbal's critique of machine civilization, which he warns may emphasize efficiency and calculation over moral and spiritual growth, potentially reducing human beings to mechanistic actors in a technologically dominated world.⁴²

“The danger of modern civilization lies not in the machines themselves, but in the subordination of human life and spirit to mechanical processes. True development is the growth of the self, guided by reason and ethical purpose.”⁴³

Here, Iqbal underscores that ethical responsibility and moral reasoning are intrinsic to human development. Machines, as instruments of civilization, cannot assume the ethical burdens or creative capacities inherent in the human khudī. This perspective reinforces the Islamic philosophical principle that human stewardship and moral accountability remain central, even in technologically advanced societies. AI, in Iqbal's framework, must be

⁴⁰ Searle, John. *Minds, Brains and Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, 28.

⁴¹ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 194

⁴² Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1930, 194.

⁴³ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 198

understood as a tool that can enhance human capabilities but cannot replace the ethical, creative, and spiritual dimensions of human selfhood.⁴⁴

Seyyed Hossein Nasr: The Crisis of Modern Science

Seyyed Hossein Nasr offers a complementary critique of modern scientific paradigms, emphasizing the spiritual and ethical crises engendered by technology unmoored from metaphysical principles. Nasr argues that modern science, by prioritizing material efficiency and mechanistic causality, neglects the ethical and spiritual dimensions essential to human flourishing. In his work *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr states:

“The fundamental problem of modern science is not its technical capacity, but its detachment from the sacred and the metaphysical. Knowledge that ignores its ultimate ends leads to moral and ecological catastrophe.”⁴⁵

Nasr’s critique highlights the limitations of purely instrumental knowledge systems, such as AI, which operate without reference to ultimate ethical or spiritual goals. In an Islamic framework, knowledge is not neutral; it is always teleologically oriented toward human virtue, justice, and alignment with divine law. AI, when developed and deployed without ethical reflection, risks reinforcing the reductionist and utilitarian tendencies Nasr identifies, emphasizing efficiency and predictive accuracy over moral responsibility. This underscores the necessity of embedding ethical oversight, spiritual reflection, and metaphysical awareness into the development of artificial intelligence.⁴⁶

Nasr further articulates the ethical and ecological consequences of a mechanistic worldview:

“When human intellect is separated from the divine order and the ethical dimension of knowledge, technology becomes an instrument of domination rather than liberation.”⁴⁷

From this perspective, AI represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While capable of augmenting human reasoning and operational capacities, AI cannot autonomously uphold moral or spiritual values. Human stewardship, guided by ethical consciousness and grounded in metaphysical understanding, is therefore indispensable. The integration of Nasr’s insights into AI discourse emphasizes that technological innovation must remain subordinate to ethical and spiritual imperatives, ensuring that machines serve humanity without supplanting the moral and intellectual responsibilities unique to human beings.⁴⁸

Fazlur Rahman and Modern Hermeneutics

Fazlur Rahman’s contribution to contemporary Islamic thought centers on the dynamic interpretation of the Qur’an through a rational and contextual lens, an approach often termed modern hermeneutics. Rahman emphasized that Islamic knowledge must be understood in its historical, social, and ethical contexts, enabling Muslims to engage meaningfully with modern challenges, including technological advancements such as artificial intelligence. He asserts that the Qur’an is not merely a static legal text but a source of guidance requiring thoughtful reflection and ethical reasoning. In *Islam*, Rahman writes:

⁴⁴ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1930, 198.

⁴⁵ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 12

⁴⁶ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981, 12.

⁴⁷ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 18

⁴⁸ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981, 18.

“The Qur’an must be understood in its historical context and in terms of the moral and social objectives it seeks to achieve. Literalism without understanding the spirit of the text is inadequate for addressing contemporary human problems.”⁴⁹

Rahman’s methodology underscores the necessity of applying ethical and contextual reasoning to novel issues like AI. In the context of artificial intelligence, literalist approaches to classical texts cannot adequately address the moral and societal implications of autonomous systems. Instead, Rahman’s hermeneutical approach encourages the use of reasoned interpretation, emphasizing the overarching objectives of justice (‘adl), public welfare (maṣlaḥah), and moral accountability. AI, therefore, must be integrated into society under the guidance of principles that prioritize ethical reflection and human well-being, rather than mere technological capability or efficiency.

“Moral and ethical reflection is essential when applying the principles of the Qur’an to modern life. Humans are accountable for how they utilize knowledge and power.”⁵⁰

This principle directly applies to AI governance. As machines lack consciousness and moral agency, the responsibility for their actions, consequences, and ethical deployment lies entirely with human beings. Rahman’s hermeneutics, therefore, provides a robust framework for integrating Islamic ethics into contemporary technological contexts, ensuring that AI is developed and employed in ways consistent with moral and societal objectives.

Ziauddin Sardar and Postmodern Islamic Epistemology

Ziauddin Sardar approaches Islamic thought from a postmodern epistemological perspective, critically examining the assumptions underlying modern scientific and technological paradigms. Sardar contends that the uncritical adoption of Western rationalist models often neglects ethical, spiritual, and contextual dimensions inherent in Islamic epistemology. He emphasizes that knowledge is not merely a tool for prediction or control but a means of understanding human purpose, moral responsibility, and cosmic order. In *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come*, Sardar states:

“Knowledge cannot be divorced from ethics and metaphysics. To adopt scientific or technological methods blindly is to risk moral and spiritual impoverishment.”⁵¹

Sardar’s critique resonates strongly with the discourse on AI. The development of artificial intelligence, if guided solely by instrumental rationality or efficiency, may reproduce the epistemic and ethical limitations identified in postmodern critiques of science. Islamic epistemology, in contrast, insists upon a synthesis of rationality, ethical accountability, and spiritual awareness, ensuring that technological tools serve human welfare without undermining moral responsibility.

Sardar further elaborates on the implications of postmodern Islamic epistemology for technological civilizations:

“Technological advancement divorced from ethical reflection becomes a form of domination, not liberation; the challenge is to integrate knowledge with moral vision.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 134.

⁵⁰ Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 137.

⁵¹ Sardar, Ziauddin. *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come*. London: Mansell Publishing, 1985, 45.

⁵² Sardar, Ziauddin. *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come*. London: Mansell Publishing, 1985, 47.

AI, as a rapidly evolving technological force, exemplifies this challenge. Sardar's perspective reinforces the need for ethical oversight, spiritual consciousness, and reflective engagement in the design and deployment of AI systems. By situating technology within a moral and epistemic framework, human agents ensure that AI functions as a means of empowerment rather than a vehicle for ethical and social erosion.

AI, Accountability, and the Future of Human Agency

The rise of artificial intelligence presents profound questions regarding human agency, moral responsibility, and the scope of accountability. Islamic philosophical and legal thought emphasizes that human beings are entrusted (*amānah*) with stewardship (*khalīfah*) over both material and intellectual realms, including technological innovations. The Qur'an explicitly reminds humanity of this trust:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

“And when your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am placing a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth.’”⁵³

This verse underscores that human agency entails responsibility for ethical decision-making, moral oversight, and the proper utilization of knowledge and power. In the context of AI, humans remain accountable for the design, deployment, and consequences of intelligent systems. Machines, regardless of sophistication, cannot assume moral responsibility or exercise ethical judgment; they function as tools through which humans enact their stewardship. John Searle's observation reinforces this distinction: “The machine may select among alternatives, but it does not deliberate; it does not understand; it cannot assume moral responsibility” (*Minds, Brains and Science*, 28). The future of human agency, therefore, is inseparable from the ethical frameworks and moral consciousness guiding the development and application of AI.⁵⁴

Furthermore, contemporary Islamic thinkers, including Allama Iqbal and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, caution against the unreflective adoption of technology that prioritizes efficiency over ethical discernment. Iqbal asserts that the true measure of civilization lies not in mechanistic sophistication but in the moral and spiritual growth of humanity (*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 198), while Nasr warns that knowledge divorced from the sacred and metaphysical dimensions can lead to ethical and ecological crises (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 12). These insights emphasize that AI must be integrated into society under human stewardship that prioritizes virtue, justice, and spiritual awareness.

Ijtihād and the Renewal of Ethical Reasoning (Tajdīd al-Fikr al-Akhlāqī)

The concept of *ijtihād*, or independent scholarly reasoning, offers a powerful tool for renewing ethical reflection in the age of AI. Classical Islamic jurisprudence permits and encourages *ijtihād* to address novel issues that the traditional textual corpus may not explicitly cover. In contemporary contexts, this includes ethical dilemmas arising from autonomous systems, algorithmic decision-making, and the societal implications of machine intelligence. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes that moral and ethical reflection requires understanding the spirit (*maqṣad*) of the Qur'an, not merely its literal text:

“Moral and ethical reflection is essential when applying the principles of the Qur'an to modern life. Humans are accountable for how they utilize knowledge and power.”⁵⁵

By applying *ijtihād*, Muslim scholars can interpret foundational ethical principles to evaluate AI, ensuring that technological innovations adhere to justice, human welfare, and

⁵³ Qur'an 2:30

⁵⁴ Qur'an. 2:30. Translation from the Noble Qur'an.

⁵⁵ Rahman, *Islam*, 137

divine guidance. This process, referred to as *Tajdīd al-Fikr al-Akhlāqī* (renewal of ethical reasoning), enables the adaptation of Islamic moral philosophy to contemporary challenges, bridging the gap between classical ethical norms and emerging technological realities. The principle of *maṣlaḥah* (public welfare) serves as a critical guideline, ensuring that AI contributes positively to society while respecting human dignity, autonomy, and moral accountability.⁵⁶

Policy Recommendations for Muslim Scholars and Technologists

Building upon the ethical and philosophical frameworks outlined above, several policy recommendations emerge for Muslim scholars, technologists, and policymakers engaged in AI development. First, ethical oversight must remain central; AI systems should be designed, deployed, and monitored in accordance with Islamic ethical principles, including justice (*‘adl*), stewardship (*khilāfah*), and accountability (*taklīf*). Second, interdisciplinary collaboration between theologians, philosophers, and AI technologists is essential to ensure that technological innovation aligns with moral and societal objectives. Third, curricula in Islamic institutions should integrate discussions on technology, ethics, and AI, fostering a generation of scholars capable of applying *ijtihād* to contemporary challenges.

Moreover, human responsibility for AI outcomes must be clearly codified in both legal and ethical frameworks. Machines should be understood as instruments, not moral agents, and accountability structures should reflect this distinction. Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s critique of modern scientific paradigms reinforces this imperative: technology, including AI, must be subordinated to ethical and spiritual considerations to avoid domination and moral erosion (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 18). Finally, Muslim societies must cultivate ethical literacy in technological contexts, promoting informed decision-making and reflective engagement with AI across educational, institutional, and public domains.⁵⁷

In sum, the analytical discussion of AI in the Islamic framework emphasizes human agency, ethical responsibility, and the continuous renewal of moral reasoning. The integration of *ijtihād*, spiritual and rational intelligence, and rigorous ethical oversight ensures that AI serves humanity without undermining the ethical and spiritual principles that define Islamic thought.

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