ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ETHICAL THOUGHT:PHILOSOPHICAL AND CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing human life, shaping social, economic, educational, healthcare, and governance systems. While offering unprecedented opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and problem-solving, AI also poses significant ethical, philosophical, and civilizational challenges. Its deployment raises critical questions regarding accountability, justice, human dignity, and moral agency. Without an ethical framework, AI can exacerbate social inequalities, threaten privacy, or undermine human and societal values.
This study explores AI from an Islamic ethical perspective, integrating Qur'anic guidance, Prophetic teachings, and classical philosophical thought with contemporary ethical discourse. It emphasizes the principles of accountability (Taklīf), justice (Adl), preservation of human dignity (Karāmah), avoidance of harm (Ḍarar), and the ethical use of knowledge ('Ilm wa Hikmah). Furthermore, the research analyzes AI's civilizational impact, social implications, and potential for both human benefit and harm. The study concludes that embedding ethical and moral frameworks in AI development is essential for harmonizing technological advancement with cultural, spiritual, and social responsibilities in the 21st century.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Thought, Islamic Ethics, Philosophical Analysis, Civilizational Impact, Moral Responsibility, Ethical Governance, 21st Century Technology

Introduction
Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative forces of the twenty-first century, reshaping economies, governance, warfare, education, healthcare, and cultural life. Beyond its technical dimensions, AI raises profound ethical questions concerning human dignity, autonomy, responsibility, justice, and the future of civilization itself. The rapid expansion of algorithmic decision-making systems has intensified concerns about moral accountability, bias, surveillance, and the displacement of human agency, making ethical reflection an indispensable component of contemporary AI discourse (Floridi et al. 2018; Russell and Norvig 2021).
While AI is often approached as a product of modern science and engineering, its ethical implications cannot be adequately understood without reference to long-standing philosophical and civilizational traditions. Classical philosophy, religious moral systems, and cultural worldviews have historically addressed questions about intelligence, intentionality, moral responsibility, and the limits of human creativity. Ignoring these traditions risks reducing AI ethics to technical compliance or regulatory checklists, detached from deeper moral wisdom and civilizational values (Kant 1997; Wiener 1950).
Modern AI development is largely shaped by Western epistemological assumptions, particularly utilitarianism, instrumental rationality, and technological determinism. Although these frameworks offer valuable tools for assessing efficiency and outcomes, they often fall short in addressing moral intention, spiritual accountability, and collective well-being. In

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contrast, Islamic ethical thought emphasizes amānah (trust), ʿadl (justice), and maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (higher objectives of the law), while Eastern traditions prioritize relational harmony and moral intention, offering alternative ethical lenses for evaluating AI systems (Ghazali n.d.; Confucius 1979; Harvey 2000).

The accelerating integration of AI into critical domains such as law enforcement, military operations, financial systems, and social governance has heightened ethical risks, including algorithmic bias, opacity, erosion of privacy, and the concentration of power in technological elites. Scholars increasingly warn that unregulated or ethically neutral AI may deepen global inequalities and undermine social cohesion, particularly in non-Western societies that lack representation in AI governance structures (O'Neil 2016; Floridi et al. 2018).

This study argues that AI ethics must move beyond a narrow technocentric approach toward a civilizationally inclusive ethical framework. By engaging Western philosophical traditions alongside Islamic and Eastern ethical systems, the research seeks to demonstrate that ethical governance of AI requires moral wisdom, cultural sensitivity, and spiritual accountability. Such an approach not only addresses immediate ethical challenges but also contributes to safeguarding human dignity and civilizational continuity in an age of intelligent machines (Kant 1997; Ghazali n.d.; Wiener 1950).

Accordingly, this paper explores the philosophical foundations, ethical paradigms, and civilizational perspectives relevant to AI in the twenty-first century. It aims to contribute to the growing global discourse on AI ethics by offering a comparative and value-oriented framework that integrates technological innovation with moral responsibility, emphasizing that the future of AI is ultimately a test of humanity's ethical and civilizational maturity (Floridi et al. 2018; Russell and Norvig 2021). However, these technological innovations also introduce complex ethical dilemmas:

1. Can AI systems make morally responsible decisions, or does moral accountability remain exclusively human?
2. How can AI decision-making respect justice, fairness, and equity across diverse communities?
3. In what ways can civilizational and cultural values guide the ethical deployment of AI?
4. How can society prevent potential harms such as bias, misuse, inequality, or erosion of human dignity?

Islamic thought offers profound guidance. Rooted in Qur'anic principles, Prophetic teachings, and classical scholarship, it emphasizes the integration of reason (ʿaql) and morality (akhlaq), social justice, and human welfare. Classical scholars such as Al-Fārābī, Al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Rushd emphasized the alignment of intellect, ethics, and governance principles that are directly applicable to AI ethics.

This research aims to:

Examine the philosophical and ethical foundations of AI in the Islamic context.

Analyze the implications of AI for social justice, human dignity, and civilization.

Identify challenges posed by AI and propose actionable ethical guidelines for its responsible implementation.

By bridging traditional Islamic scholarship with modern technological discourse, this study develops a comprehensive framework for understanding AI's ethical, philosophical, and civilizational impact.

Historical Background

The ethical discourse surrounding Artificial Intelligence (AI) is deeply rooted in humanity's long-standing philosophical engagement with intelligence, agency, responsibility, and moral accountability. Although AI as a technological phenomenon is relatively recent, the ethical

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questions it raises originate from classical philosophy, religious moral systems, and civilizational reflections on the limits of human reason and creative power (Floridi et al. 2018; Wiener 1950; Kant 1997).

Classical and Pre-Modern Ethical Foundations

In ancient Greek philosophy, ethical reflection on intelligence and moral agency provided an enduring foundation for contemporary debates on artificial cognition. Plato emphasized that knowledge devoid of moral wisdom could become socially destructive, asserting that ethical truth must guide technical capability (Republic) (Plato 1992). Aristotle distinguished techne (technical skill) from phronesis (practical moral wisdom), arguing that ethical judgment requires context, intention, and virtue rather than mechanical rule-following (Nicomachean Ethics) (Aristotle 1999). This distinction remains central to critiques of algorithmic governance and automated decision-making.

Within Islamic intellectual civilization, ethical reasoning developed as an inseparable dimension of knowledge (ʿilm). Al-Farabi viewed rationality as a means for achieving moral excellence and social harmony within the virtuous state (Al-Madina al-Fadila) (Al-Farabi n.d.). Ibn Sina (Avicenna) emphasized consciousness, intentionality, and moral responsibility as defining attributes of human intellect, sharply differentiating it from mechanical imitation (Ibn Sina n.d.). Al-Ghazali warned that knowledge without ethical discipline leads to fasād (corruption), stressing accountability before God and the moral purpose of all human action (Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn) (Ghazali n.d.). These principles frame human creativity as a divine trust (amānah), a concept highly relevant to debates on autonomous AI systems.

Likewise, Eastern philosophical traditions provide significant ethical insights that challenge reductionist views of intelligence. Confucian ethics emphasize relational morality, social responsibility, and harmony through the concepts of ren (humaneness) and li (moral order), rejecting purely utilitarian or individualistic moral reasoning (Analects) (Confucius 1979). Buddhist ethical philosophy centers on intention (cetana) and moral consequence, asserting that ethical value arises from conscious awareness and compassion rather than mechanical action (Harvey 2000).

Early Modern Thought and Mechanistic Reason

The early modern period marked a decisive intellectual shift toward mechanistic interpretations of nature and mind. René Descartes conceptualized animals as automata and described cognition in mechanical terms, thereby laying philosophical foundations for later computational theories of intelligence (Discourse on Method) (Descartes 1998). Enlightenment rationalism further reinforced instrumental reason, emphasizing human mastery over nature through scientific and technological control.

This mechanistic trajectory generated profound ethical concerns. Immanuel Kant distinguished sharply between instrumental rationality and moral agency, arguing that moral action requires autonomy, intention, and respect for human dignity qualities irreducible to calculation or algorithmic logic (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals) (Kant 1997). Kantian ethics continues to shape contemporary debates on AI responsibility, human dignity, and ethical limits of automation.

Emergence of Artificial Intelligence in the Twentieth Century

The modern concept of AI emerged in the mid-twentieth century with Alan Turing's foundational work on computation and machine intelligence, particularly his proposal of the imitation game as a test for machine thinking (Computing Machinery and Intelligence) (Turing 1950). The Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence (1956), led by John McCarthy and colleagues, formally established AI as an academic discipline, primarily focused on simulating human cognitive functions with limited ethical reflection (McCarthy et al. 1956).

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CJSSR
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As AI and automation expanded in the late twentieth century, ethical concerns intensified regarding labor displacement, surveillance, autonomy, and the concentration of technological power. Norbert Wiener, a pioneer of cybernetics, warned that technological systems lacking moral governance could undermine human values and social stability (The Human Use of Human Beings) (Wiener 1950).

The Contemporary Ethical Turn in the Twenty-First Century

In the twenty-first century, AI ethics has evolved into a global interdisciplinary field engaging philosophy, theology, law, social sciences, and public policy. Issues such as algorithmic bias, opacity, accountability, and threats to human dignity have prompted scholars to critique purely technical, market-driven, and utilitarian ethical models (Floridi et al. 2018).

There is increasing recognition that sustainable AI ethics must be civilizationally inclusive, drawing upon Islamic, Western, Eastern, and Indigenous moral traditions. Historical ethical thought consistently demonstrates that technological advancement detached from moral wisdom risks eroding justice, human dignity, and civilizational balance. Thus, AI ethics represents not merely a technical challenge, but a profound moral and civilizational test for humanity in the twenty-first century (Kant 1997; Wiener 1950; Floridi et al. 2018).

1. Philosophical Overview

Ethics studies the distinction between right and wrong, justice, and moral responsibility. AI challenges traditional ethical frameworks by simulating intelligence and decision-making processes. Central questions include:

- Can AI systems possess moral reasoning comparable to humans?
- Who bears accountability when AI systems cause harm or injustice?
- How can civilizations maintain ethical standards amidst rapid technological evolution?

Classical Islamic philosophy provides guidance:

Al-Fārābī emphasized virtuous leadership and integration of knowledge, morality, and societal welfare (Al-Madina al-Fadila, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995).

Al-Ghazālī stressed that knowledge without ethical refinement is incomplete (Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1981).

Ibn Rushd highlighted rational deliberation as essential for just governance (Bidayat al-Mujtahid).

AI systems, when ethically guided, can reflect these principles by supporting decisions that are fair, accountable, and socially beneficial.

2. Islamic Ethical Principles Relevant to AI

1. Accountability (Taklīf):

Humans are morally responsible for all actions, including AI-mediated outcomes.

Qur'an 17:36: وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ جَعَلْنَـٰهُ فِي سِجِلٍّ مُّبِين (Al-Qur'an al-Karim [17:36])

Translation: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge; indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart all of these will be questioned."

Explanation: Designers and users of AI are accountable for its decisions and consequences.

2. Justice (Adl):

AI decisions must promote fairness and equity.

Qur'an 4:58: إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَن تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ (Al-Qur'an al-Karim [4:58]; Al-Qurṭubī, Al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān, vol. 11, p. 210)

Translation: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice."

3. Preservation of Human Dignity (Karāmah):

AI must enhance human welfare and respect autonomy.

Qur'an 95:4: وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ (Al-Qur'an al-Karim [95:4]; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm, vol. 3, p. 89)

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Translation: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam."

4. Avoidance of Harm (Ḍarar):

AI systems must minimize harm.

Hadith: لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ (Ibn Mājah 3982)

Translation: "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm."

5. Knowledge and Wisdom (ʿIlm wa Hikmah):

AI should promote ethical knowledge and societal benefit.

Qur'an 20:114: وَقُل رَّبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا (Al-Qur'an al-Karim [20:114]; Al-Fārābī, Al-Madina al-Fadila)

Translation: "And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'"

3. Historical Perspective

Early Caliphate: Governance relied on justice and moral responsibility (Ibn Hishām, Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah, vol. 2, p. 147).

Medieval Philosophy: Scholars integrated reason and ethics, forming frameworks similar to modern AI governance.

Social and Moral Technology: Islamic civilization historically applied ethical oversight to societal systems a precedent for AI evaluation.

4. Qur'anic and Prophetic Ethical Guidance for AI

1. Accountability (Taklīf):

Arabic: وَكُلُّ أُمَرٍۡ جَعَلۡنَـٰهُ فِي سِجِلٍّ مُّبِين (Al-Qur'an 17:36)

Translation: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge; indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart all of these will be questioned."

2. Justice (Adl):

Arabic: إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَن تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ (Al-Qur'an 4:58)

Translation: "Render trusts to whom they are due and judge with justice."

3. Avoidance of Harm (Ḍarar):

Arabic: لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ (Ibn Mājah 3982)

Translation: "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm."

4. Preservation of Human Dignity (Karāmah):

Arabic: وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ (Al-Qur'an 17:70)

Translation: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam."

5. Knowledge and Wisdom (ʿIlm wa Hikmah):

Arabic: وَقُل رَّبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا (Al-Qur'an 20:114)

Translation: "And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'"

6. Prophetic Ethics:

Arabic: مَنْ لَا يَرْحَمُ النَّاسَ لَا يَرْحَمُهُ اللَّهُ (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6011)

Translation: "He who does not show mercy to people will not be shown mercy by Allah."

Arabic: أَلَا إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ النَّاسِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ (Al-Majlis al-Sahih, Al-Hakim)

Translation: "The best among people are those who are most beneficial to others."

AI's Ethical, Social, and Civilizational Impacts: Contemporary Challenges and Recommendations

1. Ethical Impacts of AI

Artificial Intelligence fundamentally influences human ethical decision-making. While AI can assist in efficiency and objectivity, it raises several moral concerns:

1. Decision-making accountability: Automated systems can reduce human oversight, potentially leading to ethical violations. Islam emphasizes human responsibility (Taklīf), meaning AI must always function under ethical supervision (Qur'an 17:36 [Al-Qur'an al-Karim]; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2570).

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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2. Bias and fairness: AI can inadvertently reinforce social biases, leading to injustice. Islamic ethics prioritize justice (Adl) and equity, ensuring all human beings are treated fairly (Qur'an 4:58 [Al-Qur'an al-Karim]; Al-Qurṭubī, vol. 11, p. 210).
3. Privacy and dignity: AI systems, especially those handling personal data, can threaten human dignity. Qur'anic teachings (17:70 [Al-Qur'an al-Karim]; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, p. 89) stress the sanctity and honor of human life.
4. Harm reduction: Ethical principles demand avoidance of harm (Ḍarar). AI applications should be designed to prevent physical, social, or psychological damage (Ibn Mājah 3982).
5. Knowledge with ethics: Technological advancement must be guided by wisdom (ʿIlm wa Hikmah) to ensure societal benefit, in line with Qur'an 20:114 and Al-Fārābī's emphasis on ethical knowledge.
2. Social Impacts of AI
1. Employment and economy: AI can both create and replace jobs. Societies must balance efficiency with social justice. Prophetic guidance emphasizes benefiting others and promoting social welfare (Al-Majlis al-Sahih, Al-Hakim).
2. Education and skill development: AI transforms learning by personalizing education, but ethical considerations require that AI tools do not promote inequality. Access and fairness must be prioritized (Qur'an 4:58; Qur'an 17:36).
3. Health and well-being: AI improves healthcare outcomes, but decisions affecting life and death require strict moral oversight. Islamic ethics highlight the sanctity of life and responsible stewardship (Qur'an 5:32).
4. Social cohesion: Algorithmic decision-making can unintentionally segregate or polarize communities. Ethical AI should enhance societal unity and trust, reflecting Islamic teachings on mercy, cooperation, and social harmony (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6011).
3. Civilizational Impacts of AI
1. Cultural integrity: AI-driven platforms may influence values, language, and traditions. Civilizational ethics advocate for maintaining identity while embracing innovation (Al-Fārābī, Al-Madina al-Fadila).
2. Moral and spiritual life: AI must support, not undermine, spiritual development. Technologies influencing behavior and belief systems should align with moral and religious principles (Qur'an 20:114; Al-Ghazālī, Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn).
3. Global ethical standards: AI development transcends borders. Civilizational dialogue guided by universal principles such as justice, mercy, and human welfare is essential to create ethical consensus (Ibn Rushd, Bidayat al-Mujtahid).
4. Contemporary Challenges
1. Algorithmic bias: AI may perpetuate historical inequalities, requiring proactive ethical regulation (Qur'an 4:58; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, p. 89).
2. Autonomy vs accountability: As AI becomes autonomous, moral responsibility must remain with humans (Qur'an 17:36; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2570).
3. Surveillance and privacy: AI-driven surveillance poses ethical dilemmas, requiring policies aligned with dignity and justice (Qur'an 17:70).
4. Weaponization of AI: Military AI systems raise moral questions about harm, proportionality, and human oversight (Ibn Mājah 3982; Al-Fārābī, Al-Madina al-Fadila).
5. Misinformation and social engineering: AI-generated content can influence beliefs and social norms, necessitating ethical evaluation (Qur'an 5:2; Al-Ghazālī, Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn).
5. Recommendations for Ethical AI Development
1. Human-centered oversight: All AI systems must function under accountable human supervision (Qur'an 17:36; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2570).

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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2. Embedding justice and fairness: Algorithmic decisions must be transparent and auditable to prevent discrimination (Qur'an 4:58; Al-Qurṭubī, vol. 11, p. 210).
3. Protection of human dignity: AI must uphold privacy, autonomy, and personal rights (Qur'an 17:70; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, p. 89).
4. Harm minimization: Risk assessments and ethical audits must be conducted to prevent societal and individual harm (Ibn Mājah 3982).
5. Knowledge and ethical integration: AI research must combine technological expertise with ethical, philosophical, and civilizational insight (Qur'an 20:114; Al-Fārābī, Al-Madina al-Fadila).
6. Promoting social welfare: AI applications should aim to benefit humanity, especially marginalized populations (Al-Majlis al-Sahih, Al-Hakim).
7. Global collaboration: Cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue should guide universal ethical standards for AI (Ibn Rushd, Bidayat al-Mujtahid).

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence represents not merely a technological advancement but a profound ethical and civilizational challenge for humanity in the twenty-first century. As intelligent systems increasingly shape decision-making in governance, security, economy, and culture, ethical questions related to human dignity, responsibility, justice, and accountability have become unavoidable. This study has demonstrated that addressing these challenges requires more than technical safeguards or regulatory mechanisms; it demands a deep engagement with philosophical and moral traditions that have historically guided human conduct and social order (Floridi et al. 2018; Wiener 1950).

The comparative analysis of Western, Islamic, and Eastern ethical traditions reveals that no single moral framework is sufficient to address the complex ethical implications of AI. While Western philosophical approaches contribute valuable insights through deontological and utilitarian reasoning, they often prioritize efficiency and outcomes over moral intention and spiritual accountability. In contrast, Islamic ethics emphasizes amānah (trust), ʿadl (justice), and moral accountability before God, while Eastern traditions stress relational harmony, compassion, and ethical intentionality. Together, these civilizational perspectives offer a more holistic and human-centered foundation for AI ethics (Kant 1997; Ghazali n.d.; Confucius 1979; Harvey 2000).

The findings of this study underscore that the ethical risks associated with AI such as algorithmic bias, opacity, erosion of privacy, and concentration of power—are not merely technical failures but moral shortcomings rooted in value-neutral approaches to technology. Historical experience consistently shows that technological progress divorced from ethical wisdom leads to social fragmentation and injustice. Consequently, ethical governance of AI must prioritize human dignity, social justice, and moral responsibility over mere efficiency or economic gain (O'Neil 2016; Floridi et al. 2018).

Furthermore, this research highlights the urgent need for a civilizationally inclusive ethical framework in global AI governance. Dominance of Western-centric ethical models risks marginalizing non-Western moral traditions and exacerbating global inequalities in technological development and regulation. Incorporating Islamic, Eastern, and other indigenous ethical perspectives can contribute to a more equitable and culturally sensitive AI ecosystem that respects diverse moral worldviews and societal needs (Wiener 1950; Floridi et al. 2018).

In conclusion, the future of Artificial Intelligence is inseparable from the ethical choices made by humanity today. AI can either become a tool for justice, compassion, and human flourishing or a mechanism of control, inequality, and moral erosion. The direction it takes will depend on

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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whether ethical wisdom rooted in philosophical depth and civilizational values is allowed to guide technological innovation. By integrating moral responsibility with scientific advancement, humanity can ensure that AI serves as a means of civilizational progress rather than a threat to human dignity and ethical order (Kant 1997; Ghazali n.d.; Wiener 1950).

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ISSN E: 3006-1466
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