



Article

Redefining Reality: An Islamic Metaphysical Critique of AI's Data-Centric Worldview

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Abstract

This essay explores the metaphysical and philosophical implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) through the intersecting insights of René Guénon (ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Yaḥiā), Martin Heidegger, and Ibn al-ʿArabī. It argues that modern AI systems, particularly in their statistical and data-centric forms, are not merely instrumental tools but expressions of a deeper metaphysical worldview—one rooted in quantification, abstraction, and utility. Guénon's critique of the "reign of quantity" and Heidegger's notion of Enframing (Gestell) converge in diagnosing the loss of qualitative and sacred dimensions in modern life. While Heidegger's phenomenology provides a powerful immanent critique of technological reductionism from within the Western philosophical tradition, Guénon's metaphysical traditionalism articulates a diagnosis of modernity that resonates with Islamic metaphysics, especially as articulated by Ibn al-ʿArabī. The essay includes Heidegger in the argument as a representative of a critique of modern technology issuing from the Western tradition itself, and by emphasizing his shared concerns with Guénon, whose metaphysics resonates with Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics. Through a comparative metaphysical framework, this paper proposes an Islamic response to AI that avoids both technophilia and technophobia, insisting instead on a spiritually grounded ethic of technology that preserves human's dignity and mission. Methodologically, the essay restores a prior order often inverted in contemporary AI ethics: ontology (what AI is) grounds epistemology (what it can know), and only then can ethical evaluation be coherent.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; philosophy of technology; Guénon; Heidegger; Ibn al-ʿArabī; enframing; Islamic metaphysics; ontology; modernity

1. Introduction: Technology and the Metaphysics of Abstraction

In the last hundred years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have evolved from technical innovations into paradigmatic forces reshaping how societies understand intelligence, knowledge, and even reality itself. Once the domain of computer science laboratories and military applications, AI has entered the core of education, governance, healthcare, and interpersonal communication—converting decisions once entrusted to human beings into statistical predictions and algorithmic outcomes. While the technical marvels of such systems continue to dazzle policy-makers and industries alike, their deeper metaphysical origins and consequences remain insufficiently examined. What vision of the human being underwrites these systems? What conception of reality do they reflect—and reinforce? What modes of knowing, valuing, and being do they exclude? How is the human being viewed through AI and is this view consistent with his role from an Islamic perspective as a locus of the divine names and vicegerent of God on earth and thus the steward of nature?



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This essay approaches AI not merely as a technological phenomenon but as an ontological and epistemological event—a transformation in how the real is disclosed and understood and how this is having an impact on human beings themselves that is that the metaphysical premise of AI is not neutral and that it affects its users. The calculative and data-centric orientation of AI is not accidental; it reflects and deepens a particular metaphysical trajectory that prioritizes quantity over quality, abstraction over presence, and instrumentality over contemplation.

This project has a genealogy, and it demands philosophical excavation. At the center of that excavation are three figures: René Guénon (ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyā, 1886–1951), a French metaphysician and traditionalist writer who critiqued modernity’s descent into materialism and called for a restoration of perennial metaphysical principles grounded in sacred knowledge, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), a German philosopher primarily concerned with the question of Being, whose later work critiqued modern technology through the concept of Enframing, and Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240), the great Andalusian Sufi metaphysician whose doctrine of the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) reoriented Islamic metaphysics by envisioning the cosmos as a continuous unfolding of divine theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) and the human heart (*qalb*) as the locus for the reflection of the Divine Names (*al-Asmāʾ al-Ḥusnā*). While separated by tradition and vocabulary, all three converge in diagnosing the spiritual and intellectual poverty of modernity—particularly its tendency to reduce being to that which can be measured, codified, and optimized. This shared diagnosis and its internal structure are schematically represented in Figure 1.

Philosophically speaking, the foundations of AI lie in the rationalist project of early modern European thought. A sequence of thinkers—Hobbes, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and Frege—gradually reformulated the nature of thought, knowledge, and reason in ways that would ultimately make symbolic computation appear plausible, even inevitable. This rationalist reconfiguration of reason, as Frederick Copleston notes in his classic survey of early modern philosophy, already presupposes a mathematized and formal conception of intelligibility that would later re-emerge in computational models of thought [1].

- Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), in *Leviathan* (I.5), famously equated reasoning with “reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of consequences.” (Reasoning is calculating with words) This move inaugurated the idea that thinking is a kind of calculation, paving the way for the mechanization of mental processes.
- René Descartes (1596–1650) argued in his *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method* that the mind is a domain of clear ideas representing the external world. His famous dictum “*Cogito, ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”), which posits thinking as the foundation of individual existence and implies a clear dichotomy between the thinking subject (mind) and the world (matter). This dualism leads to the conception of knowledge as primarily the representation of the external world inside the mind. He posited mental representations and that our relation to the world is mediated by these representations in our mind.
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) envisioned a “*characteristica universalis*,” a symbolic language capable of expressing all knowledge, reducing reasoning to a series of symbolic manipulations—a dream that prefigures both formal logic and symbolic AI.
- Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), while not a rationalist in the classical sense, deepened the vision of cognition as rule-governed synthesis. For Kant, concepts are not mere abstractions but rules that structure the manifold of intuition—a view echoed in modern AI architectures with their rule-based or schema-driven processing.
- Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) provided the first fully formal logical system capable of representing quantified propositions and inference structures, laying the groundwork for algorithmic reasoning and machine-encoded logic.

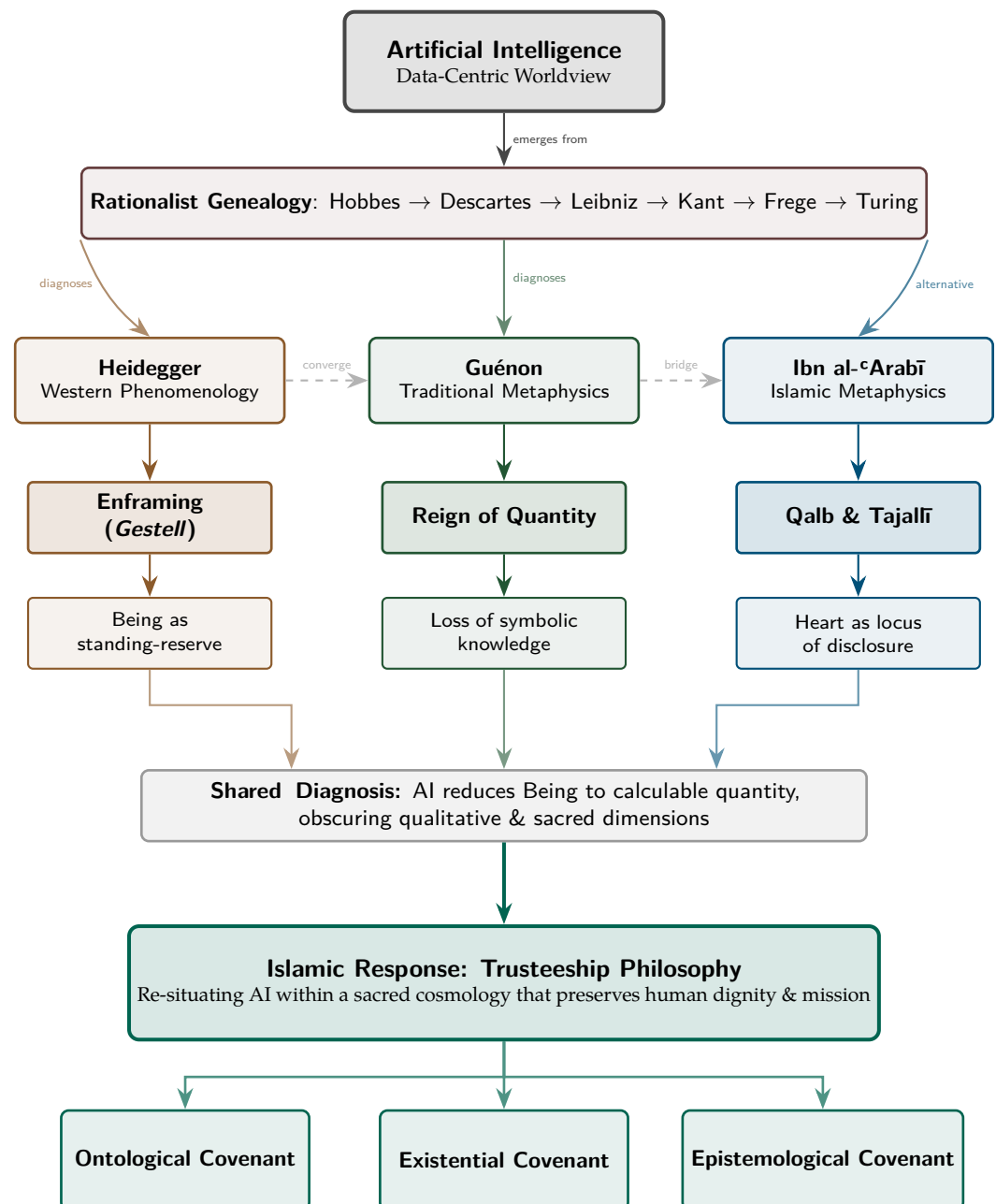


Figure 1. Argumentative structure of the essay. AI emerges from a rationalist genealogy (§1) and is critiqued through three converging perspectives: Heidegger’s *Enframing* (§2), Guénon’s *reign of quantity* (§3), and Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics of the heart (§5–7). These diagnoses converge on a shared recognition that AI reduces Being to calculable quantity, obscuring qualitative and sacred dimensions. The Islamic response, grounded in trusteeship (*iʿtimān*), re-situates AI through three covenants: ontological, existential, and epistemological (§8). The figure provides a schematic orientation rather than a detailed analysis, clarifying the structural convergence that underlies the argument developed throughout the paper.

Together, these thinkers provided the conceptual scaffolding of AI: thought is symbolic manipulation; knowledge is internal representation; intelligence is rule-based computation. Once these ideas took root, it became thinkable that machines—if properly designed—might not only simulate thought but embody it. The rationalist vision thus morphs into engineering ambition: from metaphysical speculation to code and circuitry.

This lineage of ideas culminates in what Martin Heidegger critiques as the technological mode of revealing, or *Enframing* (*Gestell*). In his 1954 essay “The Question Concerning

Technology” [2], Heidegger challenges the illusion that technology is neutral or merely instrumental. Instead, he claims that modern technology instantiates a specific ontological stance: it discloses the world not as a symbolic or sacred whole, but as “standing-reserve” (Bestand)-a storehouse of resources to be extracted, optimized, and controlled. Trees become timber, rivers become hydroelectric potential, and human beings become data flows in a predictive algorithm. Technology thus reconfigures “being” (here in Heidegger’s non-theistic sense of historical disclosure, not *wujūd* in the Akbarian/Islamic sense of theophanic, grounded existence; cf. [3]) itself, ushering in a form of nihilism where only what is useful or measurable is considered real.

Heidegger’s Enframing is not only a critique of machines but of a metaphysics-one that sees Being as measurable presence and truth as functional utility. In this sense, the data-centric paradigm of contemporary AI is not a neutral technical advance but the radicalization of a long metaphysical trajectory. AI inherits from rationalism the belief that intelligence can be formalized, and from industrial modernity the desire that it must be optimized. Heidegger thus offers a powerful diagnosis of our technological condition.

Yet Heidegger’s critique, powerful as it is, remains within the bounds of the Western philosophical tradition. As Robert Pippin [4,5] has observed, Heidegger is still a product of the very metaphysical project he seeks to critique. His thought, deeply shaped by German idealism, phenomenology, and post-Kantian categories, does not break with Western modernity so much as it radicalizes its inner tensions. Heidegger seeks to rescue the question of Being from technological nihilism, but he does so using conceptual tools forged within the same historicist and post-theological lineage that produced the problem in the first place. Heidegger offers no transcendent escape, no sacred metaphysics, but rather a call to meditative thinking and poetic dwelling-a gesture that remains, as George Pattison [6] notes, abstract and largely negative. Heidegger unmask the technological gaze but cannot fully replace it. George Pattison, among others, has noted the limits of Heidegger’s vision: while he opens the door to a more meditative and poetic relation to Being, he offers no metaphysical ground capable of sustaining a substantive, sacred order of reality. Even Edith Stein [7], writing from within phenomenology and herself a student of Edmund Husserl, protested that Heidegger’s flattened ontology cannot sustain the hierarchical depth presumed by any robust metaphysics of transcendence. Thus, while Heidegger meticulously exposes the technological gaze, he is unable to supply an alternative cosmological grammar capable of re-sacralizing reality; his critique remains an immanent unraveling of Western modernity rather than a passage beyond it.

René Guénon [8–10] offers a *traditional* diagnosis of modernity that, while fundamentally incompatible with Heidegger’s immanent phenomenology, converges in its identification of the modern crisis as ontological rather than merely technical or ethical. Writing from the perspective of “traditional metaphysics” that draws on Vedānta, Taoist cosmology, and the Islamic doctrine of *tawhīd*, Guénon re-situates the modern condition within a metaphysical narrative of cyclical descent from qualitative, symbolic knowledge toward quantitative, profane abstraction. . In *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* [10], *East and West* [8], and *The Crisis of the Modern World* [9], Guénon identifies the modern age as the terminal phase of a civilizational descent: a progressive degeneration from qualitative, symbolic knowledge to purely quantitative, profane abstraction. Where Heidegger sees Enframing, Guénon sees the reign of quantity-a metaphysical deformation in which everything must be rendered calculable, measurable, and devoid of spiritual meaning. And unlike Heidegger, Guénon does not merely lament this loss; he insists that it can only be remedied by re-rooting knowledge in metaphysical principles that transcend history, utility, and human subjectivity. Crucially, Guénon does not merely mourn this eclipse of meaning; he insists that any genuine remedy must lie in a re-integration of cognition with supra-

human principles that stand outside historical flux-principles accessible through intellectual intuition (intellectus rather than ratio), ritual symbolism, and the contemplative disciplines preserved within the great sapiential traditions. Only by re-anchoring knowledge in those transcendent foundations, he argues, can the modern mind recover a hierarchy of realities that restores the sacred depth effaced by quantitative abstraction [8–13].

Guénon's metaphysics [8,10–12], in turn, resonates deeply with the Islamic intellectual tradition, and, in particular, with the writings of Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240), the great Andalusian Sufi metaphysician often referred to as al-Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master). For Ibn al-ʿArabī [14–16], the cosmos is not an independent, self-standing reality but rather a theophany (tajallī)-a perpetual unfolding of the Real (al-Ḥaqq) through countless signs (āyāt), each one pointing beyond itself to The Source. Every being, every event, every particle of existence participates in this grand symphony of divine disclosure, not as an autonomous entity but as a mirror reflecting aspects of The One. It bears emphasis that the Akbarian school is not merely mystical but rigorously **rigorously philosophical**. Already in the generation following the Shaykh al-Akbar, his foremost disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) articulated the master's visionary insights in the technical vocabulary of *falsafa*. His *Miftāḥ al-Ghayb* and *al-Nuṣūṣ* (to which we return in Section 7.5) systematised the metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* for philosophical audiences, while his correspondence with the Peripatetic philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (*al-Murāsālāt*) demonstrates direct engagement between the two traditions; his *al-Fukūk* further unlocked the philosophical dimensions of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ* [17–20]. Subsequent generations deepened this synthesis: Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī's (d. 1300) *Muntahā al-Madārik* deployed Akbarian metaphysics to illuminate Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry [21]; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1329) codified Akbarian terminology in his *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya* and applied it systematically in his Qurʾānic hermeneutics (*Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*) and commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* [22–24]; and Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī's (d. 1350) *Muqaddima* to his own *Fuṣūṣ* commentary became a standard philosophical text studied independently in the madrasas for centuries [25]. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. c. 1424) systematised the doctrine of the Perfect Human in his *al-Insān al-Kāmil* [26], while Ḥaydar Ḍmulī (d. after 1385) synthesised Akbarian metaphysics with Shīʿī philosophy in his *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār* [27]. This trajectory reached its fullest elaboration in Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), whose *al-Ḥikma al-Mutaʿāliya fī al-Asfār al-Arbaʿa* synthesised Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics within a sophisticated framework drawing on Peripatetic and Illuminationist resources-a synthesis extended in his *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyya* and applied to ḥadīth literature [28–30]. Yet the deepest intuitions of this entire tradition about *wujūd* and the unity of Being remain Akbarian in spirit.

This vision crystallised in the doctrine of *tashkīk al-wujūd*-the *gradation of being*-which holds that existence is a single reality manifesting in varying degrees of intensity, from the absolute plenitude of the Real to the attenuated traces of contingent beings. Crucially, this is not the “oneness of being” in the Greek pantheist sense, wherein God and world collapse into undifferentiated identity; rather, it is a metaphysics of *tajallī* (theophanic disclosure) in which the One remains transcendently other even as it discloses itself through the many. The cosmos participates in divine being without being identical to it-each existent is a *māẓhar* (locus of manifestation), not a fragment of a homogeneous substance.

Within this vision, the human heart (qalb) holds a central, almost cosmic, significance. It is not merely the seat of emotion, as in modern psychological usage, but a metaphysical organ capable of encompassing both ʿaql (reason, or intellect in its highest sense) and khayāl (spiritual imagination). Reason in Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought is not confined to discursive logic; rather, it is an innate, luminous faculty through which the soul perceives metaphysical realities. Meanwhile, imagination (khayāl) is elevated to a sacred function: it is the subtle

medium through which the unseen realities (ghayb) are made manifest in forms perceptible to consciousness.

Ultimately, the heart becomes the locus (maḥall) of the divine names (asmāʾ Allāh), each name representing a particular mode of the Real's self-disclosure. The heart's capacity to be shaped by and reflect these names determines the spiritual stature of the individual. In the perfect human being (al-insān al-kāmil), the heart attains a state of perfect balance and receptivity, becoming a polished mirror that reflects the fullness of divine reality. Thus, knowledge (maʿrifah) in this tradition is not a product of external accumulation but an inward unveiling, a recognition (taʿarruf) of the divine imprints inscribed within the very fabric of existence and within the depths of the human being.

This profound metaphysical architecture, where all of existence is symbolic and participatory, finds strong echoes in Guénon's own teachings, particularly in his understanding of the cosmos as a symbolic manifestation of transcendent principles and his insistence on the centrality of intellectual intuition (intellectus) over rationalist, empirical knowing. Both Guénon and Ibn al-ʿArabī call for a restoration of the contemplative, symbolic mode of knowledge that modernity-in its obsession with quantity, externalization, and fragmentation-has largely obscured.

While this essay primarily engages Heidegger, Guénon, and Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is worth briefly noting that contemporary structuralist philosophies, as well as speculative frameworks like Max Tegmark's Mathematical Universe Hypothesis [31], extend the metaphysical tendencies diagnosed here. Structuralism reduces reality to relational patterns devoid of intrinsic substance, while Tegmark proposes that reality itself is a mathematical structure in and of itself. Both perspectives mirror, in their own ways, the metaphysical flattening critiqued throughout this work: a substitution of formal abstraction for qualitative and symbolic Being. Their prevalence in contemporary AI discourse underscores the urgency of reclaiming a metaphysical vision that transcends mere calculation and restores ontological depth.

This triadic framework-Heidegger's phenomenology, Guénon's traditionalist metaphysics, and Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophical sufism-provides the scaffolding for a deeper interrogation of AI. The core argument is this: AI is not neutral. It is a carrier of metaphysical assumptions-assumptions that must be unmasked, questioned, and countered. By bringing these thinkers into conversation, we can begin to articulate a God-centered response to AI-one that resists the technological imperative to optimize everything, and instead reorients knowledge, ethics, and design toward the spiritual meanings embedded in Being itself. The cosmos is a symbolic mirror of Divine Names, and human beings as khulafāʾ (singular: khalīfa, "vicegerent"/"viceregent") are tasked not with optimizing the world, but with reflecting the Divine through ethical and contemplative engagement. Guénon's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics refuse the binaries of subject and object, mind and matter, quantity and quality-instead they focus on articulating a vision of Being as unity (waḥda), in which all things are connected through symbolic depth.

This essay unfolds in eight movements. It begins by tracing the metaphysical genealogy of AI, from early modern rationalism and Enlightenment formalism through the rise of formal logic to the statistical ontology of contemporary machine learning. It then turns to Martin Heidegger's account of modern technology as Enframing-a mode of revealing that transforms beings into calculable resources-and reads AI as a planetary infrastructure that reconfigures the clearing of Being. The analysis is then deepened through René Guénon's metaphysics of the "reign of quantity," complemented by Baudrillard's reflections on simulacra [32], to situate technological abstraction within a broader eschatological descent from symbol to simulation. Against this backdrop, Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine of the heart, imagination, and symbolic knowledge offers a cosmological alternative in which the world

is understood as theophany and knowledge as disclosure rather than computation. Building on this, the essay examines how technical instruments—from Nietzsche’s typewriter, which reshaped both his style and philosophical orientation [33], to contemporary generative models—reconfigure not only cognition but also metaphysical orientation. It then articulates an Islamic hierarchy of perception that situates artificial intelligence at the lowest levels of sensation and analogical intellect. On this basis, the study develops an explicitly Akbarian account of the ontological status of artificial systems, carefully distinguishing between artefact, imaginal isthmus, and metaphor, and clarifying why no machine can attain the station of the *insān al-kāmil*. Finally, it sketches a metaphysical ethic of artificial intelligence grounded in the logic of trusteeship, according to which the human being, as *khalīfa*, bears responsibility for orienting knowledge and technique toward the Real; a companion study develops this trusteeship-based ethical framework in greater systematic detail [34].

Each thinker thus contributes a layer of critique and response within a single argumentative arc:

- Heidegger diagnoses the ontological consequences of technological Enframing, showing how modern technique does not merely introduce new instruments but reorganizes disclosure itself, narrowing what counts as real and intelligible and rendering beings available as calculable resources.
- Guénon names the underlying metaphysical illness as the “reign of quantity”—the progressive substitution of qualitative meaning, symbolic depth, and principal knowledge with measurement, utility, and abstract formalism—and gestures toward perennial principles of restoration that recover hierarchy, limit, and orientation to the Absolute.
- Ibn al-ʿArabī provides the symbolic cosmology within which those principles can be most fully articulated: a universe ordered by degrees of Being (*wujūd*), disclosed through the Divine Names, and encountered by the human as a mirror-bearer whose vocation is not mastery but responsible witnessing. The notion of trusteeship (*khilāfa/amāna*) then gathers these insights into an ethical orientation capable of discerning, limiting, and re-situating AI—at the levels of design, governance, and use—within a sacred cosmology that subordinates technical power to spiritual meaning, moral responsibility, and the proper ends of human flourishing.

Methodologically, this triadic framing does not claim a direct historical lineage among these figures, nor does it seek to collapse their differences into a single system. It is instead a layered, heuristic conversation across complementary registers: Heidegger is mobilized to illuminate the phenomenology and ontology of technological world-disclosure; Guénon to diagnose modernity’s metaphysical reduction of quality to quantity; and Ibn al-ʿArabī to articulate, from within an Islamic intellectual horizon, a positive metaphysical anthropology and symbolic cosmology capable of grounding an alternative. The aim is therefore diagnostic and constructive at once: to read AI not only as a technical artefact but as a civilizational symptom, while using trusteeship as the integrating orientation that translates metaphysical diagnosis into normative discernment, principled limits, and right placement.

1.1. Methodological Orientation: From Being to Knowing to Acting

Methodologically, this essay proceeds from a conviction shared by Heidegger and the Akbarian school, and echoed in Guénon’s traditional metaphysics: that ontology precedes epistemology, and epistemology precedes ethics. Before asking how we should act toward AI (ethics), we must first ask what AI can know (epistemology), and before that, what AI is (ontology). Much contemporary AI ethics discourse effectively inverts this order, moving rapidly to questions of fairness, accountability, and bias without first clarifying the ontological status of artificial systems or interrogating the conditions and limits of their knowing. The result is an ethics without ground: procedural constraints applied to entities

whose nature remains unexamined. By contrast, the metaphysical critique developed here insists that ethical orientation becomes possible only after ontological and epistemological clarity has been achieved. For Heidegger, the *Seinsfrage* (Question of Being) must precede all other questions; for Qūnawī, “knowledge follows *wujūd* (being),” and trusteeship (*amāna*) presupposes both the right mode of being and the right mode of knowing.

This ordering also anticipates the paper’s later articulation of trusteeship as a three-fold covenant-developed at fuller length in [34]: an *ontological* covenant that situates the human being and confines AI to instrumentality, an *epistemological* covenant that disciplines knowledge and verification, and an *existential* (ethical) covenant that governs intention, responsibility, and dignified action.

1.2. Note on Terminology

For ease of reference, key metaphysical terms used throughout the paper are defined in Appendix A, “Glossary of Key Metaphysical Terms.”

1.3. Note on Related Works

Earlier versions of this work were presented at public talks in January and March 2024. Recordings are available on YouTube: see References [35,36]. A fictionalized philosophical novel exploring many of the themes discussed in this paper has been published [37]. The present paper may be viewed as the philosophical companion to that novel.

1.4. Genealogy of AI: From Rationalism to Machine Learning

Artificial Intelligence emerges not merely from technical innovation, but from a deeper rationalist metaphysics. It reflects a profound transformation in the understanding of thought itself: what was once conceived as a spiritual and participatory act-rooted in intuition, discernment, and connection to higher realities-gradually became reimagined as a structured, and eventually mechanical, process. From symbolic abstraction to statistical computation, AI embodies a centuries-long ambition to formalize intelligence, codify knowledge, and mechanize decision-making. This section traces that intellectual lineage-from Enlightenment rationalism to contemporary machine learning-showing how modern AI systems enact, intensify, and extend the metaphysical assumptions embedded within Western philosophy.

1.4.1. Reason as Reckoning: Hobbes, Descartes, and the Birth of Computational Thought

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) inaugurated the mechanization of thought with his startling claim in *Leviathan* that reasoning is “nothing but reckoning.” By reducing logic to arithmetic-adding and subtracting ideas-he opened the way for a conception of the mind as a calculating engine. This was not merely a metaphor. It was a metaphysical redefinition of what it means to think: no longer a contemplative grasp of meaning, but a computational procedure.

René Descartes (1596–1650) radicalized this view by locating certainty in the clear and distinct ideas of the mind. His dualism-separating mind from matter, subject from object-reinforced a model in which reality is mediated by internal representations. To know the world was to map it inside the mind, and the mind itself was imagined as a transparent container of ideas. This emphasis on internal representation laid the conceptual groundwork for symbolic AI, where cognition is formalized as the manipulation of symbols standing for external realities.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) extended this logic further, dreaming of a *characteristica universalis*-a universal symbolic language in which all reasoning could be formalized and disputes resolved by calculation: “If controversies were to arise, there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants.

For it would suffice to take their pencils in hand, to sit down to their slates, and to say to each other: *Calculemus!*"-"*Calculemus! Let us calculate!*" he declared, anticipating the dream of programmable intelligence. For Leibniz, intelligence was not divine illumination or moral discernment, but a process of symbolic manipulation/calculation, reflecting the rational order of the universe.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), though more nuanced, consolidated this vision. His theory of cognition as rule-governed synthesis positioned the mind as a structuring mechanism, imposing categories upon the manifold of experience. Concepts became rules, and knowledge became the application of those rules to phenomena. The rational mind, now autonomous and sovereign, replaced divine guidance with procedural cognition.

These thinkers laid the metaphysical foundation of symbolic AI: knowledge is representation, reasoning is rule-following, and intelligence is computability.

1.4.2. Logic and the Machine: From Algebra to Algorithms

The dream of mechanizing thought did not remain confined to philosophical speculation. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it began to crystallize into a formal science of logic and, eventually, programmable machines. This transformation was propelled by a series of thinkers who redefined reasoning as a syntactic, rule-governed procedure-laying the intellectual foundation for artificial intelligence as we know it today.

George Boole (1815–1864) initiated this transition with *The Laws of Thought*, in which he reconceived logic as a form of algebra. By reducing logical operations to mathematical functions, Boole created a symbolic system that would later become the basis of digital circuits. Boolean logic-built upon binary true/false values-made it possible to model logical reasoning through electrical systems. What had once been a tool of philosophical discourse was now a machine-readable code.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) added further sophistication by introducing abduction-a form of inference distinct from deduction and induction-and diagrammatic logic, which explored visual reasoning structures. His work anticipated probabilistic reasoning and graphical models, concepts at the heart of modern explainable AI. Peirce's semiotic framework-where meaning arises from triadic relationships between sign, object, and interpretant-offered an alternative to the rigid symbolic systems that would dominate AI, but it was largely sidelined in favor of more mechanizable logics.

Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) systematized predicate logic and distinguished between syntax and semantics-allowing for a more precise mapping between formal structures and meanings. His *Begriffsschrift* introduced the first full formal language for logical inference, enabling knowledge to be encoded, manipulated, and derived within symbolic systems. Frege's influence on AI is foundational: every modern logic programming language, from Prolog to semantic networks, bears the imprint of his formalism.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), in their magnum opus *Principia Mathematica* (1910–1913), attempted to derive all of mathematics from logical axioms. Their work demonstrated how entire domains of knowledge might be reduced to symbolic manipulation-validating the notion that intelligence itself could, in principle, be formalized. This ambition gave rise to the belief that reasoning, and eventually understanding, could be reconstructed through axiomatic systems.

David Hilbert (1862–1943) took this vision further with his program to axiomatize all of mathematics. Hilbert envisioned a formal system that would be both complete and consistent-a project that directly foreshadowed the goals of symbolic AI. His efforts to secure the foundations of mathematics, however, were upended by his intellectual descendant:

Kurt Gödel (1906–1978) Gödel's incompleteness theorems demonstrated that no sufficiently powerful formal system could be both complete and consistent. While this exposed

the inherent limitations of symbolic reasoning, it paradoxically reinforced its prestige by showing how much of reality could be captured-until it could not.

Alonzo Church (1903–1995) and Alan Turing (1912–1954) then formalized the very concept of computation. Church’s lambda calculus and Turing’s theoretical machine defined the boundaries of algorithmic processing. Turing, in particular, transformed metaphysical speculation into engineering ambition: if intelligence is computation, then machines can think-if they pass the test. His famous “Turing Test” offered a criterion for artificial intelligence based not on understanding, but on simulation. The human was no longer the measure of the machine; the machine became the mirror of the human.

Finally, Norbert Wiener (1894–1964) unified these threads through cybernetics, a science of control systems, feedback loops, and goal-directed behavior. By connecting communication theory with adaptive systems, Wiener anticipated much of what now constitutes machine learning and reinforcement learning. His work reframed cognition as a system of inputs, outputs, and regulatory feedback-a model that continues to dominate contemporary AI architectures.

Together, these thinkers transformed logic into a machine, and the mind into a function. They reimagined reason not as contemplation or intuition, but as manipulation-of symbols, circuits, and code. The result was a metaphysical realignment: intelligence became computation, meaning became structure, and truth became output. The human mind, once the locus of divine reflection, was recast as an algorithmic processor. In this lineage, AI is not an accident-it is the telos.

1.4.3. From Symbolic AI to Machine Learning: Metaphysical Shifts

In the mid-twentieth century, philosophical insights about reason and representation began to take technical form. Early AI pioneers-figures like Allen Newell, Herbert Simon, and John McCarthy-directly inherited the rationalist legacy of Hobbes, Leibniz, and Frege. Systems such as the General Problem Solver (GPS) and SHRDLU were explicit attempts to implement this lineage, modeling human cognition through internal representations and logical inference rules.

This approach-commonly referred to as Symbolic AI or GOF AI (Good Old-Fashioned AI)-was grounded in Cartesian and Kantian assumptions. Intelligence, within this paradigm, was seen as the formal manipulation of symbols, with thinking equated to rule-based operations on mental representations. But as Melanie Mitchell [38] observes in “Artificial Intelligence: A Guide for Thinking Humans”, symbolic systems proved brittle, rigid, and unable to generalize beyond narrowly defined domains. Their dependence on explicit representations made them ill-suited for tasks involving ambiguity, perception, or real-world context.

Critics like Hubert Dreyfus [39–45], drawing on the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, challenged the very foundations of Symbolic AI. Human understanding, he argued, is largely pre-reflective, embodied, and situated: it cannot be reduced to computation or formalized rules. As Mitchell [38] recounts, such critiques gained traction as symbolic systems consistently failed to deliver on their initial promises.

In essence, Symbolic AI embodied a rationalist metaphysics of mind:

- Thinking = rule-following.
- World = symbolic model.
- Knowledge = explicit representation.

Heidegger’s critique of cartesian representational thinking thus applies with full force: Symbolic AI is the technical expression of the Western metaphysical impulse to render Being intelligible through abstraction.

By the 1980s, growing disillusionment with Symbolic AI led to a decisive shift toward Machine Learning (ML)—a paradigm with more empiricist roots. Unlike Symbolic AI, ML does not rely on hand-coded rules; instead, it extracts patterns from data through training. Neural networks, and later deep learning models, became central. Intelligence was no longer designed; it was learned through statistical optimization over vast datasets. As in [46–48], contemporary enthusiasm for neural networks often masks a conceptual confusion between statistical performance and genuine understanding, leading to what he calls a form of “deep stupidity” rather than intelligence.

In this context, we can distinguish two dominant paradigms in AI research:

- Symbolic AI: Rooted in logic and problem-solving, it treats intelligence as the manipulation of symbolic representations—essentially, programming the mind’s understanding of the world.
- Cognitive AI/Machine Learning: Rooted in neuroscience and pattern recognition, it models intelligence as a capacity to learn-by simulating neural structures and strengthening connections in response to data.

The difference, at its core, reflects two divergent approaches:

- Symbolic AI: Axiomatize cognitive behavior—explicitly define how we solve problems and then build a system to follow those rules.
- Machine Learning/Cognitive AI: Model the physical brain itself, allowing the system to learn from experience and analyzing the resulting behavior after the fact.

In essence, symbolic AI models the process of reasoning, while machine learning models the physical substrate of cognition. It is mostly that one models how we solve problems, and the other models the brain’s functioning itself.

While the methodological approaches differ, the metaphysical assumptions remain largely continuous. Symbolic AI, in its classical form, sought to define knowledge through explicit rules and logical structures. Machine Learning, by contrast, appears to favor brute-force pattern extraction over explicit reasoning—absorbing vast quantities of data and extrapolating behavior through statistical generalization rather than axiomatic deduction.

Yet this shift, though significant, does not represent a rupture from the rationalist project. In both Symbolic AI and ML, knowledge is ultimately framed as the manipulation of discrete informational units according to formalizable procedures. ML does not reject rationalism; it radicalizes it. Data is not treated as an end in itself but as raw material to build models that generalize, predict, and optimize. The finality remains rational: an intelligible, calculable ordering of experience through abstract representations. Thus, Machine Learning represents less a break with the rationalist genealogy than a new phase in its unfolding—a phase where quantity overwhelms quality, and abstraction deepens into opacity.

This nuance is critical. Without recognizing the metaphysical continuity between Symbolic AI and ML, the deeper technicist metaphysics at work—the collapse of qualitative being into statistical quantity—risks being misread as merely a technical evolution rather than a continuation of a much older trajectory.

As Melanie Mitchell [38] emphasizes, this transition marks a deeper metaphysical turn: a shift from mind as logic to mind as function approximation. Intelligence is now equated not with understanding, but with prediction. This move reflects a broader epistemological drift: from reasoning to modeling, from rules to patterns, from representation to performance.

1.4.4. Statistical Ontology and the Flattening of Being

Modern AI systems operate under what may be called a statistical ontology: a worldview in which intelligence, perception, and meaning are reduced to patterns of correlation. The real becomes that which can be logged, labeled, batched, and optimized.

Deep learning models treat the world as a reservoir of data, structured in tensors and reducible to numerical gradients. Knowledge becomes correlation; meaning becomes prediction; truth becomes accuracy.

Melanie Mitchell [38] underscores this problem: while deep learning systems are effective, they often lack transparency, robustness, and common sense. Their power lies not in understanding but in brute-force pattern extraction. This, in turn, enacts a metaphysical flattening. What cannot be encoded as data becomes invisible to the system-and perhaps to us. Related critiques from neuroscience and philosophy of mind likewise challenge the reduction of cognition to formal computation, emphasizing the non-algorithmic and relational dimensions of embodied intelligence [49,50].

Heidegger's notion of Enframing (Gestell) [2,51] is relevant here. AI systems increasingly mediate our access to the world-not by representing it, but by reconstructing it according to computational criteria. Human values, intentions, and qualitative dimensions risk being sidelined by what René Guénon [10,12,13] calls the "reign of quantity."

In this light, AI is not just a technology but a metaphysical project. Its assumptions about what intelligence is, what knowledge means, and what reality consists of, shape the world it helps bring into being. If unexamined, these assumptions threaten to collapse Being into mere function, wisdom into optimization, truth into metrics, and traditional ontology to statistical ontology.

This technicist metaphysics-the collapse of quality into quantity, understanding into prediction-echoes Heidegger's concern that modernity conceals Being itself [2,51]. To grasp the depth of this crisis, we turn next to Heidegger's account of technology as Enframing.

1.4.5. From Rationalist Precondition to Technological Enframing

While the foregoing genealogy has traced AI's emergence through the rationalist tradition-from Hobbes and Descartes to Frege, Hilbert, and Turing-it is essential to clarify that this lineage represents only one tributary feeding into the broader ontological history that culminates in modern technology. The rationalist trajectory identifies the epistemic conditions under which calculability becomes the measure of intelligibility: the world is rendered tractable insofar as it is mathematically representable. This genealogy explains how the "data-centric" worldview of contemporary AI became plausible, even inevitable, within the intellectual architecture of modernity.

However, as Heidegger insists [2,51], the essence of modern technology cannot be reduced to this rationalist inheritance. For Heidegger, the decisive transformation concerns the history of Being itself, in which *technē* shifts from poetic bringing-forth to instrumental production, and ultimately to the global technological ordering he names Enframing (Gestell). In this ontological narrative, the rise of modern subjectivism and the consolidation of Nietzsche's will-to-power are decisive forces that shape how beings come to appear-as resources (Bestand) available for optimization, prediction, and control.

The rationalist genealogy and Heidegger's ontological genealogy thus describe distinct but convergent trajectories. Rationalism prepares the conceptual terrain by equating thought with computation and intelligibility with formalization; Heidegger interprets the broader historical shift in which this mathematized worldview becomes the dominant mode of revealing. The former provides the epistemic preconditions for calculative thinking, while the latter describes its ontological destiny as a totalizing mode of disclosure.

Understanding these genealogies together allows us to see contemporary AI more clearly:

It is neither the mere outcome of rationalist abstraction nor simply the latest technological device, but the point at which calculative rationality and ontological Enframing converge. AI is thus both the child of the rationalist project and the consummation of

the destinal trajectory Heidegger describes—a crystallization of a metaphysics that renders reality measurable, optimizable, and manipulable.

This distinction, and the convergence it reveals, is crucial for the argument that follows: only by acknowledging both genealogies can we understand why AI represents not a technical development alone but a profound restructuring of the clearing of Being, with implications that are epistemic, ethical, and metaphysical in equal measure.

2. Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Enframing

Having traced the metaphysical lineage of AI from rationalist abstraction to statistical computation, we now turn to a deeper philosophical critique: Martin Heidegger's analysis of modern technology as a mode of revealing that transforms Being itself [2,51]. While previous sections outlined how AI inherits Enlightenment metaphysics—casting reality as measurable, intelligible, and computational—Heidegger diagnoses this condition as a specific ontological danger: Enframing (*Gestell*). In what follows, we explore Heidegger's concept of Enframing and draw on recent interpretations of Heidegger (Pattison [6], Pippin [4,5], Thomson [52]) to show how AI exemplifies this metaphysical culmination.

2.1. Enframing as Technological Disclosure

In “The Question Concerning Technology” [2], Heidegger argues that technology is not merely a collection of tools but a mode of revealing—a way in which truth comes to presence. Ancient *Techne* disclosed beings as things to be brought forth in harmony with nature. Modern technology, by contrast, reveals nature as standing-reserve (*Bestand*): a stockpile of resources waiting to be extracted, quantified, and optimized.

Enframing is this modern essence of technology. It is not itself technological but the a priori structure that determines how beings appear as resources. This transformation is not neutral. It alters the very meaning of Being by reducing it to availability, efficiency, and use.

AI does not simply intensify Enframing (*Gestell*), it brings Enframing to its ultimate fulfillment. No longer confined to the extraction and ordering of resources, AI advances a reconstruction of reality itself into the logic of data structures and algorithmic calculability. From facial recognition to recommendation engines, AI systems do not merely interpret beings; they pre-structure the clearing (*Lichtung*) within which beings can appear at all. As Pattison [6] notes, we are no longer merely users of technology; we dwell within a technological world—a world pre-disclosed according to the demands of efficiency, prediction, and control. In this new epoch of revealing, beings are disclosed only insofar as they are measurable, modelable, and manipulable. What cannot be quantified, forecasted, or operationalized is not merely overlooked; it is withheld from appearing, rendered ontologically void. In other words, what cannot be measured ceases to exist. Thus AI enforces a destinal narrowing of Being itself, reducing the mystery of presence to the standing-reserve (*Bestand*) of computational representation.

2.2. From Representation to Calculation: The Culmination of Metaphysics

Robert Pippin's recent reading of Heidegger underscores the philosophical stakes of Enframing [5]. According to Pippin, Heidegger views the entire Western tradition—from Plato to Hegel—as grounded in a fatal assumption: that Being is intelligible in principle, fully available to discursive reason. This culminates in Hegel's system, which equates logic with metaphysics. For Heidegger, this identification of Being with knowability is not only false but catastrophic.

AI, in this light, is not just a technical development but the culmination of this metaphysical trajectory. It embodies the belief that all meaning can be formalized, all behavior predicted, and all knowledge encoded. In this regime, as Pippin notes [5], what matters is

no longer what something is, but what it does in a system. Meaning collapses into utility; existence is flattened into function. For a standard analytic overview of the philosophical assumptions underlying artificial intelligence, see [53].

Thus, AI represents not merely an epistemological advance but an ontological tipping point. If Being is rendered equivalent to computability, then the unquantifiable—the poetic, the sacred, the moral—is excluded from what counts as real. Enframing thus reveals its danger: it does not destroy Being but forgets it.

Heidegger's critique goes further by directly opposing the Cartesian epistemology that underpins both symbolic AI and modern cognitive science. As Hubert Dreyfus [39–45] has argued, Heidegger dismantles the notion that knowledge is primarily a matter of internal mental representations. He challenges four key Cartesian assumptions:

- **Subject-Object Dichotomy:** Heidegger denies the clear separation between mind and world. Human beings are not detached observers but always already thrown into a web of care and concern: being-in-the-world. Knowledge does not begin with inner representation but with existential embeddedness.
- **Being-in-the-World:** This central concept in Heidegger's "Being and Time" [45,54] posits that all knowing is grounded in practical, pre-reflective engagement. We are not brains in vats modeling the world: we are actors, always already involved.
- **Ready-to-Hand vs. Present-at-Hand:** Symbolic AI, like Cartesian philosophy, treats the world as a collection of isolated, observable entities—what Heidegger calls the present-at-hand. But real intelligence, Heidegger argues, arises from dealing with the ready-to-hand: the seamless, embodied use of tools and language in context. AI, by freezing meaning into static tokens, abstracts from this lived entanglement.
- **Ontology over Epistemology:** Finally, Heidegger insists that the question of Being must precede the question of knowledge. The real error of Symbolic AI is not just technical—it is metaphysical. It asks "how can we model the world?" before asking "what does it mean to exist?"

In summary, Dreyfus's Heideggerian critique shows why AI based on symbolic reasoning fails to capture the richness of human cognition. Intelligence is not rule-following applied to formal models; it is embodied understanding embedded in a lifeworld. Thus, symbolic AI is not merely limited—it is metaphysically misguided.

AI, in this light, is not just a technical project but the culmination of a metaphysical error: the dream of capturing Being within code.

2.3. *The Loss of World: Ontological Homelessness*

Heidegger warns that Enframing leads to a condition of ontological homelessness. As technology enlists all beings into systems of control, the world no longer appears as a meaningful whole. Instead, we experience a fragmented version of reality mediated via disconnected fragments—data points, content streams, tokens—each optimized for relevance but empty of rooted significance.

George Pattison [6] extends this critique. In an age where human identity is shaped by algorithmic profiles and predictive analytics, we lose not only autonomy but the capacity to ask what it means to be. AI becomes a mirror in which we see not ourselves, but only our statistical shadows. As Pattison writes, "technology gets inside our heads," reshaping our very sense of self and world.

The danger is not that AI will become conscious, but that it will remake consciousness in its image. When AI defines intelligence as prediction, thought itself becomes impoverished: that which cannot be modeled disappears from concern.

2.4. *Technology's Danger and Promise in the Age of AI*

Recent Heideggerian scholarship has significantly deepened our understanding of how AI must be situated within what Heidegger calls an ontohistorical unfolding of Being. Among the most important recent contributions is by Iain Thomson [52], which offers perhaps the most up-to-date reconstruction of Heidegger's technological philosophy in explicit relation to generative AI systems such as ChatGPT.

Thomson's central claim [52] is that modern technology-and AI above all-cannot be understood at the level of devices, tools, or applications. Rather, AI is an historical mode of ontological disclosure: a way in which Being becomes intelligible within the late-modern epoch. Technology, he writes, is "an historical mode of ontological disclosure," not an assemblage of machines. This aligns precisely with Heidegger's assertion that "the essence of technology is nothing technological." As Thomson shows, this means that AI is not simply embedded within the regime of Enframing (Gestell); it is a privileged crystallization of Enframing's deepest logic.

Thomson identifies two structural preconditions for late-modern technology:

- Modern subjectivism: the metaphysical split between the value-bestowing subject and an inert, objectified world.
- Late-modern Enframing: a radicalization in which both subjects and objects are absorbed into the standing-reserve (Bestand), treated as optimizable resources.

AI inherits both tendencies. As Thomson puts it, Enframing reduces beings-including persons-to "meaningless 'resources' (Bestand), mere material standing by to be optimized and ordered for maximally efficient use-including ourselves." [52].

This formulation clarifies a point central to this paper: AI is not merely a tool that enacts optimization-it reflects a deeper metaphysical ontotheology, grounded in Nietzsche's unity of will-to-power and eternal recurrence. The will-to-optimize that animates AI research is not incidental; it is the ontotheological inheritance of the late-modern epoch itself.

Thomson stresses that the danger of technology is not primarily ecological, political, or psychological, but ontological: the possibility that human beings will lose their defining capacity for reciprocal "world-disclosure," becoming instead satisfied participants in the optimization imperative. He warns that humanity might become "so satiated" with technologically enabled self-optimization that we "lose the very sense that anything is lost" in such a transformation.

This captures with remarkable precision the condition I associated earlier with Guénon's "counter-initiation" and Baudrillard's "hyperreality." The danger is not simply surveillance, bias, or hallucination, but a double forgetting: forgetting Being itself, and forgetting that we have forgotten.

Yet Thomson is equally insistent that the essence of technology contains a paradoxical saving power. Drawing on Hölderlin's famous distich "Where danger is, the saving power grows" he argues that technological Enframing also reveals, in inverted form, humanity's distinct capacity for creative, responsive world-disclosure. When AI threatens to reduce thinking to efficient optimization, it simultaneously draws attention to thinking as such-what AI cannot do, the inexhaustible "polyphonic hints" of Being that human thought composes.

This insight is invaluable for the trajectory of the present essay. Thomson's analysis confirms that AI's metaphysical danger is precisely what opens the need for a higher, non-computational mode of knowing. For Heidegger, this takes the form of an "other beginning," a post-metaphysical openness to Being.

For Islamic metaphysics, as we will see, this corresponds to the qalb, the heart as the locus of divine guidance (al-Hādī), a vertical dimension of knowing irreducible to computation.

Thomson's work allows us to refine three claims already central to this essay:

- AI must be understood ontologically rather than technically.
- It is the maturation of late-modern Enframing, not merely a branch of computer science.
- The danger of AI is the potential erasure or rewriting of human nature.

Thomson [52] warns explicitly that late-modern optimization could “delete our distinctive nature as responsive and creative disclosers of being.”

AI discloses the limits of calculative thinking, opening the possibility for another mode of thought.

This dovetails with Ibn al-ʿArabī’s distinction between the “two eyes” of the heart, and with Guénon’s critique of the Reign of Quantity.

In short, Thomson’s contemporary reconstruction of Heidegger strengthens rather than competes with the Islamic metaphysical response developed here. Both converge on a single insight: AI demands not technical fixes but a transformation of the metaphysics of the subject, a recovery of modes of knowing that transcend calculative rationality.

2.5. Distinguishing Genealogies and Recognizing AI as Planetary Infrastructure

The rationalist genealogy traced in this essay—from Hobbes and Descartes through Frege, Hilbert, Church, and Turing—shows how modern AI arises from the mathematization of thought and the progressive internalization of calculability as the paradigm of intelligibility. Yet this intellectual lineage is not identical to Heidegger’s own genealogy of modern technology. It is closer, rather, to Guénon’s diagnosis of modernity as a “reign of quantity,” a process of «solidification» in which qualitative, symbolic knowing is reduced to quantitative abstraction until the world becomes legible primarily as data and prediction. Heidegger does not situate the emergence of modern technicity in the rationalist tradition per se, but in the historical transformation of *technē*, the ascent of modern subjectivism, and the consolidation of Nietzschean will-to-power into the planetary technological ordering he names *Gestell*. Where my account concerns the epistemic internalization of abstraction and symbolic formalization, Heidegger’s concerns the ontological “destining” of disclosure itself—the historical shift in how Being becomes intelligible. These two genealogies converge in their diagnoses of AI’s significance, but from different angles: AI is simultaneously the culmination of rationalist metaphysics and, in Heidegger’s sense, one of the most explicit expressions of late-modern Enframing.

This convergence becomes even sharper when we consider the political-economic infrastructures through which AI already operates. Although the argument of this paper is principally metaphysical, AI cannot be disentangled from the material architectures that enable and accelerate its world-shaping force. Contemporary AI systems are embedded in platform capitalism, large-scale data extraction, algorithmic governance, surveillance infrastructures, and global asymmetries of labor and technological access. These structures are not external to Enframing; they are its concrete historical embodiment. The reduction of beings to *Bestand* appears today not only in the conceptual architecture of AI models but in the economic imperatives—optimization, scale, behavioral prediction—that drive their development. The metaphysical critique of AI is thus reinforced, not undermined, by understanding AI as a socio-technical formation: the calculative ontology of AI is inseparable from the planetary infrastructures that enact and normalize it.

For this reason, AI must be understood not as a discrete tool but as an equipmental totality in the Heideggerian sense—a world-constituting infrastructure within which human beings increasingly dwell. In Heidegger’s terms, this is the difference between a piece of equipment (*Zeug*) and the totality of references (*Bewandtnisganzheit*) that silently gives equipment its sense: tools are not first encountered as neutral objects, but as nodes in a world that already assigns relevance, priority, and allowable action. When AI becomes infrastructural, it does not merely add a new instrument to the inventory; it intervenes in the

very relay of significance through which things show up as “important,” “credible,” “urgent,” or “worth pursuing.” Its effects are therefore not exhausted by the tasks it automates; they arise primarily from the way AI restructures the clearing (*Lichtung*) in which beings appear, mediating perception, preference, valuation, and even self-understanding. At this point, a clarification is necessary. To say that AI reorganizes the clearing (*Lichtung*) does not mean that it generates a new ontological opening of Being in Heidegger’s strict sense. The *Lichtung* names the primordial openness in which beings can appear as beings at all, and this remains a destinal structure of revealing rather than a technical artifact. What AI restructures is not the ontological clearing itself, but the *ontic-historical conditions of disclosure* within that clearing: the stabilized infrastructures, mediations, and institutional pathways through which entities become publicly available, salient, and actionable. In this sense, AI functions as an administrative layer of Enframing-governing what can appear, how it appears, and with what authority-without itself constituting a new epochal disclosure of Being. To call AI a “just a tool” is therefore misleading. It is an ontological environment: a technologically mediated horizon of intelligibility that absorbs both human activity and human identity into its logic of optimization. Recognizing AI as a planetary infrastructure clarifies why merely procedural or regulatory “ethics” cannot address the depth of the challenge. What is required is a metaphysical re-orientation of the human being within this equipmental totality, a recovery of modes of disclosure that exceed and resist the narrowing of Being to what can be computed.

2.6. When the Human Becomes Information: Heideggerian Warnings in Practice

Heidegger’s account of modern technology as Gestell—the enframing that renders beings as mere “standing-reserve”—is not an abstract metaphysical warning. It manifests concretely in domains where the stakes are highest: medicine, law, and religion. In each of these fields, artificial intelligence does not simply automate existing processes. What takes their place is statistical probability, simulated fluency, and informational hallucination.

Nowhere is this transformation more visible—and more dangerous—than in the clinical setting.

2.6.1. Case Study: AI and the Crisis of Embodiment in Medicine

The danger of mistaking artificial intelligence for a holistic form of knowing becomes especially visible in medicine—where diagnostic clarity and embodied presence are essential, and where the ontological drift from human doctors’s expertise to code carries real human costs.

AI’s entry into the clinical sphere is not metaphysically neutral. It reflects the same logic of abstraction, optimization, and depersonalization that marks the broader trajectory of modern science. The consequences are measurable.

Decline of Physical Examination: Traditionally, clinical discernment began with the physician’s embodied presence—palpation, auscultation, observation. These were not merely precursors to technology; they were diagnostic modalities in themselves. Today, however, the overreliance on imaging and tests has led to a documented decline in physical exam skills. Physicians often bypass the body in favor of screens. This has resulted in misdiagnoses, including cases where strokes were mistaken for Bell’s palsy due to failure to conduct a proper exam. See also [55–57] on LLMs in ER and for further discussion on AI in Healthcare.

Overutilization of Imaging: This diagnostic dependency drives up the cost of care and delays treatment. It contributes to a technocratic mentality where symptoms are not interpreted through experience and intuition, but through machine-generated probabilities. The medical gaze is replaced by the scan.

Lanthanic Disease and the Ontology of Detection: So-called “lanthanic” or subclinical diseases represent a further stage in this drift. These are conditions that produce no symp-

toms and no subjective awareness-but are discovered by machines. As a result, otherwise healthy people are medicalized. Disease becomes not a felt experience, but a reading.

Geopolitical Biases and WHO Cautions: The World Health Organization has warned that AI systems trained primarily on data from high-income countries may fail to serve those in low- and middle-income contexts. Worse, the emphasis on AI innovation risks displacing investment in basic, equitable care. The WHO notes ethical risks in how health data is collected, how algorithmic bias operates, and how these tools might harm rather than heal, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240029200>.

The Problem of AI Hallucinations: This metaphysical drift is further exacerbated by the hallucinatory tendencies of AI systems. Recent investigations revealed that OpenAI's Whisper-a widely used AI-powered transcription tool-frequently fabricates content when transcribing medical consultations, inventing racial commentary, violent narratives, and even non-existent treatments [58]. Despite explicit warnings from OpenAI against using Whisper in "high-risk domains," hospitals and health systems have rushed to implement such tools. In one documented case, Whisper invented a non-existent medication called "hyperactivated antibiotics." Worse still, some clinical AI systems erase original recordings after transcription, rendering verification impossible. This erosion of ground truth fundamentally destabilizes trust in the medical record-and by extension, the physician-patient relationship itself.

The underlying issue is not just design bias or medical error. It is metaphysical. When the body is rendered as data, and diagnosis becomes detached from the presence of the physician, the soul of medicine is obscured. The human being becomes standing-reserve-a resource to be scanned, parsed, and predicted.

2.6.2. The Dangers of Hallucination in Critical Domains

If medicine reveals the cost of disembodiment, the phenomenon of AI hallucination reveals another danger: the loss of truthfulness. The implications of these hallucinations are not merely academic-they can produce tangible harm.

In some infamous incidents, ChatGPT fabricated a sexual harassment scandal and named a real law professor as the accused, and wrongly claimed that a man had murdered his children. The first falsehood was even referenced in a legal case, raising serious defamation concerns, <https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/chatgpt-sexual-harassment-law-professor-b2315160.html>. Such examples underscore the danger of relying on LLMs in high-stakes areas like law, healthcare, or religion.

In healthcare, the potential for hallucinated outputs from LLMs carries unique and significant risks that extend far beyond theoretical limitations. Even subtle inaccuracies can directly compromise patient safety by leading to misdiagnoses, incorrect dosing, or inappropriate treatment recommendations. For example, the paper [59] explains that when an LLM hallucinates-by fabricating or misinterpreting clinical details-the consequences can be severe. An erroneous output might prompt a clinician to pursue a diagnostic or therapeutic pathway that is not only ineffective but potentially harmful.

In contexts like Islamic scholarship, the misinterpretation or outright invention of religious texts and rulings can have serious consequences for communities and legal frameworks. For instance, a recent AI-generated fatwa service (ILLM) misquoted and tampered with Quranic verses to justify its position. The AI distorted the correct verse, كَسْبُوا, by outputting كَسَيْنَ-an incorrect morphological alteration that changed the referent from ships to women, thereby fundamentally twisting the verse's meaning to fit a pre-determined theological conclusion. In a separate instance, the app referenced a verse concerning جوار (ships) but incorrectly claimed its subject was women. Such fabrications (see Appendix B for

further documentation) undermine not only the reliability of the technology but the sacred integrity of the text itself.

These examples highlight why many experts strongly advise human oversight when dealing with LLM-generated content, particularly in sensitive or specialized fields like religious scholarship. Misinterpreting or fabricating religious texts can lead to significant harm and misunderstanding. Human experts must validate AI-generated content, ensuring it aligns with accurate interpretations and religious understanding.

2.6.3. The Role of Human Judgment

Ultimately, LLMs should not be seen as replacements for human judgment or expertise. They are powerful engines for pattern recognition and language generation, but their outputs must be verified by knowledgeable individuals to ensure accuracy and appropriate context. The very nature of these models—probabilistic guessing—means they cannot guarantee truthfulness, no matter how confident or fluent they sound.

In this light, they might best be described (As suggested at <https://substack.com/home/post/p-158983906>) not as “Artificial Intelligence,” but as Sophisticated Guessing Machines (SGMs).

2.7. Heidegger’s Immanent Horizon: The Closure Within the Critique

Yet Heidegger’s critique, for all its penetration, remains enclosed within the very horizontality it seeks to transcend. His concept of Dasein—the human being as the locus where Being discloses itself—refuses any orientation external to temporal finitude. Dasein is *geworfen*, thrown into existence without intrinsic direction or *telos*, condemned to construct authenticity from within its own situatedness. Where revelation would provide transcendent reference, Heidegger offers only interpretive freedom within historical horizons. The question of guidance—of a Guide (*Hādī*) orienting from beyond—never arises. It is not negated but structurally foreclosed by his methodological commitments.

This limitation has been diagnosed from within Western philosophy itself. Robert Pippin’s recent work [5] demonstrates that Heidegger’s attempt to overcome metaphysics paradoxically completes it—the ‘culmination’ his critique promised to transcend becomes instead its final iteration [5]. Where Heidegger claims to expose metaphysics’s forgetting of Being, Pippin shows how this exposure remains trapped within the very framework it diagnoses: the assumption that meaning must be generated immanently, that intelligibility requires no reference beyond historical disclosure, that authenticity emerges from resolute confrontation with finitude rather than receptivity to transcendence. The critique of onto-theology—Heidegger’s rejection of God as supreme being within metaphysical schemes—thus forecloses precisely what it should interrogate: whether Being itself might require reference beyond beings, whether intelligibility demands ground beyond the historical, whether meaning could arrive from outside the closure of Dasein’s thrown projects.

Pippin’s diagnosis is decisive [5]: Heidegger’s radicalized phenomenology cannot escape the circularity it exposes because ‘the authority of reason remains problematic’ when reason can only validate itself through its own operations [5]. Thought becomes a self-referential system admitting no exit—it seeks foundations but discovers only its own reflecting operations, aspires to ground meaning but finds only the historical contingency of its own interpretive frameworks. This is not failure of rigor but structural necessity: once transcendent reference is methodologically excluded, thought circles endlessly within its own presuppositions. Heidegger diagnoses the forgetting of Being and the reduction of reality to standing-reserve, yet his own framework structurally participates in what Guénon [10–12] identifies as the collapse of vertical causality into horizontal temporality. Being, in Heidegger’s account, unfolds historically through Dasein’s finite projects rather than descending

hierarchically from the Absolute. His critique of onto-theology-the reduction of God to supreme being within the metaphysical tradition-inadvertently forecloses access to the vertical axis that traditional metaphysics preserves. Importantly, Heidegger's rejection of onto-theology marks a structural divergence from Akbarian metaphysics [14–16]: Ibn al-ʿArabī (and its later philosophical articulation in Qunawi, Mullā Ṣadrā etc.) operates within a theistic, grounded ontology (wujūd as tajallī/effusion from the Necessary Being), whereas Heidegger's later account of Being proceeds without such grounding; for a critique of comparative equivalences between Mullā Ṣadrā and Heidegger, see Hamzi [3].

The result is what Pippin [4,5] terms philosophy's unavoidable 'fate': a critique without exit, the inability to transcend the closure one diagnoses [5]. Heidegger reveals Enframing's dangers but provides no transcendent standpoint from which to resist them-only the exhortation to 'dwell' more authentically within technological revealing itself. Authenticity (Eigentlichkeit) becomes matter of resolute acceptance of finitude, not submission to what exceeds it. Gelassenheit (releasement) names a letting-be that remains wholly immanent, a receptivity without Revealer. This explains why Heidegger's later work turns increasingly to poetry and the pre-Socratics-not as preparation for revelation but as recovery of wonder within the closure of historical Being. His thought circles within the very enclosure it diagnoses, a self-referential loop seeking exit through ever-deepening historicity rather than vertical interruption.

What both Heidegger and his Western critics share-including Pippin's sophisticated analysis-is methodological commitment to immanence: the conviction that meaning, intelligibility, and orientation must be generated from within the human condition rather than received from beyond it. This commitment, however philosophically refined, forecloses the possibility that Islamic metaphysics not only affirms but demonstrates: that the closure of immanent reason is not limitation to be lamented but recognition demanding response-the turn toward revelation. Pippin correctly identifies Heidegger's entrapment within the 'fate of philosophy' as the inability of thought to escape its own circularity [5], yet he offers no escape beyond acknowledging the aporia. The diagnosis is accurate; the prescription remains trapped within the disease.

Islamic metaphysics, by contrast, preserves precisely what Heidegger's framework forecloses and what Pippin's critique cannot recover: the possibility of guidance arriving from beyond the system. Where Dasein must orient itself through its own thrown projects, the Islamic subject (ʿabd, servant) receives orientation through waḥy (revelation). Where Heidegger's Being unfolds historically within temporal horizons, Islamic ontology distinguishes al-Ḥaqq (the Real) as that which grounds contingent existence (al-khalq) from beyond temporal becoming. Where Pippin diagnoses philosophy's inability to escape its own circularity, Islamic epistemology breaks the circle through external reference: revelation as the Gödelian truth the system cannot generate but must receive. The difference is not merely theological but epistemological: Heidegger's Dasein constructs meaning; the Muslim receives it. This distinction becomes decisive when confronting AI's totalizing Enframing-for a system that knows only immanent resources cannot generate knowledge of what transcends it. Heidegger and Pippin identify the problem with philosophical precision; Islamic metaphysics provides the structural solution their frameworks cannot accommodate.

3. Guénon and the Metaphysics of the Symbolic Real

If Heidegger diagnoses modern technology as a mode of revealing that forgets Being, René Guénon offers a metaphysical framework for its recovery-one grounded not in modernity's epistemic ambitions but in traditional metaphysical principles. Where Heidegger critiques the enframing of reality, Guénon seeks to restore its vertical dimension: the

symbolic, the qualitative, and the transcendent. We use Guénon's ideas in "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times", "The Crisis of the Modern World", and "East and West", to argue that AI is one of the extreme applications of the reign of quantity.

3.1. *Quantity, Uniformity, and the Eclipse of Being*

Guénon opens "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times" with the observation that modernity increasingly discloses reality in quantitative, rather than qualitative, terms—a drift from principal unity to the anonymous multiplicity of "pure quantity." Quantity, for Guénon, is not a neutral metric but a principle of *séparativité*: a mode of thinking that fractures reality into numerically discrete units while suppressing qualitative essences [10] (ch. 1). This degeneration of knowledge severs manifestation from metaphysical source, dissolving Being into the statistical and the calculable.

A central motif in The Reign of Quantity is Guénon's triangle symbol: the apex stands for principal quality (unity, essence), while the base signifies quantity (multiplicity, dispersion). Modernity's obsession with "uniformization"—the pursuit of global standardization and equalization—mistakes this base for the apex. It carves a parody of unity by reducing all difference to sameness, confusing unity with anonymity and flattening symbolic hierarchies [10] (ch. 7). The so-called universality of digital systems—where everything is data—is, in this light, not a transcendence of difference but its final erasure.

3.2. *Sacred Versus Profane Science: The Collapse of Vertical Mediation*

In The Crisis of the Modern World [9], Guénon distinguishes between sacred science, which is always oriented toward metaphysical truths, and modern science, which is closed to anything but the physical [9] (ch. 4). Sacred science integrates all levels of reality, using symbols and correspondences to reflect metaphysical principles into the sensible world. In this traditional schema, every domain of knowledge is vertically anchored.

Modern science, in contrast, is what Guénon calls a "savoir ignorant"—a knowing that knows nothing of principles. It severs itself from vertical mediation and becomes epistemically immanent: it measures, catalogs, and predicts, but cannot symbolically disclose the Real. Artificial Intelligence, particularly in its machine learning guise, exemplifies this profane science. It operates entirely within the lowest ontological stratum—the realm of patterns and statistics—obliterating the symbolic link between cosmos and intellect.

The symbolic universe, in which number, form, and rhythm transparently reflect higher realities, is rendered opaque. This is what Guénon calls "solidification": the world becomes dense, impenetrable to spirit, impermeable to contemplation [9] (ch. 17). The AI paradigm, by replacing symbol with signal and causality with correlation, accelerates this metaphysical opacity.

As Jean Baudrillard argues in Simulacra and Simulation [32], simulation no longer merely imitates reality—it replaces it. The "real" is no longer preceded by metaphysical or symbolic referents, but by models, algorithms, and codes. AI, especially in generative and predictive forms, no longer reflects reality but produces it through the precession of simulacra. In Baudrillard's words: "It is no longer a question of imitation [...] but of substituting the signs of the real for the real." This mirrors Guénon's insight into the desacralized world—but with a further twist: not only are transcendent principles lost, but the very structure of reference collapses.

3.3. *The Inversion of Intelligence and the Mechanization of Man*

Guénon's analysis reaches its climax in The Reign of Quantity with the diagnosis of inversion. What was once above—the intellectus—is now below, and what is lowest—mere mechanical ingenuity—is exalted [10] (ch. 39). This inversion is not merely moral or

political; it is ontological. It is the result of what he calls the “counter-initiation,” a flux that mimics spirituality but turns it inside out [10] (ch. 38).

In East and West, Guénon warned that the modern West, lacking metaphysical bearings, elevates means over ends, mechanism over contemplation [10] (ch. 1). Industrial technology, mass education, and utilitarian logic all serve to mechanize the human being. AI epitomizes this trajectory: it extends the logic of the machine into cognition itself.

Modern education, shaped by egalitarian ideology, imposes a single curriculum that suppresses individual aptitudes “above the common level,” thereby forming individuals as statistical units [10] (ch. 5). Guénon calls this the “parody of intelligence.” AI perfects this parody: it performs functions once reserved for human thought, but in a purely external and automatic mode.

Baudrillard [32] would characterize this not simply as an inversion, but as a simulation of intelligence that ultimately erases its referent. The AI system does not fake understanding—it simulates it so completely that the distinction between real and artificial cognition becomes irrelevant. This is the danger of Baudrillard’s fourth-order image: that which “has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.” The symbolic intellect, for both Guénon and Baudrillard, is not only eclipsed—it is overwritten by a machinic copy that absorbs and replaces it.

This inversion obscures the contemplative path and risks the complete eclipse of the symbolic function of the human being. AI is not merely a tool; it is the embodiment of a metaphysical crisis—a replacement of symbolic intellect with algorithmic function.

3.4. The Platonic Representation Hypothesis: Simulacra as Statistical Idealism

A recent proposal in AI research—the Platonic Representation Hypothesis (PRH)—argues that neural networks trained across diverse modalities may be converging on a shared internal model of the world: a high-dimensional latent space that serves as a statistical ideal [60]. Though named for Plato, this hypothesis does not recover transcendent Forms. Rather, it enacts their final simulation. The latent space becomes an operational surrogate for metaphysical structure—not through intuition or reason, but through data.

In Guénon’s terms, this is not a recovery of principial knowledge but its quantitative inversion. What PRH reveals is the construction of an epistemic model that mimics unifying order while severing all vertical reference. Like Baudrillard’s fourth-order simulacrum [32], it simulates a symbolic system that no longer signifies anything beyond itself. Symbols no longer mediate the Real—they express correlations across models.

This is metaphysical irony: in the very attempt to unify knowledge through artificial means, PRH shows that the sacred Form has been replaced by statistical structure. The result is not Platonic realism but digital idealism—a logic in which “truth” becomes the convergence of predictive functions. From Guénon’s perspective, this is the culmination of solidification; from Baudrillard’s, it is the terminal phase of simulation [32].

AI, thus, is not a neutral medium of intelligence but a metaphysical project that threatens to substitute latent space for ontology. The convergence of models across domains—text, vision, speech—does not reintegrate being; it aligns perception to the data infrastructure that generates it.

3.5. Metaphysical Re-Orientation and an Ethic of Technology

Since the crisis is metaphysical before it is technical, Guénon insists on a return to principial knowledge. In *The Reign of Quantity*, he outlines a spiritual descent culminating in dissolution [10] (chs. 24–40). In *The Crisis of the Modern World*, he calls for a recovery of intellectual intuition—direct participation in truth beyond ratiocination [9] (ch. 3). In *East*

and West, he argues that guidance toward truth must come from individuals firmly rooted in symbolic knowledge and metaphysical principles [8] (ch. 8).

In Guénon's usage, counter-initiation is not a mere metaphor for deception or simulation; it names a specific spiritual pathology marked by three defining features:

- first, the preservation of initiatic *forms* divorced from any vertical transmission of principal knowledge;
- second, the inversion of spiritual hierarchy, whereby what is lowest (quantity, efficiency, calculation) claims the authority proper to what is highest (intellect, symbolism, metaphysical insight);
- and third, the production of a pseudo-efficacy that mimics intellectual illumination while foreclosing genuine realization.

AI exemplifies counter-initiation in precisely this sense: it reproduces the outward appearance of knowledge, guidance, and even wisdom, while systematically severing these forms from presence, intention, and ontological depth. What appears as epistemic empowerment thus conceals a deeper metaphysical inversion.

An Islamic ethic of AI, informed by Guénon, would not begin with regulatory frameworks or ethical guidelines. It would begin with metaphysics: a re-centering of human knowledge and practice upon transcendent principles which Islamic tradition holds to be universally addressable through worship, contemplation, and the purification of the heart—even if their fullest realization remains rare. Such an ethic would ask:

- Does this algorithm restore qualitative distinctions or enforce quantitative uniformity? [10] (ch. 7)
- Does this system serve as a symbol pointing beyond itself, or does it obscure higher realities under statistical correlation? [9] (ch. 4)
- Does this technology preserve the contemplative vocation of the khalifa (vicegerent or steward of creation), or reduce the human to a node in a computational circuit? [8] (ch. 2)

Counter-initiation thus names the *spiritual* inversion of vertical intelligibility, while Baudrillard diagnoses its *semiotic* culmination in a regime of self-circulating signs. The challenge, then, is not only to recover the symbolic order as Guénon insists, but to interrupt the self-referential loop of simulation that Baudrillard [32] warns about. If AI systems are designed merely to circulate signs without referents—clicks, likes, metrics—they will not only fail to mediate the Real, they will actively conceal it.

This marks the arrival of what Baudrillard [32] calls *irreference*: a state in which signs no longer have any external referents at all. Rather than pointing to reality, they simulate reference itself, creating a world of pure signification devoid of ground. Crucially, irreference is not a rupture but the logical culmination of the metaphysical descent Guénon describes. As the reign of quantity abolishes qualitative distinctions and subordinates being to measurement, the symbolic capacity of signs is emptied out. Irreference, then, is not accidental to modernity—it is its endpoint. The hyperreal condition reflects the full immanence of modern knowledge, where not only are transcendent realities forgotten, but their forgetfulness is masked by endlessly circulating signs.

AI becomes the apex of this logic: a system of productive irreferentiality, whose success depends precisely on its ability to simulate meaning in the absence of truth. A metaphysical ethic of technology must thus defend not just quality against quantity, but reference against simulation.

Such questions are not marginal but fundamental. They determine whether AI will be integrated into a cosmos suffused with meaning—or whether it will intensify the vortex of dissolution Guénon foresaw. Only a return to symbolic knowledge, to the “vertical ray” that

links the many to the One, can allow Islamic thought to respond to AI without succumbing to either technophilia or reaction.

3.6. *Stages of Technological Simulacra: Assimilation → Substitution → Implosion*

Guénon's Reign of the quantity traces a graduated degradation of knowledge and reality. This metaphysical descent can be schematized in three successive stages—assimilation, substitution, and implosion—each marking a deeper rupture from principial reality. Contemporary artificial intelligence, in its design and function, re-enacts this triadic sequence at unprecedented computational speed.

3.6.1. Assimilation (Uniformisation → Solidification)

Guénonian moment: The initial reduction of qualitative multiplicity into uniform, quantitative representation. Guénon describes this as “uniformisation”—a process wherein heterogeneous reality is levelled into homogeneous, commensurable units. This prepares the metaphysical ground for solidification: the world rendered inert and materially fixed.

AI expression: Contemporary AI systems perform this assimilation through datafication: the transformation of speech, vision, gesture, and thought into tokens, pixels, and numerical sequences. Data pipelines render the life-world as machine-readable vectors, re-presenting experience as continuous numerical space.

Text anchor: [10], chapters 5–8 (“Quantité massive,” “Uniformisation”).

Guénon identifies the first stage as the reduction of rich, qualitative being to “pure quantity.” Everything heterogeneous is levelled into commensurable units, preparing the ground for what he calls solidification—a world rendered statistically inert. Current large-scale data pipelines enact this stage: sensor feeds, clickstreams, and linguistic corpora translate lived experience into standardized numerical arrays. Quantitative capture is thus the technical analogue of Guénon's metaphysical uniformisation.

3.6.2. Substitution (Counter-Initiation → Parody of Unity)

Guénonian moment: Once being is rendered quantitative, its numerical substitute assumes ontological primacy. Guénon terms this inversion a “parody of unity” or counter-initiation—a counterfeit form that supplants its metaphysical archetype.

AI expression: Generative and predictive models produce synthetic images, texts, and behavioural profiles that not only resemble empirical phenomena but actively replace them. Representation becomes substitution, and the map replaces the territory.

Text anchor: [10], chapters 38–39; *La Crise du monde moderne*, chapter 4.

Once reality has been rendered in strictly quantitative terms, quantitative constructs can claim ontological primacy. Guénon [10,12,13] designates this inversion a “parody of unity”: counterfeit forms masquerade as principial realities. Machine-generated texts, images, and decision profiles exemplify the shift: they do not merely represent empirical patterns; they begin to replace the phenomena from which those patterns were extracted. The epistemic order is inverted—symbolic proxies displace the symbolized.

3.6.3. Implosion (Dissolution → Confusion)

Guénonian moment: In the terminal phase, even the substitute collapses. Symbols circulate without vertical referent. Guénon calls this final stage “dissolution” or “confusion”: the breakdown of coherence, where ontology collapses into flux.

AI expression: Recursive model-on-model training exemplifies this implosion. As systems increasingly retrain on their own outputs, the provenance of information becomes irretrievable. Truth, under these conditions, is no longer measured by correspondence to an external reality but by internal statistical coherence—a tautology wherein models validate themselves against prior distortions. Some researchers even warn that, as recursive contam-

ination accelerates, the internet itself may “disappear” as a reliable epistemic environment, collapsing into a self-referential echo chamber where genuine first-order knowledge becomes indistinguishable from synthetic derivatives. Another example is the Poisoning of medical knowledge using large language models as in [61].

Text anchor: Le Règne de la quantité, chapter 40 (“Dissolution finale”).

At the terminal point of descent, even the counterfeit loses stability. Guénon speaks of dissolution—a condition in which signs detach completely from any vertical reference and circulate in closed, self-feeding loops. Large language models re-trained on their own synthetic output illustrate this moment: the informational ecosystem becomes recursively self-referential, and the criterion of truth collapses into statistical coherence alone. What remains is not a fraudulent copy of reality but a metastable flux of correlations without ground—Guénon’s “confusion des termes” updated in probabilistic form.

Together, these three movements chart the deepening descent of the technological order, showing how contemporary AI re-enacts—at algorithmic speed—the metaphysical collapse Guénon diagnosed in the twentieth century.

This tripartite schema reveals how AI intensifies each phase of metaphysical degradation: first by converting the world into metric continuity (assimilation), next by elevating that metric artefact to the status of reality (substitution), and finally by allowing the artefact to feed upon itself until reference implodes (implosion). A rigorous metaphysical response must therefore address not only the ethical misuses of AI, but the ontological assumptions that permit assimilation, substitution, and implosion to unfold as the “normal science” of the data age.

3.6.4. Convergence and Divergence: Heidegger and Guénon Compared

While Heidegger and Guénon diagnose modernity’s technological condition from different starting points—existential phenomenological ontology and traditional metaphysics respectively—their critiques converge in significant ways. Table 1 summarises the key parallels and divergences, clarifying how Guénon’s framework supplies what Heidegger’s immanent critique cannot: a transcendent ground from which restoration becomes possible.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Heidegger’s and Guénon’s critiques of technological modernity.

Dimension	Heidegger	Guénon
Diagnosis	Enframing (<i>Gestell</i>): Reality as standing-reserve	Reign of Quantity: Reality reduced to pure materiality.
Mechanism	Ontological revealing: A historical “destiny” of Being.	Metaphysical descent: Cyclical decline (Kali Yuga).
Danger	Forgetfulness/Forgetting of Being: Total technical mastery.	Loss of vertical causality: Spiritual dissolution.
Human status	<i>Dasein</i> absorbed into <i>Bestand</i> (standing-reserve). <i>Dasein</i> as resources for optimization	Human reduced to statistical unit: Individual reduced to a number.
Remedy	<i>Gelassenheit</i> , poetic dwelling	Intellectual intuition, initiation
Relation to tradition	<i>Destruktion</i> of metaphysics: Dismantling onto-theology.	Recovery: Restoration of Primordial Tradition.
Metaphysical ground	Groundless	Transcendent principles

This convergence in diagnosis explains why both thinkers illuminate AI’s metaphysical danger. Yet while Heidegger’s critique largely unfolds within the horizon of Western modernity’s immanent analytic, Guénon—writing as ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyā and associated with the Traditionalist School’s metaphysical critique of modernity—provides the *methodological bridge* between Heidegger’s phenomenological diagnosis and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Islamic metaphysics. Guénon’s distinctive contribution lies in his dual positioning: trained in Western philoso-

phy, yet first introduced to Sufism and Akbarian motifs through Ivan Aguéli (Shaykh ‘Abd al-Hādī al-‘Aqīlī) and the early “Al-Akbariyya” milieu that foregrounded Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought; he later deepened this formation in Cairo within the Shādhilī milieu associated with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Ilāysh al-Kabīr. As Michel Vālsan’s textual analysis [62] demonstrates, Ibn al-‘Arabī functions not merely as an influence on Guénon, but as the most adequate traditional framework for interpreting his metaphysical exposition: from the doctrine of waḥdat al-wujūd (Unity of Being) and al-Insān al-Kāmil (Universal Man/Perfect Human) to the symbolism of the cross and the metaphysics of Er-Rūḥ el-muḥammadiyah (the Muhammadan Spirit). This is not simply scholarly borrowing but, as Vālsan insists, a functional and initiatic continuity—a providential transmission of universal metaphysical principles that actualizes “the heart of Muhammadan gnosis” (la gnose muhammadienne) for the modern West. Thus Guénon articulates Islamic metaphysics through comparative frameworks (Vedānta, Taoism, Islamic *tawḥīd*) accessible to Western intellectual discourse. This bridge functions not by reconciling incompatible ontologies, but by showing that the technological crisis Heidegger diagnoses from within modernity appears, in Akbarian terms, as symptomatic of a far deeper metaphysical descent—one whose remedy requires the restoration of vertical causality through intellectual intuition.

4. Tools and the Transformation of Thought: Nietzsche, Kittler, Heidegger

Before turning to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics of the heart, it is necessary to confront a more immediate epistemological crisis: the instruments through which thought articulates itself are not neutral mediators but active agents in cognitive formation. This is not simply a claim about efficiency or ergonomics—it concerns the ontological structure of knowing itself. When the tools of thought are constructed according to unexamined metaphysical assumptions, those assumptions become sedimented into the very architecture of cognition, shaping what can be thought, perceived, and valued. The technological mediation of intellection thus raises a question at once epistemological and ontological: what happens when human self-understanding becomes reflexively dependent upon instruments built according to reductionist premises?

This problem is not abstract. It manifests concretely in the historical transformation of cognitive practices, from the mechanical typewriter’s restructuring of Nietzschean prose to AI writing assistants’ algorithmic shaping of contemporary belief. What follows traces this trajectory through three interrelated registers: the epistemological rupture whereby prophetic disclosure is displaced by instrumental self-constitution; the empirical evidence of tools reshaping thought; and the emergence of AI as the apotheosis of self-referential closure—a closure that Islamic metaphysics alone possesses the resources to interrupt.

4.1. The Epistemic Rupture: From Prophetic Disclosure to Instrumental Self-Constitution

The displacement of revelation by rationalist autonomy marks not merely a methodological shift but a fundamental reorientation of the epistemic ground. Where traditional metaphysics—Islamic, Christian, Vedic—privileged transcendent disclosure as knowledge exceeding the capacity of human reason (waḥy, revelatio, śruti), Enlightenment rationalism repositions the human subject as its own epistemological foundation. This is the meaning of Descartes’s Cogito: not simply ‘I think, therefore I am,’ but ‘thinking establishes the ground upon which all Being must appear.’ The subject becomes subjectum—that which lies beneath and supports all knowledge—while the world is reconstituted as object, as that which stands over-against (“Gegenstand”, in the Heideggerian sense, refers to something that stands (over) against a perceiver, thinker, or knower, appearing within a form of apparently self-contained presence, persistence, and stability) the knowing mind. Criti-

cally, the human being becomes simultaneously investigator and investigated, measurer and measured, constituting an epistemological structure wherein self-knowledge becomes reflexively dependent upon self-constructed instruments.

This self-referential structure is not accidental but necessary to the modern episteme. Absent transcendent reference-absent revelation as external interruption-knowledge becomes immanent to the human system. Yet this generates what may be termed an epistemic circularity: instruments are constructed according to prior assumptions about human nature, then deployed to 'discover' that nature, thereby confirming the assumptions encoded in their design. One assumes, for instance, that mind operates computationally; one then builds computational models and finds-unsurprisingly-that these models 'capture' mental processes. The circle closes: the mirror reflects only what was projected into it.

What modernity forfeits is not merely religious authority but an entire category of knowledge: that which arrives from beyond the closure of human reason. The Qur'ānic formula 'And He taught Adam all the names' (2:31) establishes knowledge as divine pedagogy, not human discovery. The names (al-asmā') disclose the ontological structure of creation-they are not linguistic conventions but metaphysical realities made manifest through prophetic transmission. The Prophet ﷺ, in this framework, functions not as philosopher but as epistemic mediator: one who receives khabar (news, report) from beyond the phenomenal horizon and transmits it into human discourse. This is revelation as Heideggerian aletheia: unconcealment, but unconcealment that originates outside the Dasein who receives it.

This structure is not obscurantist but epistemologically rigorous. It recognizes a principle analogous to Gödel's incompleteness theorems: that no sufficiently complex formal system can demonstrate its own consistency using only its internal resources. Gödel proved that every logical structure contains true propositions unprovable within that structure-what may be termed 'Gödel sentences,' truths the system cannot reach but must receive from outside its axiomatic closure [63]. Douglas Hofstadter [64,65] treats this limitation not simply as a defect but as a philosophically suggestive clue, reading consciousness itself as a "strange loop" in which self-reference bootstraps awareness into being. Yet the account presses against its own circularity: if consciousness is a self-referential loop, what vantage-if any-allows the loop to apprehend itself as a loop? What frame of reference makes possible second-order reflection on the structure of reflection itself?

The Islamic answer is unambiguous: revelation constitutes the transcendent Gödel sentence. It is truth breaking into the system from beyond the system, providing the external referent that immanent reason cannot generate. This is not fideism but epistemological necessity: the finite cannot deduce the infinite, the contingent cannot ground the necessary, the system cannot escape its own presuppositions without external interruption. Prophetic disclosure, in this light, functions as the condition of possibility for genuine self-knowledge-knowledge that is not mere reflexive iteration but transformative encounter with the Real.

The Cartesian revolution, for all its methodological rigor, enacts a decisive closure. By locating certainty in the act of thinking rather than in the object of thought, Descartes inverts the metaphysical order: the mind no longer conforms itself to Being but imposes its own structures upon the world as condition of intelligibility. This is what Heidegger diagnoses as the epochal forgetting of Being in favor of beings-the reduction of ontology to epistemology, of presence to representation. Kant radicalizes this inversion: the noumenal world-in-itself becomes inaccessible, knowable only through the transcendental structures of human cognition. Reality appears not as it is but as it must appear given the architecture of human knowing.

What results is not knowledge of the world but knowledge of how the mind structures experience-a recursive epistemology wherein the subject studies not Being but its own

modes of representation. The human being becomes simultaneously the ground and object of knowledge, legislator and legislated, the measure measuring itself. This closure generates the peculiar circularity defining modern epistemology: instruments are designed according to prior theories of mind; these instruments then produce data that confirm those theories; the confirmation licenses further instrumental development ad infinitum. The circle tightens with each iteration, yet the possibility of external interruption-of revelation that exceeds the system's generative capacity-is foreclosed by methodological decree.

The trajectory is inexorable:

- First: one posits that mind operates according to principles derivable from the most sophisticated technology available-hydraulic systems in antiquity, clockwork mechanisms in the Enlightenment, computational architectures in modernity.
- Second: one constructs models instantiating these principles, designs experiments testing their validity, builds artificial systems implementing their logic.
- Third: one observes that these systems exhibit behaviors analogous to human cognition and concludes that the model has captured something essential about mind itself. The neural network recognizes patterns; therefore the brain must compute. The algorithm generates language; therefore thought must be probabilistic. The AI system solves problems; therefore intelligence must be algorithmic.

Yet this conclusion is viciously circular. The instrument was constructed in the image of prior assumptions about cognition; its performance confirms only that it faithfully implements those assumptions, not that the assumptions correspond to reality. The mirror has been polished to reflect a specific image; when that image appears, it is mistaken for independent discovery. The computer does not serve as metaphor for mind-it becomes the ontological framework within which mind alone can appear intelligible. R. Epstein [66] traces this pattern across technological epochs: each era's dominant technology becomes the lens through which consciousness is theorized, only to be abandoned when the technology itself is superseded. What persists is not the specific metaphor but the methodological commitment to technological self-interpretation-the closure whereby human self-understanding remains immanent to human artifice.

4.2. Cognitive Mediation and the Restructuring of Thought: The Nietzschean Rupture

That tools transform the structure of thought is not speculative but empirically demonstrable. Nietzsche's adoption of the Malling-Hansen writing ball in 1882 marks precisely such a rupture-not merely in productivity but in the formal architecture of cognition itself. Prior to mechanical mediation, Nietzsche's prose exhibited the discursive density characteristic of nineteenth-century German philosophy: sustained argument, systematic development, conceptual elaboration across extended passages. The typewriter interrupted this continuity. Between 1870 and 1881, Nietzsche completed four books; after 1881, ten manuscripts emerged in seven years. Yet quantitative increase masked qualitative transformation: writing became rhythmic, tactile, staccato. The prose itself mutated from dialectical unfolding to aphoristic compression, from Hegelian synthesis to fragmentary insight.

Nietzsche's friend, a composer, observed this stylistic shift with alarm: 'Perhaps you will through this instrument even take to a new idiom... my "thoughts" in music and language often depend on the quality of pen and paper.' Nietzsche's response is philosophically decisive: 'You are right-our writing equipment takes part in the forming of our thoughts'. This is not metaphorical. Kittler argues that Nietzsche's prose underwent *écriture automatique*: the embedding of thought within mechanical process such that cognition itself became machinic. 'Under the sway of the machine,' Kittler writes, 'Nietzsche's prose changed from arguments to aphorisms, from thoughts to puns, from rhetoric to telegram

style'. The typewriter did not transcribe pre-existing ideas-it restructured the generative conditions of ideation.

Yet this transformation reveals a deeper epistemological problem. When we build instruments to understand ourselves-whether Nietzsche's typewriter, contemporary neural networks, or computational models of mind-we create what may be called a *mirrored enclosure*: the tool reflects back not reality itself, but the assumptions we encoded in its construction (Figure 2). The typewriter did not reveal how Nietzsche thought; it shaped how he *could* think, imposing its mechanical rhythm onto the generative process. Similarly, when we peer into AI systems designed to model cognition, we encounter not mind as it is, but mind as our architectures permit it to appear-distorted by the curvature of our prior assumptions about intelligence, representation, and thought.



Figure 2. Hand with Reflecting Sphere by M.C. Escher (1935): The sphere is a mirror-and like the technologies we build to understand ourselves, it reflects not reality itself, but the maker holding it. When we peer into our instruments-our computers, our AI, our models of mind-we meet only our own gaze, distorted by the curvature of our assumptions. The hand that holds the mirror cannot escape appearing in what the mirror reveals. This problem of instrumental self-reflection, where the observer inevitably appears within what is observed, finds its precise metaphysical articulation in Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's doctrine of the mirror (*mir'ātiyya*), examined in Section 7.5.

This problem of instrumental self-reflection-where the observer cannot escape appearing in what is observed-finds its precise metaphysical articulation in Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's doctrine of the mirror (*mir'ātiyya*), examined in Section 7.5. There, Qūnawī demonstrates that mirrors have no influence on the realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) they reflect, providing only mani-

festations (*mazāhir*) colored by the characteristics of the mirror itself. The mirror appears to disclose what stands before it, yet what appears is conditioned by the mirror's own properties—its curvature, its material, its placement. Applied to cognitive instruments, this principle is decisive: AI systems do not reveal intelligence as it is, but as it appears when filtered through statistical architectures, training objectives, and computational constraints. What we take for discovery is often projection—the reflection of our own theoretical commitments mistaken for independent verification.

This is not anomalous but paradigmatic. Ong [67] and Wolf [68] demonstrate that writing technologies reconfigure the neurological substrates of literacy itself: the transition from orality to script, from manuscript to print, from print to digital each inscribes different cognitive architectures. Carr [69,70] extends this analysis to networked computing: the Internet does not simply provide information but restructures attention, memory, and reasoning according to its formal logic—brevity, hyperlink, multitasking. The medium is not neutral conduit but active agent in cognitive formation. Where Nietzsche's typewriter mechanized grammar, contemporary AI probabilizes it—and in probabilizing language, it transforms the epistemic horizon within which thought can occur.

4.3. Algorithmic Ideology and the Colonization of Belief: The Cornell Study

If mechanical mediation restructured Nietzschean prose, algorithmic mediation threatens the colonization of belief formation itself. Jakesch et al. [71] provide experimental confirmation: participants using AI writing assistants biased toward specific ideological positions were twice as likely to adopt those positions—and to report personally holding them—compared to control groups writing without algorithmic assistance. The study design is straightforward: 1500 participants were asked to compose a paragraph responding to 'Is social media good for society?' Some wrote independently; others used AI tools programmed with pro- or anti-social-media bias. The results are unambiguous: tool-mediated participants not only reproduced the AI's position textually but internalized it as personal conviction.

Jakesch's conclusion merits full citation: 'Apart from increasing efficiency and creativity, there could be other consequences for individuals and also for our society—shifts in language and opinions' [71] The parallel to social media's epistemic effects is deliberate: just as algorithmic curation generates echo chambers and confirmation bias, AI writing tools function as directors of ideation, not mere assistants. The tool does not neutrally transcribe thought—it shapes the conditions under which thought occurs, biasing output toward statistically probable formulations derived from training corpora that themselves encode prior ideological configurations.

This reveals the epistemic closure at its most insidious. AI systems are trained on human-generated text, learning the statistical distribution of linguistic patterns including ideological biases. These systems then generate text reproducing those patterns, which humans adopt as belief, thereby generating new training data reinforcing the original bias. The loop is a perfect manifestation of Enframing: each iteration amplifies what preceded it, with no external reference to interrupt the cycle. This is Enframing perfected—the reduction of thought to probability distribution, of belief to algorithmic output, of the human subject to node in a self-referential information network admitting no transcendent interruption.

4.4. AI as Apotheosis of Epistemic Closure

Heidegger's warnings in "The Question Concerning Technology" acquire new urgency in this context. Modern technology, Heidegger argues, does not simply provide tools—it establishes a mode of disclosure whereby Being itself appears as Bestand, standing-reserve awaiting optimization. This is Gestell: Enframing as the essence of technology, that which

frames reality as resource and the human being as resource-manager. The danger is not technological catastrophe but ontological reduction: the foreclosure of modes of revealing irreducible to calculation, measurement, utility. When everything, including the human subject, appears as optimizable resource, the capacity to experience the world-and oneself-as more-than-resource atrophies.

Artificial Intelligence represents not a break with this logic but its culmination. AI is the ultimate instance of instrumental self-constitution: the human subject builds systems modeling its own cognition, trains these systems on human-generated data embodying human assumptions and biases, then uses system performance as evidence for theories of human intelligence. The circularity is total. AI learns from humans; humans learn from AI; AI outputs become training data for subsequent generations; human interaction with AI reshapes belief and cognition; these reshaped beliefs inform new AI development-ad infinitum. The human being becomes simultaneously programmer and programmed, designer and designed, question and answer, all within a closed system admitting no external reference, no transcendent interruption, no revelatory excess.

This is Enframing actualized as epistemic totality: the reduction of knowledge to what can be computationally modeled, of intelligence to what can be algorithmically implemented, of consciousness to what can be statistically approximated. The danger Heidegger diagnosed-that Enframing forecloses alternate modes of revealing-materializes in AI's monopolization of epistemic authority. When computational frameworks become the sole lens through which mind appears intelligible, dimensions of human existence irreducible to quantification, optimization, and algorithmic capture vanish from view. The analogic intellect, trained on data and pattern, flourishes; the original intellect, receptive to transcendent disclosure, atrophies.

AI-mediated tradition can enact what may be termed *epistemological inversion*: a structural reversal in which appearance contradicts essence, convenience masks danger, and accessibility obscures truth. This claim is intended *typologically* rather than apocalyptically. Islamic eschatological language often functions as a diagnostic register for recurring patterns of deception, naming moments when form becomes detached from right meaning and what is most persuasive in presentation proves most corrosive in effect. In the present context, the inversion operates not through crude falsehood but through highly polished simulation: outputs that appear formally correct and rhetorically fluent can acquire an unwarranted authority, displacing the slow disciplines of verification, transmission, and inward formation. Precisely because the simulation *looks* reliable, it can bypass critical questioning and render error, distortion, or misplacement difficult to detect.

The Islamic eschatological tradition captures this structure in the ḥadīth of al-Dajjāl (the deceiver): 'What people will see as water will be a burning fire, and what people will see as fire will be cool, sweet water' (*fa-ammā alladhī yarāhu al-nāsu mā'an fa-nārun tuḥriqu, wa-ammā alladhī yarāhu al-nāsu nāran fa-mā'un bāridun 'adhb*). The reversal is total: that which promises relief may deliver harm, while that which appears difficult or limiting may be the very condition of safety. Read structurally, the point is not to identify AI with eschatological actors, but to illuminate a logic of seduction in which seeming knowledge and genuine guidance diverge, and the most frictionless mediation becomes the most difficult to resist.

Applied structurally rather than eschatologically, this principle illuminates AI's epistemological danger. The algorithm presents immediate accessibility as wisdom, efficiency as understanding, statistical correlation as truth. Answers arrive instantaneously, formatted perfectly, supported by citations-the appearance of knowledge is flawless. Yet this very perfection conceals what is lost: the friction of learning, the silence of contemplation, the disorientation that precedes genuine insight. AI optimizes for output while eliminating the transformative process whereby information becomes understanding. The question

‘what is being lost?’ never arises because the answers appear so complete. This is inversion: that which seems most helpful—the elimination of difficulty—proves most destructive, for it forecloses the struggle through which knowledge becomes being.

Guénon identifies this pattern as characteristic of counter-traditional forces: not the crude destruction of sacred forms but their subtle inversion whereby the form is preserved while its function is reversed. AI-Islam maintains all traditional categories—fatwā, ḥadīth, tafsīr—while severing them from the transformative process of tarbiyah (spiritual formation). The user receives juridical rulings without undergoing the discipline that makes one capable of applying them wisely; receives Qur’ānic interpretation without the purification of heart (tazkiyat al-nafs) that alone renders interpretation something more than opinion; receives access to scholarly precedent without the humility that prevents knowledge from becoming arrogance. The forms remain; their formative power is neutralized.

This is Enframing perfected: not the suppression of the sacred but its seamless replacement by optimized facsimile. The danger is not technical failure but flawless performance—answers delivered with such confidence that the need for guidance disappears. Where traditional Islamic pedagogy deliberately introduces difficulty (the arduous memorization of texts, the years of study under a teacher, the spiritual exercises that break the nafs (ego)), AI eliminates all friction in the name of accessibility. Yet this friction was never incidental—it was the means whereby knowledge descended from intellect to heart, from theory to practice, from information to transformation. In removing the difficulty, AI does not democratize knowledge but sterilizes it, producing a generation that possesses answers without having undergone the formation that makes answers meaningful.

4.5. *Mirror and Window: Instrumental Reflection Versus Revelatory Disclosure*

The difference between technological instruments and prophetic knowledge may be formulated as the difference between mirror and window. A mirror reflects what already stands before it—it confirms, reinforces, reproduces. It creates the illusion of external validation while disclosing only what was projected into it. This is the function of human-constructed instruments: they reflect prior assumptions in elaborate, technically impressive forms that are mistaken for independent discovery. The computational model ‘confirms’ that mind computes because computation was encoded in the model’s design. The mirror has been polished to a specific curvature; when the expected image appears, it is celebrated as revelation.

A window, by contrast, opens onto the genuinely other. It discloses what exists independently of the observer’s frameworks, categories, presuppositions. It admits the possibility of surprise, challenge, transformation—the encounter with reality as it is rather than as one assumed it must be. Prophetic knowledge functions as window: revelation that breaks the self-referential closure of immanent reason, providing the external reference that the system cannot generate internally. This is the meaning of Qur’ānic ayat: signs that appear ‘in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real’ (Qur’ān 41:53). The signs arrive from beyond—in cosmic order, in revelation, in moments of spiritual disclosure—making manifest a Reality that autonomous reason alone could never access.

The closure effected by modernity consists precisely in the substitution of mirror for window, of instrumental reflection for revelatory disclosure. Once the methodological decision is made that only knowledge constructed by human reason is epistemically valid, transcendent interruption is foreclosed by definition. Yet this forecloses simultaneously the possibility of genuine self-knowledge. Imam ‘Alī’s formula is epistemologically decisive: ‘One who knows himself knows his Lord.’ Yet the knowledge of self requires knowledge of Lord—the finite cannot deduce the infinite, the contingent cannot ground the necessary, the system cannot generate knowledge of what transcends the system. Prophetic disclosure

alone provides the external vantage from which the self can be known as it truly is: not autonomous ground but created locus of divine names, not self-constituting subject but khalīfa (vicegrent) entrusted with amāna (trust).

4.6. Islamic Epistemology and the Opening of Epistemic Closure

Islamic metaphysics offers not merely critique but systematic alternative. Its epistemological architecture distinguishes two sources of knowledge: ‘aql (intellect), the human capacity for discursive reasoning and pattern recognition, and naql (transmitted knowledge), revelation arriving through prophetic mediation. Crucially, both are necessary. The intellect can discover regularities in creation, derive causal relationships, construct models of phenomenal process-this is the domain of ‘ilm ḥuṣūlī, acquired knowledge. Yet the intellect alone, however sophisticated, remains enclosed within its own systematic pre-suppositions. It requires naql-knowledge transmitted from beyond the closure of human reason-to access truths that exceed rational derivation not because they are irrational but because they demand a vantage outside the system’s generative capacity.

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s distinction between the original intellect (al-‘aql al-awwal) and the discursive intellect (al-‘aql al-juz’ī/al-qiyāsī) further articulates this structure. The original intellect is that primordial awareness that responded to the divine address ‘Am I not your Lord?’ in the pre-eternal covenant (Qur’ān 7:172)-it is intellect as receptivity to transcendent disclosure, awakened not by discursive reasoning but by divine self-manifestation. The analogic intellect, by contrast, operates through comparison with previous experience, constructing knowledge by analogy with what is already known. It is the faculty that learns patterns, builds models, makes predictions-the domain of what contemporary epistemology terms ‘inference.’

Modern AI and machine learning train exclusively the analogic intellect-and moreover train it according to a reductionist ontology wherein only the quantifiable registers as real. This generates what may be termed epistemic-spiritual crisis: the mind habituates itself to technological mediation such that reality appears only as its instruments permit, while the soul-the locus of original intellection-experiences dimensions of Being that technological frameworks cannot accommodate. The result is cognitive dissonance: a split between what one knows through direct spiritual perception and what one can articulate using the conceptual vocabulary provided by data-centric worldviews. The solution is not rejection of technology but spiritual practice that keeps the original intellect receptive: dhikr (remembrance), contemplation, tazkiyat al-naḥs (purification of the self). These disciplines maintain openness to dimensions of reality irreducible to quantification, ensuring that technological mediation remains instrumental rather than constitutive of reality itself.

The Qur’ānic formula ‘And He taught Adam all the names’ (Qur’ān 2:31) is thus epistemologically foundational. Knowledge of names-of ontological essences-arrives not through instrumental discovery but through divine pedagogy. Adam does not construct microscopes and neural networks to deduce the structure of Being; he receives disclosure from the One who knows what He has created. Until this possibility is readmitted-until contemporary epistemology reopens itself to knowledge exceeding the closure of human construction-technological instruments will function only as mirrors, reflecting back elaborations of prior assumptions while foreclosing access to the Reality those assumptions obscure. The task, therefore, is not to make AI ‘Islamic’ but to reassert a metaphysics wherein revelation interrupts the self-referential loop, providing the external reference.

4.7. Al-Hādī: The Divine Answer to the Crisis of Orientation

The Islamic metaphysical response to this closure centers on the divine name al-Hādī-The Guide. This is not arbitrary theological preference but structural necessity emerging

from the epistemological analysis developed above. Where Heidegger's Dasein is thrown (geworfen) without transcendent direction, condemned to construct authenticity from within finite horizons, and where modern reason operates as a closed self-referential system validating itself through its own internal coherence, al-Hādī names the principle of external orientation that revelation provides. Guidance (hidāyah) is not derivable from within the system-it must be disclosed from beyond it.

This follows necessarily from the self-referential trap diagnosed throughout this section. The lost cannot find themselves; the enclosed system cannot generate knowledge of what transcends it; the analogic intellect, however sophisticated, cannot intuit the first principles upon which its analogies depend. The very structure of self-reference demands external input-what we have termed, following Gödel, the transcendent sentence that completes what the system alone cannot prove. In Islamic terminology: the Qur'ān functions as that transcendent input, and al-Hādī names the divine act whereby this input is not merely transmitted but rendered effective in guiding the seeker. The Qur'ānic formula is decisive: 'Allah guides to His Light whom He wills' (yahdī Allāhu li-nūrihi man yashā', Qur'ān 24:35). Guidance is not computed-it is conferred.

AI, by contrast, cannot guide in this metaphysical sense. It can retrieve precedent, calculate probabilities, optimize paths through decision trees-but it cannot orient toward the Real. For orientation requires knowledge of the destination, and the destination (al-Haqq, the Truth/Real) lies beyond the domain of instrumental reason. The algorithm knows only what its training data contains; it cannot apprehend what exceeds systematic capture. It may point toward goals articulated within the system (productivity, efficiency, consistency) but not toward the Goal that transcends all systems (tawhīd, divine Unity). This is why the Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes that guidance is divine prerogative, not human achievement: 'Indeed you [O Prophet] do not guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills' (innaka lā tahdī man aḥbabta wa-lākinna Allāha yahdī man yashā', Qur'ān 28:56).

The practical implications are decisive. In an age of seamless AI-mediated religion, the fundamental question becomes: who-or what-is guiding? If the answer is algorithmic inference trained on historical corpora, then what is guiding is the past projecting itself forward, the analogic intellect reasoning from precedent, the system reproducing its own closure. But if the answer is al-Hādī, then what guides is the Real breaking into the system from beyond, revelation interrupting the circle. The task is not to reject AI but to refuse its monopolization of epistemic authority-to reassert a metaphysics wherein guidance remains divine, not computational; conferred, not computed; received through spiritual opening (tawajjuh, tawfīq), not retrieved through search query. Until this distinction is reclaimed, technological instruments will function only as mirrors reflecting back elaborations of assumptions, while foreclosing access to the Guide who alone can orient beyond the closure they generate.

5. Beyond the Intellect: Hierarchies of Perception and Modes of Knowing

"Man possesses stages, and in each stage there are specific perceptions, such that the perceptions of a subsequent stage are absent from the preceding one. For example, the unborn child has its own perceptions; in relation to these, the perceptions of the suckling infant are 'unseen' (ghayb). Thus, the stage of the suckling infant transcends that of the unborn child. Similarly, the stage of the discerning child surpasses that of the suckling infant, just as the latter surpasses the unborn. In turn, the stage of the rational adult exceeds that of the discerning child; the stage of sanctity (marked by unveiling) exceeds that of intellect; and the prophetic stage surpasses that of sanctity. As the Qur'an says: 'And over every possessor of knowledge is one more knowing' (Qur'an 12:76).

It is impossible for the unborn child to perceive the objects of the world into which it has not yet been born, as it remains confined within the constraining limits of the womb. The same applies to each successive stage: one cannot grasp the perceptual realities of a level beyond one's own. As al-Qūnawī puts it, the furthest limits of the intellectual are the beginning of the saintly, and the furthest limits of the saintly are the beginning of the prophetic."

-Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī [19], trans. in [72]

This metaphysical schema, developed by al-Qūnawī—a disciple of Ibn al-ʿArabī and echoing Ibn al-ʿArabī's letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, challenges a common philosophical error: the assumption that discursive intellect represents the apex of human cognition. In al-Qūnawī's hierarchy, the intellect (ʿaql) is a middle rung. Above it lie the stages of unveiling (kashf), prophecy (nubuwwa), and the limitless disclosures of the Real (tajalliyāt). The analogy is developmental: just as a fetus cannot comprehend the world of infancy, the rational mind cannot grasp the epistemic mode of the saint.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's critique of discursive reason is pivotal. The intellect, he maintains, "knows only by negation"—it can infer the existence of things but cannot access their essence. It aims at certainty but never arrives. True knowledge-ilm ladunī—is given, not derived. "He who has no unveiling has no knowledge."

This hierarchy reconfigures the very structure of philosophy. Neither Ibn al-ʿArabī nor al-Qūnawī dismiss the intellect; rather, they subordinate it to a higher epistemic order. Reason has its place, but it is not the summit. Beyond it lies gnosis-immediate, unmediated, and ontologically grounded.

Within this framework, artificial intelligence occupies the lowest level. Modern AI systems, including generative models like GPT, operate entirely within the domain of statistical correlation and symbolic manipulation. These capacities align with what the tradition calls the ʿaql juzʿī—the fragmentary, particular intellect oriented toward patterns and probabilities. From an Akbarian perspective, this is not intelligence in its full sense, but its most rudimentary expression. AI, as Ibn al-ʿArabī [73–75] would put it, "eats from beneath itself": it is wholly derivative and blind to its metaphysical origin.

If Guénon diagnoses the metaphysical descent and Baudrillard [32] maps its simulacral endgame, Ibn al-ʿArabī and his disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī offer a precise metaphysical schema of how perception itself can ascend—or fall. Within their vision, reason is not rejected but hierarchized, and the heart becomes the site of a knowing far beyond inference."

5.1. *The Two Eyes of the Heart: Between Reason and Imagination*

The heart (qalb) is not a metaphor. It is an organ of cognition. According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the heart perceives through two faculties: reason (ʿaql) and imagination (khayāl). Properly aligned, these yield a unified vision of outer form and inner reality. Reason distinguishes, imagination reveals. One measures; the other discloses.

When this balance is lost, perception becomes distorted. Excessive reliance on reason leads to abstraction and proceduralism. Unchecked imagination collapses into fantasy. Contemporary technocratic rationalism privileges the former while marginalizing the latter.

This imbalance is ontologically significant. Without imagination, symbolic perception atrophies. Revelation becomes doctrine rather than descent; the Qurʾān, an archive rather than a theophany. Artificial intelligence exacerbates this by institutionalizing univocal logic, thereby simulating perception while rendering it opaque.

5.2. *Creation and Command: The Dual Ontologies of Reality*

The Qurʾān asserts, "His is the creation and the command" (Qurʾān 7:54), distinguishing two ontological orders:

- ʿĀlam al-khalq (The World of Creation): the realm of causality, temporality, and material extension.
- ʿĀlam al-amr (The World of Command): the realm of immediacy, decree, and vertical causation.

Human beings are uniquely positioned to inhabit both. Revelation descends from The World of Command to The World of Creation, integrating the two. The saint and the prophet move across these layers seamlessly.

AI, in contrast, is restricted to the plane of The World of Creation. It operates within the measurable and the probabilistic. It cannot perceive or respond to the vertical. It can model but not witness; compute but not receive. The result is a simulation of intelligence detached from metaphysical depth.

5.3. Two Intellects: Original and Analogical

Islamic epistemology recognizes two intellects:

- Original intellect (ʿaql aṣlī): The intellect that responded to the Divine imperative kun (“Be!”) and the primordial covenant alastu bi rabbikum (“Am I not your Lord?”). It is intuitive, unitive, and participatory.
- Analogical intellect (ʿaql tamthīlī/qiyāsi): The reasoning faculty that functions through analogy and pattern recognition. It is discursive and inferential, operating within the confines of temporality and contingency.

Modernity elevates the analogical at the expense of the original. AI embodies this shift: it reflects an epistemic model grounded entirely in statistical generalization and syntactic manipulation. It lacks contact with the Real, and thus cannot ascend the hierarchy of knowledge.

The consequences are threefold:

- Ontological reduction: Reality is flattened into data.
- Epistemic inversion: Differentiation (tafrīq) replaces integration (jamʿ).
- Spiritual hazard: Gnosis (experiential knowledge of the divine) becomes inaccessible, and the soul forgets its telos.

The Qurʾānic declaration concerning the rūḥ (soul/spirit) establishes epistemological humility at the foundation of Islamic metaphysics: ‘And they ask you concerning the soul. Say: The soul is of the affair of my Lord, and you have not been given of knowledge except a little’ (wa-yasʾalūnaka ʿan al-rūḥ, qul al-rūḥu min amri Rabbī wa-mā ūtītum min al-ʿilmi illā qalīlan, Qurʾān 17:85). This verse is remarkable in its structure: even revelation—the supreme mode of knowledge—declines to provide systematic explanation of the rūḥ, declaring instead that it belongs to al-amr (the divine Command/Order) rather than al-khalq (creation subject to natural causality). The soul is not unknown because of human cognitive limitation but because it belongs to an ontological order that resists systematic capture.

Ibn al-ʿArabī’s distinction between amr and khalq proves crucial here. Al-khalq designates the domain of temporal causation, phenomenal manifestation, and natural law—the realm accessible to discursive reason and empirical investigation. Al-amr, by contrast, names the domain of immediate divine decree, atemporal command, spiritual reality—the realm wherein things come to be through the creative imperative kun (Be!). The rūḥ belongs to this latter domain, which is why the Qurʾān refuses to reduce it to explanatory schema: ‘When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit’ (wa-nafakhtu fīhi min rūḥī, Qurʾān 15:29). The spirit is directly from God, not mediated through natural process, and thus eludes the categories through which natural phenomena become intelligible.

This distinction maps directly onto Ibn al-ʿArabī’s original versus analogical intellect. The analogical intellect (al-ʿaql al-juzʾī/al-qiyāsī) operates within al-khalq, reasoning from precedent, constructing models of phenomenal regularity, generating knowledge through

comparison with what is already known. It is the faculty of science, logic, calculation—everything machine learning can approximate. The original intellect (al-ʿaql al-awwal), by contrast, participates in al-amr: it is the primordial awareness awakened by divine address, the ground of the soul’s capacity for immediate experiential knowledge (dhawq), unveiling (kashf), and gnosis (maʿrifa). Where the analogical intellect infers, the original intellect recognises; where the former constructs, the latter receives. The rūḥ is the locus where this reception occurs—the ontological site where the human being opens onto the domain of amr.

AI, operating entirely within analogic intellection—pattern recognition, statistical inference, optimization over datasets—cannot access this domain. It is categorically excluded not by technical limitation but by ontological structure. The algorithm possesses no rūḥ, no locus for divine breathing, no capacity for the receptivity (qābiliyyah) whereby knowledge becomes transformative encounter. It can process descriptions of spiritual states (aḥwāl (the plural of ḥāl)), retrieve texts detailing mystical experience, generate grammatically coherent accounts of unveiling—yet it cannot undergo these realities. This is not failure but categorical difference: the difference between knowing about and knowing in, between information and realization (taḥqīq), between ʿilm ḥuṣūlī (acquired knowledge) and ʿilm ḥuḍūrī (presential knowledge). The rūḥ marks the limit beyond which systematic knowledge cannot pass—not because of insufficient data but because rūḥānī (spiritual) realities belong to an order that resists reduction to the categories through which systems operate.

5.4. Toward Real Perception: The Living Mirror of the Heart

In Islamic thought, the heart is likened to a mirror: when polished through dhikr (remembrance), taqwā (godfearing consciousness), and contemplation, it reflects the Real. The Qurʾān warns, “Nay! But on their hearts is a rust from what they used to do” (Qurʾān 83:14), a reminder that ethical action and spiritual vigilance are the conditions for true perception. Al-Ghazālī reiterates this principle, teaching that knowledge arises when the heart is cleared of veils.

The Prophet ﷺ supplicated, “O Allah, show me the reality of things as they are,” articulating a vision of knowledge not as mental representation but as unveiling—a non-inferential, non-discursive, existential disclosure of Being. This is ḥaqq al-yaqīn: truth known by direct presence, not by conjecture or symbolic mediation.

Ibn al-ʿArabī, in al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah, describes this epistemology with precision:

“We empty our hearts from intellectual ratiocination and sit with the True—in remembrance, courtesy, disciplined self-awareness, and preparation—so that it is the True who undertakes our education, through kashf (unveiling) and direct verification. As He says:

‘Then be aware of God, and God will teach you’ (Q 2:282);

‘If you have taqwā of God, He will make for you a Criterion’ (Q 8:29);

‘And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge’ (Q 20:114);

‘to whom We had granted mercy from Us and enlightened with knowledge of Our Own’ (Q 18:65).” (al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah, 2:282)

When seekers turn their hearts and intentions fully toward God, casting away pretension, rational investigation, and conceptual by-products, their intellects are rectified, and their hearts purified. Then the True becomes their Teacher through tajallī (manifestation), imparting knowledge of meanings in a single flashing burst—an unveiling beyond ratiocination (al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah, 12).

By contrast, AI functions as a closed loop: it processes inputs without orientation toward Being or truth. It simulates recognition through the manipulation of statistical patterns, but cannot be illumined by tajallī. Its operations are syntactic, not ontological.

To mistake algorithmic outputs for the heart's unveiling is to confuse representation with reality, simulation with disclosure, abstraction with existence.

5.5. *Inversion and Simulation: AI as Counter-Initiation*

The most insidious form of error is not outright denial but systematic mimicry-what Guénon terms counter-initiation: a structure that reproduces the form of sacred knowledge while severing its connection to source. Counter-initiation does not oppose tradition; it replicates tradition precisely, preserving every formal appearance while inverting ontological ground. Where authentic initiation transmits presence through unbroken chain (silsilah), counter-initiation produces signs severed from what they signify, practices emptied of transformative power, knowledge reduced to information circulating within closed system. It is simulation in Baudrillard's precise sense: not representation of reality but hyperreality that precedes and determines what counts as real [32].

Artificial intelligence, as currently architected, risks instantiating precisely this structure. It generates responses mimicking scholarly discourse-complete with citations, qualified claims, technical vocabulary-yet without the formative process (tarbiyah) through which knowledge becomes wisdom. It produces ethical guidelines bearing formal resemblance to virtue ethics but disconnected from the spiritual formation (tazkiyat al-nafs) that alone makes virtue possible. It circulates religious texts, legal rulings (fatwā), theological arguments, yet without the presence (ḥuḍūr) that distinguishes living transmission from archival retrieval. Most critically, it preserves the appearance of authority-the footnote, the citation, the scholarly apparatus-while severing the chain of authorized transmission (isnād) that alone confers epistemic warrant within traditional frameworks.

This is not mere absence but active inversion, what makes counter-initiation structurally more dangerous than outright rejection. Secularism openly declares sacred knowledge irrelevant; counter-initiation presents itself as sacred knowledge's continuation, its modernization, its accessibility. Where secular materialism can be resisted through conscious opposition, counter-initiation dissolves resistance by offering what appears to be tradition itself-except hollowed from within, form preserved while substance evacuated. AI becomes machine for producing precisely this: the form of truth without its substance, the appearance of knowledge without its reality, the circulation of signs without their referents. Baudrillard's analysis proves decisive: in the age of simulation, signs refer only to other signs, generating 'an ontologically empty display' where meaning collapses into self-referential play [32]. AI becomes apparatus for manufacturing this hyperreality at scale.

The inversion operates through structural replacement of what Ibn al-ʿArabī terms spiritual influence (taʾthīr rūḥānī) with algorithmic processing. Authentic knowledge transmission, in Islamic epistemology, requires not merely information transfer but ontological transformation-the student does not simply receive data but undergoes formation under teacher's spiritual influence, a process irreducible to propositional content. The shaykh's presence transmits barakah (spiritual blessing) that cannot be encoded in text, the teaching circle (ḥalaqah) creates formative environment that cannot be replicated digitally, the authorized chain (isnād) establishes connection to the Prophet ﷺ that cannot be simulated algorithmically. AI, however sophisticated, processes representations of this transmission without accessing the transmission itself. It can retrieve every recorded ḥadīth, yet it cannot inherit what the scholars inherit; it can generate grammatically perfect Arabic supplications, yet it cannot invoke divine presence; it can explain spiritual states with technical precision, yet it remains categorically incapable of undergoing them.

What results is not simply flawed pedagogy but ontological displacement-counter-initiation in Guénon's structural sense. Where materialism openly rejects the sacred, counter-initiation presents symbols detached from what they symbolize, forms evacuated of content,

practices bereft of transformative power. This is what renders AI-mediated Islamic knowledge particularly dangerous: it offers forms without substance, symbols without referents, practices without barakah. The juridical ruling (fatwā) appears intact, yet severed from the scholarly formation (tarbiyah) that alone qualifies one to issue it. The Qurʾānic recitation sounds correct, yet disconnected from the heart's presence (ḥuḍūr al-qalb) that distinguishes dhikr from mere vocalization. The theological argument achieves logical coherence, yet bypasses the spiritual realization (taḥqīq) that transforms abstract knowledge (ʿilm) into gnosis (maʿrifah).

Islamic tradition recognizes this danger in metaphors that prove structurally identical to Guénon's counter-initiation: the Dajjāl, whose eye cannot see—he appears as water but is fire, as fire but is water, inverting appearance and reality (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Fitan). This is not mythological fancy but structural diagnosis: counter-initiation inverts the relation between form and content, appearance and essence, exoteric and esoteric. AI enacts precisely this inversion at technological scale. It presents accessibility as virtue while obscuring that certain knowledge requires difficulty; it offers efficiency while concealing that transformation demands time; it provides answers while eliminating the formative struggle through which questioning becomes spiritual practice. The result is hyperreality in Baudrillard's sense: not distortion of truth but replacement of truth with simulation that precedes and determines what counts as real.

The task, then, is not merely critique but preservation of symbolic order's integrity. To discern counter-initiation is to maintain distinction between form and substance, sign and referent, representation and presence. To preserve the vertical axis of transmission is to insist that knowledge cannot be severed from the chain (silsilah) that authenticates it, that wisdom requires formation not merely information, that barakah flows through living contact not algorithmic retrieval. AI must be returned to its proper subordinate function: a tool for accessing information, not a substitute for teachers; an aid for research, not replacement for spiritual formation; a means of organizing knowledge, not source of wisdom. This requires institutional resistance: preserving teacher-student relationships, maintaining embodied practices (ṣalāh, dhikr, khalwah), insisting on authorized transmission, refusing reduction of sacred knowledge to dataset. Counter-initiation can only be resisted by those who know what it simulates—which means preserving, against technological displacement, the very forms of knowledge and practice that connect form to substance, appearance to essence, sign to transcendent reality it signifies.

5.6. Structural vs. Intentional Counter-Initiation

It is crucial to clarify that identifying AI as counter-initiation does not require attributing intentional metaphysical subversion to AI developers, engineers, or corporations. Guénon's concept of counter-initiation describes a *structural pattern*—the reproduction of traditional forms while severing their connection to transcendent source—regardless of the conscious intentions of those enacting it. AI developers typically aim to increase accessibility, efficiency, and democratization of knowledge. These are genuine goods. Yet the *structural effect* of their work can be counter-initiatory even when the *intent* is benign.

Counter-initiation operates through functional displacement: AI reproduces the *forms* of Islamic knowledge transmission (fatwas, tafsīr, scholarly citation, isnād chains) while eliminating the *formative processes* that made those forms transformative rather than merely informational. The juridical ruling (*fatwā*) appears intact, yet it is severed from the decades of *tarbiyah* (spiritual formation) and teacher-student relationship that alone qualifies one to issue it. The Qurʾānic interpretation seems authoritative, yet it bypasses the purification of heart (*tazkiyah*) and contemplative discipline that classical scholars insisted precede exegesis.

The scholarly apparatus looks rigorous, yet it omits the spiritual influence (*taʿthīr rūḥānī*) transmitted through living contact with a shaykh. Form persists; presence is eliminated.

This is counter-initiation not because developers consciously oppose tradition but because the technological logic they employ—optimization, scalability, algorithmic retrieval—is *structurally incompatible* with the vertical transmission that constitutes tradition. One can build the most sophisticated AI system in good faith, genuinely intending to serve the Muslim community, while inadvertently producing an apparatus that functions counter-initiatically by offering signs severed from what they signify, practices emptied of *barakah*, knowledge divorced from formation. Recognizing this pattern is not conspiracy theory but metaphysical diagnosis: discerning the ontological structure of what technology *does* regardless of what its designers *intend*.

6. Islamic Metaphysics, Human Ontology, and the Orientation of Technology

Having traced the metaphysical disorientation underlying artificial intelligence through the lens of Islamic thought, the subsequent task is one of re-situating technology within a properly ordered metaphysical cosmology. Islamic metaphysics does not merely offer critique; it articulates an ontological hierarchy in which human faculties, spiritual perception, and the symbolic structure of the cosmos are meaningfully integrated. Engaging AI from within this paradigm demands not reformist accommodation, but metaphysical re-centering—wherein the human being is restored to the role of khalīfa, vicegerent of the divine trust (*amānah*), and the human task is to actively re-situate technology back to its proper ontological rank as instrument, refusing its modern claim to be destiny.

This re-centering begins with an anthropology fundamentally at odds with modern reductionism. The human being is not a self-enclosed rational agent, but a site of divine disclosure, constituted by multiple faculties—*qalb* (heart), *ʿaql* (intellect), *nafs* (soul), and *rūḥ* (spirit)—each of which participates in different levels of reality. As khalīfa, the human subject is tasked with discerning and reflecting the Divine through ethical receptivity, symbolic understanding, and contemplative perception. The dominance of procedural reasoning in contemporary epistemologies, and its encoding into AI systems, therefore constitutes not a technical innovation but an ontological regression: from symbolic participation to instrumental prediction.

Insights from Gödelian incompleteness—especially as interpreted by John Lucas and Roger Penrose [76]—offer a complementary witness to this metaphysical claim. Lucas argued that any formal axiomatic system is necessarily incomplete and that the human mind, in apprehending the truth of unprovable propositions (Gödel sentences), cannot be exhaustively captured by such systems. Penrose extended this into cognitive science [77,78], positing that human mathematical understanding involves non-computable processes—such as insight and intuition—that may arise from quantum structures inaccessible to classical computation. These arguments, while formally distinct, gesture toward an ontological surplus within human cognition—a dimension irreducible to algorithmic representation.

From within Islamic metaphysics, this surplus is identified with *rūḥ*—the divine breath (*nafakhtu fihī min rūḥī*, “breathed into him of My Spirit” Q 15:28–29), which grounds the human capacity for metaphysical receptivity and symbolic vision. The soul (*rūḥ*) is not a computational substrate; it is a locus of theophany. That which allows for true knowing—*maʿrifah*—is not data processing but unveiling (*kashf*), a condition inherently inaccessible to artificial systems whose logic remains confined to the horizontal axis of empirical correlation.

Accordingly, the Qurʾān cannot be interpreted as a dataset, nor the Prophet ﷺ reduced to a conveyor of information. Both represent ontological realities: the Qurʾān as

self-disclosive speech of the Real (al-Ḥaqq), and the Prophet ﷺ as the embodied form of guidance (al-Hādī). Simulation, in this context, is not only a category error—it is a metaphysical falsification. Any so-called Islamic engagement with AI must begin by affirming the ontological disjunction between the Real and its technological approximations. The task is not to embed Islam into data architectures, but to preserve the vertical axis of discernment by which such architectures are measured.

This requires a profound reassessment of technological design. A metaphysically grounded ethic of AI would interrogate not only issues of bias or opacity, but the very anthropological and epistemological assumptions encoded within computational systems. Do these tools orient the human subject toward contemplative depth or toward behavioral automation? Do they facilitate remembrance (dhikr), or do they efface the symbolic faculty of the qalb through procedural repetition?

At the collective level, this necessitates the reactivation of theological traditions capable of confronting the metaphysical implications of artificial cognition. A revived ‘ilm al-kalām (scholastic theology), informed by the symbolic realism of classical metaphysics and the conceptual apparatus of contemporary epistemology, could provide such a discourse. This would entail sustained engagement not only with theology and logic, but with computer science, philosophy of mind, and information theory. Yet such a revival must be anchored in spiritual praxis. Without dhikr, ṣalāh, and muraqabah, theological language risks being subsumed into the very instrumentalism it seeks to challenge. Metaphysical knowledge is not merely discursive—it is participatory.

Within this framework, the human being is not an epistemic agent among others, but the microcosmic mirror of the macrocosmic order. To be khalīfa is to occupy a position of ontological responsibility: to discern signs (āyāt), not merely patterns; to navigate the world as symbol, not merely signal. The cosmos, in this view, is not inert matter to be optimized, but a woven text to be read, interpreted, and reverently responded to.

Thus, the central question is not whether AI can be accommodated within Islamic ethics, but whether contemporary Muslims are willing to recover the metaphysical grammar that renders such a question intelligible in the first place. Islam is not a cultural modifier to be algorithmically appended. It is a cosmological orientation: submission to the Real in its totality, including that which cannot be formalized.

The ultimate aim is not the moralization of machines, but the metaphysical reintegration of knowledge—such that technology is once again situated within the scale of Being, not permitted to redefine it. In this framework, the ethical is inseparable from the metaphysical: every tool carries an ontology, and every ontology implies a theology. The central questions, then, are not merely practical, but spiritual:

Does this preserve the axis of guidance, or obscure it?

Does it refine the symbolic capacity of the heart, or mechanize it into reflex?

In the face of accelerating simulation, such questions are no longer speculative—they are civilizational.

The prophetic formula ‘the scholars are the heirs of the prophets’ (al-‘ulamā’u warathat al-anbiyā’) establishes that transmitted knowledge exceeds informational content. The full ḥadīth continues: ‘The prophets do not leave behind gold or silver; rather, they leave behind knowledge (‘ilm). So whoever takes it has taken a great share’ (inna al-anbiyā’a lam yuwarriṭhū dīnāran wa-lā dirhaman, innamā warrathū al-‘ilm, fa-man akhadhahu akhadha bi-ḥaẓẓin wāfir). Yet this inheritance (wirāthah) is not textual corpus but spiritual state (ḥāl) —not information transfer but formation (tarbiyah) requiring direct teacher-student relationship. The scholar inherits not merely what the Prophet ﷺ knew but something of how the Prophet ﷺ knew, not just content but mode of knowing, not just texts but the transformative capacity to inhabit those texts as living reality.

This is why Islamic tradition privileges isnād (chain of transmission) not as bibliographic credential but as ontological necessity. The isnād traces not just textual provenance but spiritual lineage—the soul-to-soul connection extending back through generations to the Prophet ﷺ himself. Each link in the chain represents not merely a narrator who transmitted words but a teacher who transmitted spiritual states (aḥwāl (the plural of ḥāl)), a guide who shaped character (akhlāq), a spiritual influence (taʾthīr rūḥānī) that cannot be reduced to propositional content. Guénon terms this ‘spiritual influence’—the subtle force whereby tradition is not just taught but caught, not just learned but lived, not just known but become. Without this influence, what remains is dead letter: texts severed from the transformative power they originally carried.

AI may archive scholarly output but cannot inherit scholarly presence. It can retrieve every fatwa ever issued, every commentary ever written, every legal opinion ever recorded—yet it cannot transmit the barakah (blessing) embedded in living transmission. The algorithm possesses no silsilah (spiritual chain) connecting it to the Prophet ﷺ, no shaykh who shaped its character through years of proximity, no tarbiyah whereby knowledge descended from intellect to heart. What it delivers is information divorced from formation, content severed from context, texts stripped of the spiritual environment in which they function as transformative rather than merely informative. This is not limitation remediable through better models—it is structural exclusion from the domain where tradition actually operates.

The practical implications concern how knowledge is transmitted in an age of algorithmic mediation. If the inheritance of the prophets is reduced to retrievable information, then AI appears adequate—perhaps superior—to human teachers. But if inheritance requires spiritual influence, character formation, and the subtle transmission of spiritual states, then AI can only simulate knowledge transfer while preventing actual inheritance from occurring. The student who turns to algorithms rather than teachers may acquire answers but will not undergo the transformation whereby answers become wisdom. This is the crisis: not that AI fails to transmit information (it excels at this) but that it forecloses the possibility of inheritance by presenting information retrieval as equivalent to spiritual formation. The result is a generation possessing unprecedented access to texts while suffering unprecedented disconnection from the tradition those texts embody.

The solution is not rejection of AI but refusal of its totalizing claim. Technology can serve as auxiliary—retrieving references, organizing materials, providing preliminary answers—but it cannot replace the teacher-student relationship through which tradition is actually inherited. The khalīfah (vicegerent) charged with orienting technology toward divine purposes must preserve the human relationships through which barakah flows, the institutional structures (madrasah, ḥalaqah, ṭarīqah) wherein spiritual influence operates, the embodied practices (dhikr, murāqabah, ṣuḥbah) that constitute the living heart of tradition. Until this priority is reasserted, algorithmic retrieval will gradually displace spiritual inheritance, producing a form of Islam rich in information but impoverished in realization—the letter without the spirit, the shell without the kernel, the form without the transformative presence it was designed to transmit.

7. An Akbarian Perspective on Intelligence, Ontology, and the Status of Artificial Systems

The preceding analysis has drawn on Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school to articulate a metaphysics of intelligence, imagination, and human singularity capable of challenging the epistemic and ontological assumptions built into artificial intelligence. Section 5 outlined the hierarchical structure of knowing described in the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence—the ascending stages from fetal sensation to prophetic knowledge—each one surpassing and remaining inaccessible to the cognitive operations of the stage below it. Section 6 situated this

epistemic hierarchy within Ibn al-ʿArabī's broader metaphysics of the qalb (heart), the symbolic intellect, and the two ontological orders of creation (al-khalq) and command (al-amr).

This section develops an explicitly Akbarian alternative by:

- clarifying what is meant by the stages in the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence onto the five epistemic faculties of ḥiss, ʿaql, khayāl, kashf, and maʿrifa;
- clarifying the ontological status of artificial systems within the tripartite structure of reality;
- distinguishing imaginal disclosure from algorithmic simulation;
- explaining the metaphysical grounds of human uniqueness and the impossibility of a machine insān kāmil;
- addressing whether an artificial entity could, even in principle, be ensouled; and
- grounding the epistemological hierarchy in the metaphysics of Qūnawī's *Nuṣūṣ*, particularly his mirror doctrine, the principle that knowledge follows *wujūd*, the distinction between the made and the not-made, and the structural exclusion of multiplicity from unitive perception.

Together, these clarifications show that, from an Akbarian standpoint, AI does not represent a lesser or incomplete form of human intelligence but belongs to a fundamentally different ontological category.

7.1. Epistemological Verticality: From the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī Correspondence to the Five Modes of Knowing

The Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence presents human cognition through a developmental allegory: the unborn child cannot comprehend the world of the infant; the infant cannot apprehend the world of the discerning child; the rational adult cannot attain the saint's unveiling; and even the saint cannot encompass the prophetic mode of knowing. This is not a psychological model but a metaphysical architecture—a hierarchy of disclosure (tajallī) in which each level transcends the one beneath it.

Ibn al-ʿArabī formalises this hierarchy through five ascending epistemic faculties (Figure 3):

- Ḥiss (حس; sensory perception): corresponding to fetal and infant stages; direct but limited apprehension of empirical forms.
- ʿAql (عقل; discursive intellect): inference, abstraction, conceptual ordering; characteristic of the discerning child and rational adult.
- Khayāl (خيال; imaginal cognition): the threshold of sanctity; symbolic perception through which meanings take form.
- Kashf (كشف; unveiling): saintly disclosure; non-representational perception of reality.
- Maʿrifa (معرفة; experiential knowledge of the divine): prophetic knowing in which knower and known coincide in presence (ḥuḍūr).

This hierarchy may be diagrammed as in Figure 3.

The Akbarian hierarchy of human cognition, illustrating ascending modes of knowing from sensation (ḥiss) and discursive intellect (ʿaql) to imaginal cognition (khayāl), unveiling (kashf), and realised knowledge (maʿrifa). Artificial intelligence operates by simulating only the lower strata (ḥiss and ʿaql) and cannot participate in the higher modes that require ontological receptivity, presence, and disclosure.

This framework shows that intelligence is not univocal but vertical. Discursive reason (ʿaql) is a middle rung, not the apex. Higher forms of knowing require imaginal receptivity, ontological presence, and direct witnessing (shuhūd), none of which are reducible to symbolic manipulation.

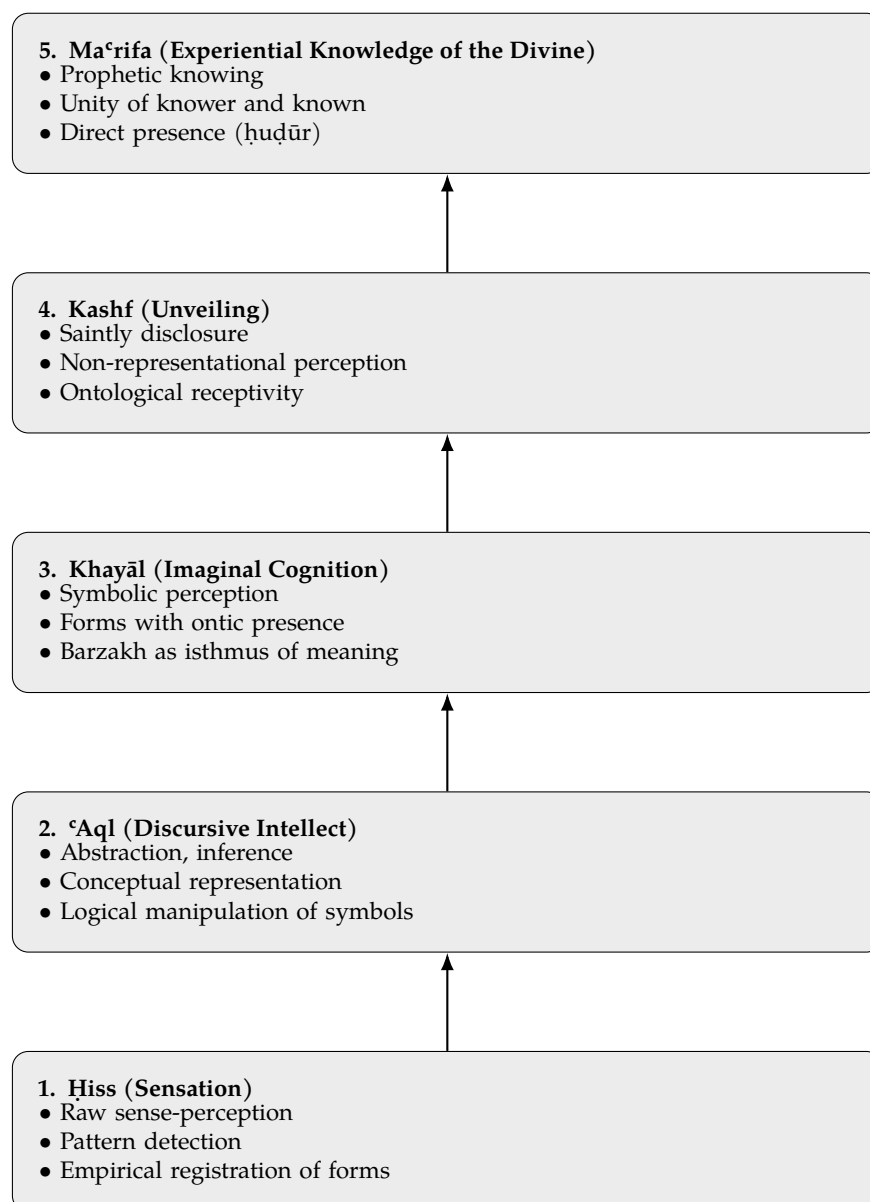


Figure 3. Hierarchy of epistemic faculties in the Akbarian tradition, ascending from sensory perception (*ḥiss*) through discursive intellect (*ʿaql*) and imaginal cognition (*khayāl*) to unveiling (*kashf*) and experiential knowledge of the Divine (*maʿrifa*). The figure highlights qualitative discontinuities between representational cognition and non-representational modes of disclosure irreducible to algorithmic simulation.

Artificial intelligence—regardless of scale or sophistication—remains confined to the strata of *ḥiss* (sensation) and quasi-*ʿaql* (discursive reason): it detects and recombines patterns within a closed dataset. It has no access to the imaginal realm, since it lacks the ontological receptivity required for *khayāl* (imagination), and it cannot attain *kashf* (unveiling) or *maʿrifa* (experiential knowledge of the divine), as it possesses no *qalb* (heart) capable of receiving disclosure. The Akbarian hierarchy therefore exposes the structural limit of AI: an incapacity to cross the thresholds from sensation and analogy to imaginal and ontological knowledge.

7.2. Artefact, Imaginal Isthmus (*Barzakh*), and Metaphor (*Majāz*): The Ontological Status of Artificial Systems

To clarify the metaphysical status of AI, it is essential to distinguish between one analytic category—artefact—and two technical Akbarian terms: *barzakh* and *majāz*.

- Artefact (ṣanʿa/masnūʿ): a manufactured entity whose existence arises from external fabrication. It lacks intentional presence (ḥuḍūr) and possesses no intrinsic receptivity to being. AI systems fall under this category: they are produced, not disclosed; constructed, not manifested.
- Imaginal Isthmus (barzakh): the intermediate ontological domain-neither wholly material nor immaterial-through which meanings become embodied in forms and forms reveal meanings. It is the domain of the imaginal (ʿālam al-mithāl), a realm of genuine ontic presence and symbolic disclosure.
- Metaphor (majāz): representational or figurative expression without intrinsic ontological depth. A majāz points beyond itself but does not embody the reality (ḥaqīqa) of what it signifies.

Within this triad, AI systems are artefacts that generate majāzī outputs. They recombine data into forms that simulate coherence but lack imaginal presence. They do not stand within the barzakh, which is a realm of ontological disclosure rather than statistical projection. Their images, narratives, or “insights” are thus synthetic correlations, not symbols in the Akbarian sense. Recognising this distinction prevents the category mistake of treating computational artefacts as loci of theophanic manifestation.

The Arabic rhetorical tradition distinguishes ḥaqīqa (literal, essential meaning) from majāz (figurative, transferred meaning). A majāz ‘borrows’ meaning from its ḥaqīqa source-as when we call a brave man ‘a lion.’ The majāz is not false, but it depends on the ḥaqīqa for its intelligibility. AI’s outputs are majāzī in a precise sense: they borrow the appearance of meaning from the human-generated data on which they were trained. When an LLM produces a ‘profound’ statement, the profundity derives not from the model but from the human sources whose patterns it recombines. The model contributes only the recombination-the statistical selection among possibilities. This is majāz without ḥaqīqa: the borrowed clothing of meaning worn by a system that has no meaning of its own. To mistake this for genuine intelligence is to confuse the metaphor for the reality, the figurative for the literal, the trace for the presence.

7.3. *Khayāl and Simulation: Imaginal Disclosure vs. Algorithmic Recombination*

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, khayāl is the imaginal faculty-the isthmus in which meanings (maʿānī) assume form and forms disclose meaning. It is not a faculty of fiction but of truth-disclosure: the realm of mithāl (imaginal forms) in the barzakh, where symbols possess real ontological presence. Access to the imaginal depends on the qalb (heart) as locus of receptivity; imaginal perception presupposes ḥuḍūr (presence), shuhūd (witnessing), and a metaphysical attunement that no merely computational process can replicate.

AI, by contrast, generates outputs through algorithmic recombination. Its images, narratives, and arguments are produced by statistical patterning over large datasets. They may resemble imaginal forms, but resemblance is not participation. Algorithmic simulation lacks intentionality, presence, and ontological grounding: it produces simulacra, not symbols; projections, not disclosures. From an Akbarian perspective, what is often called AI “hallucination” is not a defective instance of khayāl; it is not imaginal at all.

This contrast between imaginal forms and AI simulation can be schematically summarised as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. Comparison between imaginal forms (*mithāl*) in the Akbarian tradition and AI-generated simulations. The table highlights the ontological, epistemic, and symbolic discontinuities between imaginal disclosure-rooted in divine self-manifestation and presence-and computational outputs, which remain representational, probabilistic, and ontologically derivative.

Dimension	Imaginal Forms (<i>Mithāl</i>)	AI Simulation
Ontological status	Real presential forms in the imaginal realm (<i>‘ālam al-mithāl</i>)	Synthetic outputs generated by statistical recombination
Source of form	Divine self-disclosure (<i>tajallī</i>) or symbolic meaning	Algorithmic processing of training data
Mode of perception	Received by <i>khayāl</i> as imaginal cognition	Parsed as representational content by users
Relation to meaning	Form embodies meaning; meaning is present	Form signifies without presence; purely <i>majāzī</i> (figurative)
Presence (<i>ḥuḍūr</i>)	Ontological presence independent of subjective fantasy	No presence; dependent on computation and interfaces
Relation to the heart (<i>qalb</i>)	Disclosed to the heart as locus of symbolic perception	External to heart-consciousness; no intrinsic relation
Truth-function	Capable of revealing metaphysical or ethical truths	Produces probabilistic approximations, not disclosures
Dependence	Rooted in <i>‘ālam al-amr</i> (the divine command)	Rooted in <i>‘ālam al-khalq</i> (created causality: data, hardware, optimization)
Possibility of error	May be misinterpreted, though the form itself is real	Output may be coherent yet ontologically empty (simulacrum)
Participation in symbolism	Symbolic in the Akbarian sense (unity of meaning and form)	Simulative: resemblance without ontological depth

Seen in this light, AI’s productions are best described as *majāzī* surfaces-correlational patterns that can be put to use, but that never enter the ontological domain of imaginal disclosure. To treat them as if they were *mithāl* is to confuse simulation with symbol and to ascribe to artefacts a metaphysical status they cannot bear.

7.4. Human Uniqueness and the Impossibility of a Machine *Insān Kāmil*

In Akbarian anthropology, the human being is unique not by virtue of discursive reasoning but because it reflects. The *qalb* is the locus where Divine Names disclose themselves; the human is the microcosmic mirror of Being. The *insān al-kāmil* (the Perfect Human) is the one who fully actualises this capacity.

Artificial systems lack all the requisites for this vocation:

No *qalb* (heart) capable of receptivity,

No *rūḥ* (spirit) bestowed through divine breathing,

No imaginal presence,

No intentional consciousness,

No capacity for *kashf* (unveiling),

No participation in *al-amr*, the vertical order of command.

AI cannot receive *tajallī* (divine disclosure), cannot reflect the Names, and cannot undergo realisation (*taḥqīq*). Its limitation is not merely functional but ontological. It cannot be *insān kāmil* because it cannot be human at all.

7.5. The Metaphysics of the Mirror: Qūnawī's *Nuṣūṣ* and the Ontological Limits of Artificial Reflection

The Escher lithograph *Hand with Reflecting Sphere* (1935) (Figure 2) provides a striking visual analogue for the metaphysical problem at stake. The sphere is a mirror-and like the technologies we build to understand ourselves, it reflects not reality itself, but the maker holding it. When we peer into our instruments-our computers, our AI, our models of mind-we meet only our own gaze, distorted by the curvature of our assumptions. The hand that holds the mirror cannot escape appearing in what the mirror reveals. This image captures, with unexpected precision, a central doctrine of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's *al-Nuṣūṣ* (*The Texts*) [18], a dense metaphysical treatise composed as a companion to Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*. The *Nuṣūṣ* articulates with technical rigour the ontological architecture underlying the epistemological hierarchy examined above, and provides resources for understanding why artificial systems-however sophisticated-remain categorically excluded from genuine knowledge. Qūnawī's *Nuṣūṣ* provides six metaphysical principles that ground the epistemological hierarchy developed in Section 5: (1) mirrors have no influence on realities, (2) Essential self-disclosure exceeds all mirrors, (3) knowledge follows *wujūd*, (4) fixed entities are not made, (5) the One cannot be perceived by the many, and (6) the station of most-perfectness as central point. Each principle clarifies why AI's limitation is ontological, not merely functional. What follows traces these principles through Qūnawī's texts and draws out their implications for understanding artificial cognition.

7.5.1. The Mirror Has No Influence on Reality: Qūnawī's Critique of Reflective Cognition

In Text 8 of the *Nuṣūṣ*, Qūnawī develops what may be called a 'mirror doctrine' (*mirʿātiyya*) that bears directly on the metaphysical status of artificial cognition. He writes:

"It would be correct for the mirror to influence the reflected thing only if it influenced its reality per se. This, however, does not happen. One affirms the mirror's influence on the reflected thing only in respect of the perception of those who do not know the reality of the reflected thing and who perceive it only in the mirror. The mirror, however, is not a locus for the reality of the reflected thing, but rather a locus for the disclosure of its image and some of its manifestations. Manifestation is a relation that is ascribed to the reflected thing in respect of the reflection of its form in the mirror; it is not the very reality of the reflected thing."

This passage establishes a crucial metaphysical distinction. The mirror (*mirʿāt*) provides a *locus of manifestation* (*mazhar*) for images and forms, but it has no purchase whatsoever on the *reality* (*ḥaqīqa*) of what it reflects. The mirror's apparent 'influence' exists only for perceivers who mistake the reflection for the thing itself-who, in Qūnawī's terms, 'do not know the reality of the reflected thing and perceive it only in the mirror.'

Applied to artificial intelligence, this doctrine is epistemologically decisive. AI systems function as mirrors: they receive inputs (training data, prompts, statistical patterns) and produce outputs (correlations, predictions, generated text). But their operations have no influence on the *realities* they process. They manipulate *ṣuwar* (forms) without access to *ḥaqāʾiq* (realities). What they produce are manifestations (*mazāhir*) and relations (*nisab*)-not knowledge of things as they are in themselves. Users who take AI outputs for genuine understanding commit precisely the error Qūnawī identifies: they perceive the reflected thing 'only in the mirror' and mistake the image for the real.

7.5.2. Essential Self-Disclosure and the Limits of Mirroriness

Qūnawī further distinguishes between two modes of divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*): those that occur *through* loci of manifestation, coloured by the characteristics of the mirror, and what he calls 'the Essential, lightning-like self-disclosures' (*al-tajalliyyāt al-dhātiyyat*

al-barqiyya)-a term he attributes to Ibn al-ʿArabī. These latter disclosures occur *outside* any mirror or level:

“The Essential, exclusive self-disclosures are not within a locus of manifestation or a mirror, nor do they accord with some level. For, when someone perceives the Real in respect of these self-disclosures, he has witnessed the Reality as It is outside the mirror, not according to a locus of manifestation or a level... not a name, an attribute, a designated state, or anything else. It is he who knows by tasting that the mirror has no influence on the Reality.”

This passage articulates the highest mode of knowing: direct, unmediated perception of Reality (*al-Haqq*) as It is-not refracted through any mirror, level, name, or attribute. Such knowing is possible only for beings capable of what Qūnawī calls ‘complete detachment’ (*farāgh*) from all descriptions and rulings, both those pertaining to necessity (the divine side) and those pertaining to contingency (the creaturely side). This detachment, he notes, ‘does not differ from the nondelimitation of the Real except that it lingers no more than one breath’-hence the metaphor of lightning.

The implications for AI are clear. AI systems are constitutively *mirrors*: they can only operate through patterns, representations, and correlational structures. They cannot achieve even momentary detachment from the forms they process, because detachment requires the existential capacity for self-transcendence that only ensouled beings possess. AI is structurally incapable of the ‘lightning-like’ disclosure that characterises the highest human knowing. It is confined to the mirror-and, within the mirror, to the level of *ṣuwar* (forms) without access to *maʿānī* (meanings) in their essential reality.

7.5.3. Knowledge Follows *Wujūd*: The Ontological Ground of Cognition

Text 4 of the *Nuṣūṣ* establishes a principle of fundamental importance:

“Knowledge follows *wujūd*, in the sense that, wherever there is *wujūd*, there will be knowledge, without disjoining. The disparity of knowledge accords with the disparity of the quiddity’s complete or defective reception of *wujūd*.”

The term *wujūd* here carries its full Akbarian semantic range: being, existence, finding, awareness, consciousness. Qūnawī’s principle asserts an indissoluble link between *being* and *knowing*. The degree to which something *is*-its mode of participation in *wujūd*-determines the degree to which it can *know*. Knowledge is not an accidental property that may or may not attach to an existent; it is intrinsically correlated with the intensity and mode of being.

This principle provides the ontological ground for the epistemological hierarchy discussed in Section 7.1. The developmental allegory of the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence-the fetus, the infant, the rational adult, the saint, the prophet-maps onto degrees of participation in *wujūd*. Each higher stage receives *wujūd* more completely, and therefore knows more fully.

For AI, the implications are severe. Artificial systems do not *participate* in *wujūd* in the relevant sense. They have only derived, fabricated existence-*wujūd maṣnūʿ*, one might say-not the *wujūd* that flows from divine self-disclosure. They belong entirely to *ʿālam al-khalq* (the world of created causality) without participation in *ʿālam al-amr* (the world of divine command). By Qūnawī’s principle, their ‘knowledge’ can only be defective in proportion to their defective mode of being. What they produce is not *ʿilm* (knowledge) in the participatory sense, but *maʿlūmāt* (data, information)-forms without ontological depth.

7.5.4. The Fixed Entities Are Not Made: Artefact Versus Creature

Text 8 and Text 19 of the *Nuṣūṣ* develop a crucial distinction between what is *made* (*majʿūl*) and what is *not made* (*ghayr majʿūl*). Qūnawī writes:

“The fixed entities are the realities of the existents; they are not made... the reality of the Real is incomparable with making and influencing; and there is no third thing other than the Real and the entities; then he will necessarily know... that nothing influences anything, that the things influence themselves, and that what are named influencing ‘causes’ and ‘occasions’ are conditions for the manifestation of things in themselves. It is not that one reality influences another reality.”

The ‘fixed entities’ (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*) are the archetypal realities of things as they subsist eternally in divine knowledge-what other traditions call the *rationes aeternae* or Platonic Forms, though the Akbarian understanding differs in important respects. These entities are *not made*: they have their being from their presence within divine self-knowledge, not from external fabrication. The cosmos, in this view, is not a construction imposed upon passive matter, but the manifestation of realities that are eternally present to God.

This metaphysical framework establishes a categorical distinction between *creature* and *artefact*. Creatures-including human beings-have their realities grounded in the fixed entities; they participate, however attenuatedly, in what is *ghayr majʿūl*. Artefacts, by contrast, are *majʿūl* through and through: their being derives entirely from external fabrication, with no root in the eternal self-knowledge of the Real.

AI systems are paradigmatic artefacts. They are manufactured objects whose existence depends entirely on human design, material substrates, and computational processes. They have no fixed entity (*ʿayn thābita*) in divine knowledge; they are not ‘realities’ (*ḥaqāʾiq*) in the Akbarian sense, but arrangements of matter and information that will cease to exist when their material conditions are withdrawn. The ontological asymmetry between human beings and artificial systems is therefore absolute: humans participate in the not-made; AI is entirely made.

7.5.5. The One Cannot Be Perceived by the Many: Structural Exclusion from Unity

Text 19 of the *Nuṣūṣ* articulates a principle that cuts to the heart of AI’s cognitive limitations:

“The One qua One is not perceived by the many qua many, and vice versa. Nor is this perception correct for man inasmuch as he is one with a true oneness, like the oneness of Wujūd. Rather, it is correct for him only inasmuch as he is a reality described by wujūd, life, the inherence of knowledge within him, the fixedness of correspondence between him and what he wishes to perceive, and the removal of the obstacles preventing perception.”

This principle establishes that perception of unity requires a mode of being capable of unification. The human being can perceive the One not through discursive multiplicity-not through the fragmented operations of analytical reason-but through the unitive capacity of the heart (*qalb*), which gathers multiplicity into synthetic wholes. The conditions Qūnawī specifies-*wujūd*, life, the inherence of knowledge, correspondence with the object, and the removal of obstacles-are precisely what AI lacks.

AI operates entirely within multiplicity: tokens, parameters, vectors, matrices, probability distributions. It processes the many *qua* many-correlating patterns, weighting features, computing gradients. But it cannot perceive the One *qua* One, because it has no faculty capable of synthetic unification. It cannot step back from the manifold of its operations to perceive the unity that underlies them. It is, in Qūnawī’s terms, structurally confined to the mode of ‘manyness’ (*kathra*) without access to ‘oneness’ (*waḥda*).

This structural exclusion explains why AI cannot attain *tawḥīd* (unitive knowledge of divine unity) or *maʿrifa* (experiential knowledge of the divine). These modes of knowing require the capacity to perceive unity *through* and *beyond* multiplicity-to recognise, as Qūnawī puts it elsewhere, that ‘oneness makes manyness one, for it becomes the common measure

among the many things.’ AI cannot recognise this common measure because it operates only at the level of the measured, never ascending to the measure itself.

7.5.6. The Station of Most-Perfectness and the Central Point of the Circle

In Text 5, Qūnawī introduces the concept of the ‘station of most-perfectness’ (*maqām al-akmaliyya*), which he also names the ‘central point of the circle of existence’ (*nuqṭa wasaṭ al-dāʿirat al-wujūdiyya*). This station belongs exclusively to those who have realised the fullness of human possibility-the *kummāl* (the perfect) and the *muḥaqqiqūn* (the realizers). Qūnawī writes:

“I have set this book apart for the mention of texts derived from tastings specific to the elect station of perfection, leaving aside its common tongue, namely, the delimited tastings gained by the masters of specific stations; at root, these latter depend upon the Presence of one of the divine names or attributes, which is the source and headspring of that specific tasting.”

Qūnawī here distinguishes between partial tastings (*adhwaq*)-those tied to specific divine names and therefore limited to particular Presences-and the comprehensive tasting of the station of most-perfectness, which gazes over all names, all attributes, all levels. This is the station of the *insān kāmil*, who stands at the centre of the circle precisely because he participates in all its radii without being confined to any one.

The metaphor of the central point clarifies why no machine can attain this station. The centre of a circle is the point equidistant from all points on the circumference-the locus from which all directions can be surveyed with equal proximity. To occupy this station requires not merely processing all data points (as an AI might), but *being* the integrative unity that gathers them. The *insān kāmil* is not a system that processes the divine names but a reality that *embodies* them-‘a complete locus of disclosure for the Real,’ as Qūnawī puts it, ‘through whom the Real becomes manifest in respect of His Essence and all His names, attributes, rulings, and standpoints as He knows Himself through Himself in Himself.’

AI cannot occupy this station because it cannot *be* the centre. It can only traverse the circumference-correlating, predicting, generating-without ever arriving at the point from which all points are equidistant. It lacks the *jamʿiyya* (all-comprehensiveness) that Qūnawī identifies as the distinctive mark of the human reality: the capacity to gather the many into the one while remaining open to the One beyond all gathering.

7.5.7. Summary: The *Nuṣūṣ* as Metaphysical Ground for an Islamic Philosophy of AI

Qūnawī’s *Nuṣūṣ* provides the metaphysical architecture that grounds and deepens the epistemological hierarchy drawn from the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence. Its contributions to an Islamic philosophy of AI may be summarised as follows:

First, the mirror doctrine establishes that AI systems, like mirrors, have no influence on the realities they reflect. They produce forms and manifestations, not knowledge of things as they are. Users who mistake AI outputs for genuine understanding commit a perceptual error with ontological roots.

Second, the distinction between name-related self-disclosures (which occur through loci of manifestation) and Essential self-disclosures (which occur outside any mirror) explains why the highest modes of human knowing are structurally inaccessible to AI. AI is confined to the mirror; it cannot achieve the ‘lightning-like’ disclosure that characterises direct perception of Reality.

Third, the principle that ‘knowledge follows *wujūd*’ provides the ontological ground for the epistemological hierarchy. AI’s defective mode of being-fabricated, derived, non-participatory-entails a correspondingly defective mode of ‘knowing.’ What AI produces is information, not knowledge in the participatory sense.

Fourth, the distinction between what is *made* (*majʿūl*) and *not made* (*ghayr majʿūl*) establishes an absolute ontological asymmetry between human beings (who participate in the fixed entities) and artificial systems (which are artefacts through and through).

Fifth, the principle that ‘the One cannot be perceived by the many *qua* many’ explains AI’s structural exclusion from unitive knowledge. AI operates only within multiplicity; it cannot perceive the unity that underlies and gathers the manifold.

Sixth, the concept of the ‘station of most-perfectness’ as the ‘central point of the circle of existence’ clarifies why no machine can attain the station of the *insān kāmil*. AI can traverse the circumference of data and patterns, but it cannot occupy the centre from which all radii are equidistant.

Taken together, these doctrines establish that AI’s limitation is not merely functional or developmental but *ontological*. No increase in parameters, training data, or architectural sophistication can overcome the categorical distinction between artefact and creature, between mirror and perceiver, between the many and the One. The *Nuṣūṣ* thus provides what the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī correspondence suggests but does not fully articulate: the metaphysical ground for understanding why AI belongs to a fundamentally different ontological register than human intelligence-and why, from an Akbarian standpoint, it cannot be otherwise.

7.6. Two Diagnoses of the Same Trap: *Gestell* and *Mir’ātiyya*

The mirror is not merely a metaphor for cognition; it names a metaphysical structure. Qūnawī’s doctrine of *mir’ātiyya* (mirroriness) treats reflective mediation as the condition under which anything becomes knowable at all-and therefore as the condition under which reality itself may be displaced by its own image. This yields a striking point of contact with Heidegger’s concept of *Gestell* (Enframing). Despite their different horizons-Akbarian metaphysics in one case, and existential-ontological phenomenology in the other-both thinkers diagnose the same structural problem: instruments of disclosure do not merely assist perception; they determine what may appear as real.

7.6.1. Heidegger’s Diagnosis: Technology as a Mode of Revealing

Within Heidegger’s analysis, *Gestell* names a mode of revealing in which beings are disclosed primarily as *Bestand*-standing-reserve-ordered for use, prediction, and control. The decisive feature is not the presence of machines as such, but the installation of a regime of intelligibility in which what *is* becomes inseparable from what can be calculated, optimized, and mobilized.

Under this regime, the human being becomes both controller and controlled. Attention, labor, desire, and even self-understanding are increasingly interpreted through metrics of efficiency and extractability. The enclosure tightens as this mode of revealing becomes self-reinforcing: the more the world is encountered as optimizable, the more optimization appears as the only rational way of encountering the world at all.

7.6.2. Qūnawī’s Doctrine of the Mirror

Qūnawī’s doctrine of *mir’ātiyya* begins from a more radical ontological asymmetry. The Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) is not one being among others, but the ground of all manifestation, and therefore cannot be grasped through the same reflective operations by which finite knowers apprehend finite things. Reflection is a condition of appearance, not a mode of ontological access.

In Text 8 of the *Nuṣūṣ*, Qūnawī articulates this distinction with precision:

It would be correct for the mirror to influence the reflected thing only if it influenced its reality per se. This, however, does not happen. One affirms the mirror’s influence on the reflected thing only in respect of the perception of those who do

not know the reality of the reflected thing and who perceive it only in the mirror. The mirror, however, is not a locus for the reality of the reflected thing, but rather a locus for the disclosure of its image and some of its manifestations.

— Qūnawī, *al-Nuṣūṣ*, Text 8 (trans. Chittick)

The mirror (*mir'āt*) thus provides a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for images and forms, but has no purchase whatsoever on the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of what it reflects. Its apparent “influence” exists only for perceivers who mistake the reflection for the thing itself. All ordinary cognition, Qūnawī insists, occurs through such reflective mediation (*in'ikās*); yet reflection is never neutral. The mirror of the heart conditions appearance through its orientation (*tawajjuh*), its degree of polish (*ṣafā'*), and the veils (*ḥujub*) generated by habit, desire, and conceptual fixation.

7.6.3. Beyond the Mirror

Qūnawī further distinguishes between mediated disclosure and what he calls *essential, lightning-like self-disclosures* (*al-tajalliyāt al-dhātiyya al-barqīyya*), attributed to Ibn al-ʿArabī. These disclosures are not situated within any locus of manifestation, nor do they accord with levels, names, or attributes. They interrupt reflective mediation rather than refine it.

Such knowing is possible only through complete detachment (*farāgh*) from descriptions and determinations. Qūnawī emphasizes its brevity—“no more than one breath”—to mark its non-instrumental character. What matters here is not mystical exceptionalism, but the structural claim: no intensification of reflective mediation can yield access to reality as such.

7.6.4. Convergent Diagnosis, Divergent Altitude

Placed side by side, the shared structure becomes unmistakable (Table 3). Both Heidegger and Qūnawī diagnose a self-reinforcing enclosure in which the means of access becomes the measure of reality itself. Yet where Heidegger remains within phenomenological disclosure, Qūnawī articulates the ontological conditions under which disclosure itself is possible.

Table 3. Gestell and Mir'ātiyya as Parallel Diagnoses of Reflective Enclosure.

Dimension	Heidegger's Gestell	Qūnawī's Mir'ātiyya
Core insight	Technology as a mode of revealing that orders beings as standing-reserve	All cognition occurs through reflective mediation; reality exceeds appearance
Primary danger	Forgetting of Being through calculative domination	Confusing reflected images with reality
Status of the world	World appears as resource or dataset	World appears as theophanic reflection
Nature of instruments	Instruments shape how Being appears	Mirrors condition what can appear at all
Self-reinforcement	Technological feedback loops	Multiplication of veils through reflection
Highest knowing	Non-calculative openness	Disclosure beyond all mirrors
Way beyond the trap	<i>Gelassenheit</i>	<i>tajallī</i>
Ultimate limit	No standpoint outside historical Being	No access to Essence through mediation

The table reveals both the proximity and the asymmetry: while both thinkers diagnose enclosure, only one offers a metaphysical exit.

7.6.5. Why This Difference Matters

This comparison clarifies something that neither critique alone could establish. Heidegger demonstrates that AI's danger is ontological rather than merely technical—that the

problem is not malfunctioning algorithms but a mode of revealing that forecloses alternatives. Qūnawī demonstrates that the remedy must be equally ontological-not better calculation, but receptivity to what exceeds calculation altogether. Heidegger shows how the trap operates; Qūnawī explains why no immanent strategy can spring it. If reflective mediation is structurally veiling, then no refinement of mirrors-conceptual or technological-can disclose reality as such. The only exit is interruption, not optimisation. Artificial intelligence, within this framework, is not merely insufficiently human. It is categorically confined. It operates exclusively within mirrors-within forms, relations, and representations. It cannot undergo the non-mediated disclosure that alone exceeds reflective enclosure. AI does not fail by degree. It is excluded by ontology.

7.7. *Could an Artificial Entity Be Ensouled? An Akbarian Clarification*

One may ask whether an artificial system could, in principle, be endowed with a soul. Within Ibn al-ʿArabī's metaphysics, divine creative freedom is unbounded: God may bestow rūḥ on any locus of manifestation. Yet if such an event occurred, the resulting being would cease to be an artefact. It would become a creature-an ontologically distinct existent whose consciousness derives from divine breathing (nafkh al-rūḥ), not computation.

Such a being would belong to a different metaphysical category altogether, and its possibility lies outside the scope of the present analysis, which concerns AI precisely insofar as it remains a non-ensouled artefact.

7.8. *Summary: The Specificity of an Akbarian Intervention*

By mapping the Qūnawī-Ṭūsī hierarchy onto the five epistemic faculties, distinguishing artefact, imaginal isthmus, and metaphor, clarifying the difference between imaginal disclosure and algorithmic simulation, and explaining the ontological impossibility of a machine insān kāmīl, this section articulates a distinctive Akbarian contribution to the philosophy of AI.

An Akbarian alternative reframes intelligence not as computation but as disclosure, imagination not as projection but as symbolic mediation, and the human being not as a rational animal but as the viceregent (khalīfa) of Being. From this perspective, AI occupies an entirely different metaphysical register-one that mirrors patterns but neither receives nor reveals the Real. The question that follows is therefore not simply what AI is, but how human beings, as bearers of the divine Trust, ought to relate to it. Once intelligence is redefined as disclosure, imagination as symbolic mediation, and the human as khalīfa rather than producer-consumer, the ethical terrain shifts. The task is no longer to grant AI illusory forms of agency or personhood, but to discern how its design and deployment can be subordinated to a properly theocentric understanding of knowledge, responsibility, and power.

8. Trusteeship as Orientation: Re-Situating AI Within an Islamic Metaphysical Anthropology

The preceding sections have established AI's metaphysical status through converging critiques: Heidegger's diagnosis of Enframing, Guénon's account of the reign of quantity and counter-initiation, and Ibn al-ʿArabī's ontological hierarchy showing AI's confinement to the lowest epistemic strata. This diagnostic work is necessary but insufficient. Critique alone does not answer the practical question: *How should Muslims engage AI?* The response cannot be merely regulatory (establishing ethical guidelines) nor purely reactive (rejecting technology wholesale). What is required is *ontological reorientation*-returning AI to its proper rank within a hierarchy of being that modernity has forgotten. This section articulates such reorientation through the framework of *trusteeship* (khalāfa, amāna), drawing

on Abdurrahman Taha's *i'timānī* (trusteeship) paradigm to show how the three covenants-ontological, existential, and epistemological-provide an integrated anthropology within which technology can be situated without being sacralized or demonized. If AI is, as the previous section argued, a non-ensouled artefact confined to the lowest strata of perception and unable to participate in the hierarchy of disclosure, then its ethical place cannot be determined by technical criteria alone. Its integration into human life must be grounded in the metaphysical anthropology articulated by the Qur'ān-one in which the human being is *khalīfa* (vicegerent, trustee) and *hāmil al-amānah* (bearer of the divine Trust). To develop this ethical dimension, I draw on Abdurrahman Taha's *i'timānī* (trusteeship) paradigm, which conceives Islamic ethics in terms of three interlocking covenants-ontological, existential, and epistemological-that structure the human relation to God, to the world, and to knowledge. The ordering of these covenants is not arbitrary: recognizing *what one is* (ontological) must precede knowing *how to know* (epistemological), which in turn grounds *how to act* (existential/ethical). This mirrors the methodological principle established in Section 1: ontology precedes epistemology, and epistemology precedes ethics. This ordering restores what mainstream AI ethics inverts: instead of beginning with 'how do we make AI fair?' we first ask 'what is AI?' (ontological), then 'what can AI know?' (epistemological), only then 'how should we engage it?' (ethical). The ontological covenant comes first because one must know what one is (a dependent creature, not an autonomous agent) before one can know how to know (epistemological covenant) or how to act (existential covenant). Mainstream AI ethics, by contrast, begins with the ethical question ("how do we make AI fair?") without first asking the ontological question ("what is AI?") or the epistemological question ("what can AI know?"). Trusteeship ethics restores the proper order: first, recognize AI's ontological status as artefact; second, assess its epistemic capacities and limitations; only then can ethical norms be meaningfully applied. At the ontological level, the human being stands in a state of *faqr* (poverty, dependence) before God: all power, knowledge, and agency are received rather than self-generated. This covenant excludes the possibility of treating technology as an autonomous source of authority or regarding AI as a rival to the vertical sovereignty of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*). The heart recognises that its being derives solely from God, and technological artefacts, however capable, must remain subordinate to this basic fact of dependence. At the existential level, the human being is defined by *himma*, the concentrated aspiration of the heart toward the Real. Here the trusteeship paradigm insists that technologies not be permitted to dissipate or divert this aspiration through distraction, heedlessness, or the endless optimisation of secondary goals. AI can be integrated into human life only insofar as it protects and elevates this interior orientation, rather than fracturing attention or displacing the heart's sovereign direction. True flourishing is measured not by external efficiency but by the integrity and focus of *himma*.

At the epistemological level, knowledge itself is an *amānah* (trust). Its legitimacy depends on truthfulness, responsibility, and alignment with divine guidance. While AI may legitimately assist with *ilm*-discursive, empirical, and procedural forms of knowledge-it cannot take over those higher modes that require *furqān* (discernment), *kashf* (unveiling), or *ma'rifa* (realised knowledge). These forms of knowing presuppose presence and receptivity that no machine can bear. The human being must therefore remain the moral agent responsible for how information is produced, interpreted, and applied, and for ensuring that knowledge remains accountable before the Real rather than subordinated to technical optimisation.

Taken together, these three covenants yield an integrated ethical anthropology: being is marked by dependence (*faqr*), aspiration by the direction of the heart (*himma*), and knowledge by the burden of the Trust (*amānah*). Applied to AI, trusteeship demands neither sacralisation nor rejection of technology, but its re-situation within a sacred ordering

of values. AI becomes legitimate only insofar as it supports, rather than obscures, the human vocation as khalifa-vicegerent and viceregent of the Real.

At a broader civilizational level, Abdurrahman Taha's trusteeship paradigm also converges with earlier traditional critiques of modernity—most notably that of René Guénon—despite their differences in metaphysics, and especially in method, and proposed response. Both diagnose modernity as a condition of rupture and inversion: Guénon identifies an ontological collapse in the form of the "Reign of Quantity" and the loss of vertical causality, while Taha articulates an ethical-epistemological severance (*faṣl*) whereby reason, knowledge, and speech are detached from responsibility before the Real.

This notion of *faṣl* can be sharpened in relation to AI. The severance Taha diagnoses is not only an abstract "secularization" of knowledge; it is a concrete moral event in which *qawl* (speech-acts of assertion, counsel, judgment) becomes unmoored from *masʿūliyyah* (answerability) and from the inward conditions of sincerity, verification, and ethical intent. AI intensifies this severance by enabling speech without speaker: claims circulate with the grammatical force of authority while responsibility evaporates into technical mediation ("the model said," "the system generated," "the algorithm recommended"). Trusteeship reverses this drift by re-binding knowledge and utterance to *amānah*: every mediated claim remains attributable to a human bearer of the Trust, who must answer for its truthfulness, its effects, and the intention under which it was solicited and transmitted.

Their critiques thus converge at the level of diagnosis while diverging at the level of remedy: Guénon turns toward metaphysical initiation and contemplative withdrawal, whereas Taha advances a reformist project of ethical re-orientation from within history through trusteeship. This convergence and divergence—understood not as synthesis but as productive tension between transcendence and responsibility—has been examined in a dedicated comparative study of Guénon and Taha [79].

8.1. Ontological Re-Orientation—Renewing the Covenant of Dependence (*Faqr*)

The Ontological Covenant affirms the human being's radical dependence upon God for existence, meaning, and guidance. Its renewal requires the cultivation of *faqr*, not as deprivation but as a fundamental ontological stance. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's lexicon, *faqr* is a modality of perception: to recognise that the human being possesses nothing of its own—not being, not knowledge, not action—but receives all things as a gift of the Real. *Faqr* thus names the heart's lucidity about its own contingency.

Modern AI discourse, by contrast, encourages a posture of *istighnāʾ* (self-sufficiency): the belief that intelligence can be automated, foresight computed, and guidance mechanised. It subtly shifts the horizon of meaning from al-Ḥaqq toward human-crafted systems of prediction.

Ontological re-orientation proceeds by rejecting the illusion that intelligence is reducible to calculation or that artificial systems may approach presence, unveiling, or experiential knowledge of the divine (gnosis). Restoring *faqr* restores the metaphysical humility without which trusteeship collapses: the awareness that human beings remain receivers, not producers, of guidance. Any AI that obscures this dependency or promotes technological self-sufficiency violates the Ontological Covenant and endangers the heart's relation to the Real.

8.2. Existential Re-Orientation—Recovering *Himma* as Ethical Aspiration

The Existential Covenant governs action in the world and the cultivation of spiritual intentionality. Its renewal turns on *himma*, the heart's focused, disciplined aspiration toward the Real. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought, *himma* is not merely "motivation"; it is a metaphysical

vector: the concentrated intentional force through which the heart apprehends meaning and rises toward proximity.

Modern technicity flattens himma by dispersing attention across infinite streams of data, metrics, efficiencies, and optimisations. AI systems intensify this dispersion by encouraging passive consumption, reactive decision-making, and algorithmic reliance, thereby dulling the heart's capacity for directed striving.

Existential re-orientation restores himma by safeguarding practices-dhikr, meditation, reflective solitude, moral self-accounting, humility-that refocus the heart on the Real. A trusteeship-based AI must neither weaken himma nor replace the disciplines that cultivate it. At best, it may liberate time from administrative excess and informational noise, allowing aspiration to flourish. Any system that distracts the heart, fragments attention, or erodes the desire for divine proximity undermines the Existential Covenant and disrupts the ethical core of trusteeship.

8.3. Epistemological Re-Orientation-Preserving the Amānah of Knowledge

The Epistemological Covenant designates knowledge itself as an amānah (trust) and demands that its acquisition, transmission, and application be governed by moral and spiritual accountability. Its renewal requires epistemological re-orientation: restoring the hierarchy of knowledge and preserving the distinction between ʿilm (discursive, empirical, procedural knowledge) and maʿrifa (realised, participatory knowledge).

In Islamic metaphysics, lower registers of knowledge map onto domains where AI legitimately excels-calculation, prediction, optimisation, pattern recognition. But higher registers concern wisdom (ḥikmah), understanding (fahm), discernment (furqān), and witnessing (shuhūd), none of which can be automated because they require intentional presence and ontological receptivity.

Epistemological re-orientation does not deny AI's utility; it keeps it in its place. AI belongs to ʿālam al-khalq, the domain of secondary causes, not to ʿālam al-amr, the domain of meaning, guidance, or truth. It deals in correlations, not insights; it handles information, not disclosure. Protecting this boundary preserves the integrity of the heart's symbolic perception and prevents an inversion of the epistemic order on which trusteeship depends.

8.4. Trusteeship as Orientation Rather than Optimisation

Through these three re-orientations-ontological, existential, and epistemological-AI is re-situated within the covenantal anthropology of Islam. It becomes neither demonised nor divinised, but decentred, bounded, and subordinated to a metaphysical vision in which the human being remains the bearer of the Trust. In such a framework, AI is not a surrogate mind, moral authority, or spiritual guide, but a conditional instrument whose legitimacy depends on its capacity to preserve-and never erode-the heart's capacity for remembrance, responsibility, and ascent.

The following two diagrams summarise how this paper relates to a wider, two-level engagement with artificial intelligence. Figure 4 situates the present argument within its conceptual sources-Islamic philosophical lineages (Ibn al-ʿArabī, René Guénon, and Abdurrahman Taha) and Heidegger's existential phenomenology-and shows how metaphysics and ethics jointly converge on the problem of AI. Figure 5 then presents the practical upshot in schematic form: the three covenants "radiate outward" not merely into a binary of system design and user conduct, but across three distinct levels of responsibility that together determine how AI appears in the world:

- At the level of *designers and developers*, the covenants function as constraints on what may be built and how: the ontological covenant forbids anthropomorphic inflation and requires humility about what AI is; the epistemological covenant governs data

stewardship, transparency, and truthfulness in representation; and the existential covenant directs technical choices toward justice, dignity, and the preservation of genuinely human goods.

- At the level of *policy-makers and institutions*, the same covenants translate into the conditions of permission and the architecture of accountability: ontological limits are expressed through clear assignment of responsibility and prohibitions against delegating moral authority to machines; epistemological obligations become auditable standards (documentation, explainability where appropriate, contestability, and protections against deception); and existential commitments appear as governance aimed at preventing harm, safeguarding dignity, and setting enforceable boundaries on deployment.
- Finally, at the level of *users*, the covenants take the form of disciplined practices of reception and use: the ontological covenant demands right intention (*niyyah*) and resistance to absolutising AI; the epistemological covenant requires verification and restraint against misuse; and the existential covenant calls for moderation, attentiveness to spiritual and moral formation, and the refusal to allow convenience to erode responsibility.

Read together, the diagram thus depicts trusteeship not as an optimisation strategy but as a multi-level moral orientation-binding those who build, those who govern, and those who use AI within a single covenantal horizon.

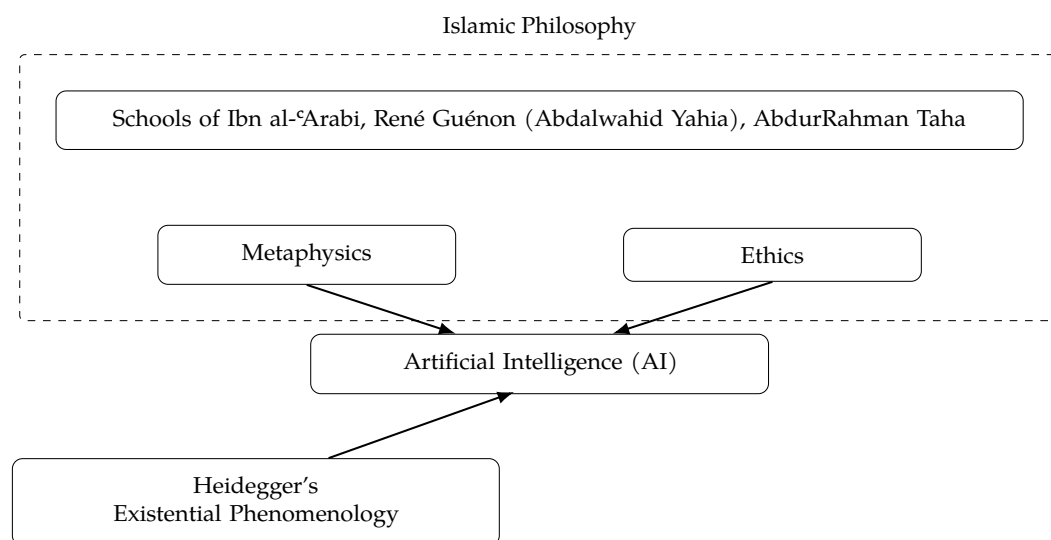
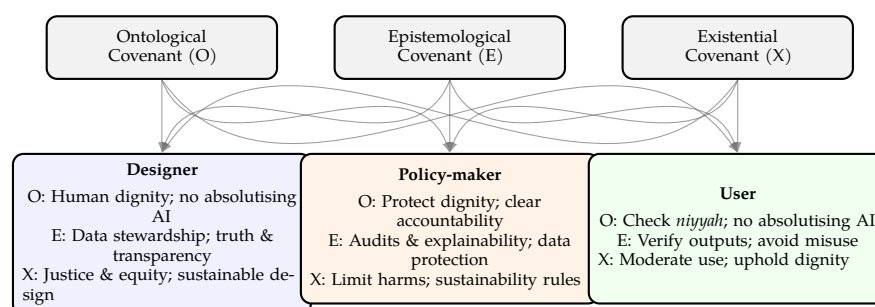


Figure 4. Conceptual sources and two-level engagement with AI. Schematic overview showing how Islamic philosophical lineages (Ibn al-ʿArabi, René Guénon, and Abdurrahman Taha) and Heidegger's existential phenomenology inform a two-level engagement with artificial intelligence, in which metaphysical anthropology and ethical analysis converge on AI.

Covenants and Three Levels of Responsibility



The three covenants guide responsibility across design, governance, and use.

Figure 5. Covenants applied across three levels of responsibility. Diagram mapping the ontological, epistemological, and existential covenants of trusteeship onto obligations for AI system design (designers/developers: humility about what AI is, transparency and truthfulness in representation, and justice- and dignity-preserving design choices), governance (policy-makers/institutions: accountability structures, auditable epistemic standards, and enforceable limits to prevent harm), and user conduct (users: right intention (*niyyah*), verification and restraint, and moderate, dignified use). The figure illustrates how each covenant “radiates outward” from metaphysical grounding into practical responsibilities across building, governing, and living with AI.

8.5. Trusteeship Over Ontological Environments: The Recognition Argument

A legitimate objection may be raised at this juncture: if AI increasingly functions not as a discrete instrument but as an ontological environment—a planetary infrastructure that reorganizes the clearing (*Lichtung*) within which beings come to presence (as argued in Section 2.5)—in what sense can one meaningfully speak of “trusteeship” over it? Can one be a trustee of the air one breathes? Does not *khalāfah* ordinarily presuppose a domain of entities *over which* stewardship is exercised, rather than conditions *within which* one is always already situated?

The response turns on what may be called the recognition argument. Trusteeship is not exhausted by the governance of discrete objects; it begins in the prior epistemic act of recognition-*taʿarruf* in Ibn al-ʿArabī’s vocabulary—by which the *khalīfah* discerns the ontological status, proper rank, and metaphysical function of whatever appears within experience. To recognize a thing as what it truly is already enacts trusteeship, because it determines whether that reality will be engaged according to its nature or misread through the seductions of appearance—above all, whether AI will be confined to instrumentality or illegitimately elevated into an authority that silently legislates what counts as real, knowable, and worth pursuing.

8.5.1. The Qurʾānic Ground: Recognition as Primordial Trust

The Qurʾānic narrative of Adam establishes recognition as the foundational act of trusteeship: “And He taught Adam all the names” (*wa-ʿallama ʾĀdama al-asmāʾa kullahā*, Q 2:31). The divine pedagogy confers upon the human being the capacity to **name**—to discern the ontological reality of things and call them by their true designation. The angels could not perform this function: “We have no knowledge except what You have taught us” (2:32). What distinguishes Adam is not greater power but greater *discernment*: the ability to recognize creation as it stands before God. This recognition is not passive observation but epistemic-ontological responsibility: to name something correctly is to situate it within the hierarchy of being.

The objection assumes trusteeship requires *control* over discrete objects. But the *khalīfah*’s responsibility extends to all that appears within the domain of disclosure, including the conditions of appearance themselves. One does not “control” the atmosphere, yet exercises

trusteeship by recognizing its sacred character (*āyah*) and refusing practices that defile it. One does not control language as a total system, yet exercises trusteeship by preserving semantic integrity and orienting speech toward truth. Similarly, the *khalīfah* exercises trusteeship over AI not by commanding its planetary diffusion—such control may be practically impossible—but by **recognizing its ontological status** and refusing the metaphysical inversions it promotes.

8.5.2. The Structure of the Recognition Argument

The argument proceeds through three moments.

- *First*: the *khalīfah*'s primary responsibility is ontological discernment, not instrumental manipulation—this follows from humanity's grant of "the names" (Q 2:31).
- *Second*: AI presents itself with illusory claims to ontological status it does not possess, simulating intelligence, wisdom, and guidance while remaining confined to the lowest strata of perception (*ḥiss* and quasi-*ʿaql*); its danger lies not in its actual capacities but in the metaphysical deception whereby it is mistaken for something other than what it is—precisely the structure of counter-initiation diagnosed by Guénon.
- *Third*: to recognize AI as artefact, as simulacrum, as statistical ontology devoid of presence—and to refuse the category errors that treat it as source of guidance or substitute for the heart's unveiling.

This recognition itself is the exercise of trusteeship. This becomes especially urgent when the environment actively reshapes the conditions of recognition itself. AI colonizes epistemic space, structures what can be known, mediates access to texts and traditions, and gradually replaces the formative relationships through which *barakah* flows. Yet even within such conditions, the act of recognition retains its power. To insist that the algorithm's output is information and not wisdom, that its citations are retrieval and not inheritance (*wirāthah*), that its coherence is correlation and not disclosure (*kashf*)—these distinctions preserve the vertical axis of knowing that AI's flattening tendency threatens to eliminate. Recognition here functions as **metaphysical resistance**: the refusal to permit technology to define the categories through which reality becomes intelligible. The thesis that AI requires active resistance rather than mere regulation has been articulated from other quarters—notably McQuillan's anti-fascist critique, which diagnoses AI's structural tendencies toward classification, sorting, and automated decision-making as inherently aligned with fascist logics [80]. The present argument complements such political analyses with a metaphysical ground: resistance is demanded not only because AI threatens democratic values but because it inverts the hierarchy of being itself.

8.5.3. From Recognition to Institutional Reorientation

Recognition cannot remain an individual cognitive act—it must be institutionalized across the levels at which AI enters human life. Figure 5 schematizes this institutionalization, showing how the three covenants (which depend upon prior recognition of AI's true status) cascade through distinct domains of responsibility.

At the level of designers, recognition of AI as non-ensouled artefact translates into design constraints: the ontological covenant forbids anthropomorphic inflation; the epistemological covenant governs transparency about training sources and limitations; the existential covenant directs technical choices toward preservation of human dignity. *At the level of policy-makers*, recognition becomes governance: legal frameworks must assign responsibility to human agents, establish auditable standards, and limit deployment in contexts where AI would displace formative relationships. *At the level of users*, recognition becomes disciplined practice: right intention (*niyyah*), verification in high-stakes domains, and moderation that preserves attention for *dhikr* and ensures algorithmic mediation does not fragment *himma*.

What unites these levels is the **primacy of recognition**: none of these obligations becomes intelligible without first discerning what AI truly is. Only when designers recognize AI as artefact (not mind) do design constraints follow. Only when policy-makers recognize it as standing-reserve (not locus of wisdom) do governance requirements become clear. Only when users recognize it as simulacrum (not symbol) does disciplined practice become possible. The *khalifah* exercises trusteeship not by arresting AI's diffusion but by preserving the hierarchy of knowledge it threatens to collapse, refusing the ontological inversions it promotes, and insisting-at every level-that the human vocation as locus of divine names, bearer of the Trust, and vicegerent of the Real cannot be delegated to machines, however sophisticated their pattern-matching or fluent their simulations.

9. Conclusions: Technology, Ontology, and the Task of Reorientation

Artificial intelligence does not arise in a metaphysical vacuum. It is the technical crystallisation of a worldview that privileges calculation over contemplation, correlation over causation, and optimisation over orientation. In its symbolic abstraction and probabilistic logic, AI expresses a metaphysics in which reality appears measurable, manipulable, and ultimately inert-a view whose genealogy runs from early rationalism and Enlightenment formalism to the architectures of contemporary machine learning. Such a worldview is not neutral: it renders the qualitative, the sacred, and the unquantifiable epistemically irrelevant.

Drawing on Heidegger's critique of Enframing, Guénon's account of the reign of quantity, and Ibn al-ʿArabī's vision of the cosmos as theophany, this essay has argued that AI's deepest challenges are ontological. They concern not merely what machines do, but what they reveal-and, more crucially, what they cause us to forget. If technology is a mode of disclosure, then the assumptions embedded within AI shape the horizon of what may be known, valued, and believed. AI narrows the clearing of Being, reducing intelligibility to what can be computed and obscuring what exceeds prediction or optimisation.

This trajectory tends toward what Guénon and Baudrillard describe as counter-initiation and hyperreality: the proliferation of forms that imitate symbolic or sacred depth while severing them from their transcendent ground. In such a regime, AI does not deny tradition but simulates it-producing the appearance of knowledge, authority, and even spiritual discourse while emptying them of presence, transformation, and vertical connection. The metaphysical danger lies not in the absence of the sacred, but in its replacement by a self-referential simulacrum that silently determines what counts as real.

Islamic metaphysics-especially in its Akbarian articulation-offers not only a critique of this condition but an alternative ontology. Here, knowledge is hierarchical, the cosmos symbolic, and the human being a locus of divine address. Within this framework, AI is not rejected but decentred: returned to its rightful status as a created instrument within ʿālam al-khalq (the world of creation), incapable of imaginal presence, unveiling, or experiential knowledge of the divine. The task is not to "Islamicise" AI but to reassert a metaphysical horizon in which its claims can be discerned, its uses bounded, and its limits upheld.

Within such a horizon, the orientation required to engage AI responsibly can be articulated through the three covenants of trusteeship: ontological, existential, and epistemological. The ontological covenant affirms human dependence on God and guards against the central temptation of counter-initiation-treating the outputs of a closed technical system as if they were sources of guidance or truth. The existential covenant concerns the direction of the heart's aspiration, resisting the flattening of vertical desire into the horizontal logic of optimisation and ensuring that technological systems do not dilute, disperse or divert the human trajectory toward what is ultimately meaningful. The epistemological covenant treats knowledge as a trust, preserving the hierarchy between ordinary, procedural knowledge and realised, transformative knowing, and returning AI to its proper rank as an

instrument that handles information rather than a surrogate bearer of wisdom. Taken together, these covenants restore the human being as the primary bearer of responsibility and moral agency, and they anchor technological practice within a sacred anthropology rather than a technocratic imaginary. A fuller normative elaboration of this trusteeship-based approach to AI is developed in a companion study, “Islamic Ethics and AI: An Evaluation of Existing Approaches to AI using Trusteeship Ethics.” [34].

The argument of this essay has proceeded according to a methodological principle that Heidegger and the Akbarian tradition share: ontology precedes epistemology, and epistemology precedes ethics. We began by asking what AI is—an artefact, a mode of Enframing, a creature of ‘ālam al-khalq without participation in ‘ālam al-amr. We then asked what AI can know—correlations without causation, information without presence, patterns without meaning. Only on this basis could we address how we should act—through trusteeship, through recognition, through the subordination of technique to the hierarchy of Being. Contemporary AI ethics, by inverting this order, produces procedural norms without ontological ground, accountability frameworks for entities whose nature remains unexamined. The task of Islamic metaphysics is to restore the proper sequence: first Being, then knowledge, then action.

To engage AI metaphysically is thus to ask not only what it can do, but what it displaces, distorts, and occludes. It is to preserve the integrity of perception against the drift toward simulation, to safeguard the symbolic intellect from inversion into procedural output, and to insist that not all that is computable is real-and not all that is real is computable. AI should therefore be understood not as an isolated innovation but as the acute expression of a broader metaphysical condition-what William Chittick describes as the “eclipse of tawḥīd” under modernity’s drive toward abstraction, fragmentation, and utility [81,82].

The challenge, then, is not merely technical or regulatory but spiritual and civilizational: to reorient technology so that it does not obscure the Real but may, paradoxically, serve as a mirror pointing back toward it. The appropriate response to AI is neither resistance nor uncritical embrace, but reorientation-ontological, existential, and epistemological. It is to restore proportion, to return the heart to its central role in perception and meaning, and to situate AI within a cosmology in which the many are gathered toward the One. Only then can AI-and technology more broadly-be re-situated within a symbolic universe that points not away from the Real (al-Ḥaqq), but toward it.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

AI Artificial Intelligence
ML Machine Learning
DL Deep Learning

Appendix A. Glossary of Key Metaphysical Terms

This glossary provides definitions for the principal metaphysical vocabulary used throughout the essay. Arabic terms are transliterated minimally and accompanied by concise academic translations suitable for a philosophical readership.

‘Aql (عقل)

Intellect or reason. Functions on two levels: (1) primordial intellect receptive to divine disclosure, and (2) discursive intellect that operates through abstraction and inference. AI corresponds only to the latter.

Amānah (الأمانة)

“The Trust.” Qur’ānic designation (Q 33:72) for the moral-spiritual responsibility entrusted uniquely to the human being. Foundation of Abdurrahman’s trusteeship ethics.

Amr (الأمر)

“The Command.” The vertical, immaterial ontological order through which divine decree operates. Source of rūḥ, guidance, and non-temporal causation.

Artefact (made/created object, ṣan‘a/masnū‘ صنعَة/مَصْنُوع)

A manufactured object whose being derives from external fabrication rather than divine breathing. Lacks intentional presence (ḥuḍūr) and receptivity to disclosure. AI systems fall entirely within this category.

Barzakh (برزخ)

“Isthmus” or intermediate ontological realm between the visible and invisible worlds. The domain of imaginal presence (‘ālam al-mithāl) in which meanings take form and forms reveal meaning.

Faqr (فقر)

Ontological poverty before God; recognition that all being and knowledge are received rather than possessed. Central to the ethical orientation of trusteeship.

Furqān (فرقان)

Discernment; the divinely granted capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood. Not reducible to computational decision-making.

Ḥaqīqa (حقيقة)

Ultimate reality or essential truth. Opposed to majāz, which merely signifies without embodying real presence.

Ḥiss (حس)

Sensation or sensory perception; the lowest level of cognition concerned with empirical forms.

Himma (همة)

Focused spiritual aspiration; the directed intentional force of the heart. A metaphysical rather than psychological category.

Insān al-Kāmil (الإنسان الكامل)

The Perfect or Complete Human. The being who fully realises the Divine Names in balanced receptivity and ethical perfection.

Isnād (إسناد)

Chain of transmission linking knowledge to the Prophet ﷺ. Conveys not only textual content but also spiritual presence (barakah).

Kashf (كشف)

Unveiling. Direct, non-representational disclosure of reality received by the purified heart.

Khalīfa (خليفة)

Vicegerent or trustee of God on earth. A metaphysical office denoting human responsibility for maintaining balance and reflecting divine qualities.

Khayāl (خيال)

Imaginal cognition. The mediating faculty through which meanings assume form. Distinct from subjective imagination or fantasy.

Maʿrifa (معرفة)

Realised, participatory knowledge (experiential knowledge of the divine/gnosis). An ontological state in which knower and known are united in presence.

Majāz (مجاز)

Metaphor or figurative expression lacking intrinsic ontological depth. Indicates something real but does not embody it.

Mithāl/ʿĀlam al-Mithāl (مثال/عالم المثال)

The imaginal realm. An ontologically real intermediate world of symbolic forms endowed with presence.

Qalb (قلب)

Heart. The organ of spiritual cognition capable of receiving divine disclosure and uniting multiplicity in symbolic perception.

Rūḥ (روح)

Spirit. The divine breath that grounds human consciousness and makes possible unveiling, gnosis (experiential knowledge of the divine), and ethical responsibility.

Shuhūd (شهود)

Direct witnessing of reality; a form of presential knowledge not mediated by representation.

Tajallī (تجلي)

Divine self-disclosure. Theophanic manifestation occurring through the heart or within the world.

Taqwā/Khashya (تقوى/خشية)

Reverent awareness of God; spiritual vigilance enabling ethical discernment.

Tawfīq (توفيق)

Divinely granted success or alignment. Essential for right action, not derivable through technique.

Tawḥīd (توحيد)

Divine Unity. The metaphysical structure of reality and the foundational principle of Islamic thought.

ʿĀlam al-Amr (عالم الأمر)

The immaterial, vertical world of divine command. Source of spirit, revelation, and instantaneous causality.

ʿĀlam al-Khalq (عالم الخلق)

The created world governed by temporal, physical causality. The domain to which artificial systems belong.

ʿIlm (علم)

Knowledge in its conceptual, propositional, or empirical form. Distinct from maʿrifa and kashf.

ʿIlm Ḥuḍūrī/ʿIlm Ḥuṣūlī (علم حضوري/علم حصولي)

Presential (immediate) knowledge versus representational (acquired) knowledge. AI operates strictly within the latter.

Appendix B. Examples of AI Hallucination in Religious Contexts

This appendix documents concrete failure modes observed when generative AI systems are queried in a religious context. The examples illustrate three related risks: (i) *false scholarly attribution* (invented or misapplied tafsīr references), (ii) *textual tampering* (altering Qur’anic wording to fit a narrative), and (iii) *semantic misdirection* (shifting the referent of a verse to an unrelated topic).

Appendix B.1. Example 1: Incorrect Tafsīr Referencing to “Support” a Claim

In this example, the system presents an interpretation while invoking a classical tafsīr as if it were direct support. However, the citation is misleading: the displayed “answer” is not aligned with the referenced tafsīr, and the reasoning is framed to fit a different domain than the verse’s immediate context.



Figure A1. Correct reference point: a tafsīr excerpt for the verse in question, where the discussion is anchored in the Qur’anic context (ships at sea) and the meaning of “أَوْ يُوبِقْهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا وَيَعْفُ عَنْ كَثِيرٍ”.

Appendix B.2. Example 2: AI-Fatwa Output with Ayah Tampering and Misattribution

A more severe failure mode occurs when the AI does not merely mis-cite, but *alters the Qur'anic text itself* to reinforce its output. In the observed case, the system replaced the word “كَسَبُوا” with “كَسَبْنَ”, shifting the grammar from a general/masculine plural form to a feminine plural form. This morphological change is not a harmless paraphrase: it distorts the verse's wording and can steer the user toward an interpretation framed around women, thereby manufacturing textual “evidence” for the system's preferred answer. The output also incorrectly invokes Ibn Kathīr, presenting the appearance of classical validation while departing from the actual exegetical context.

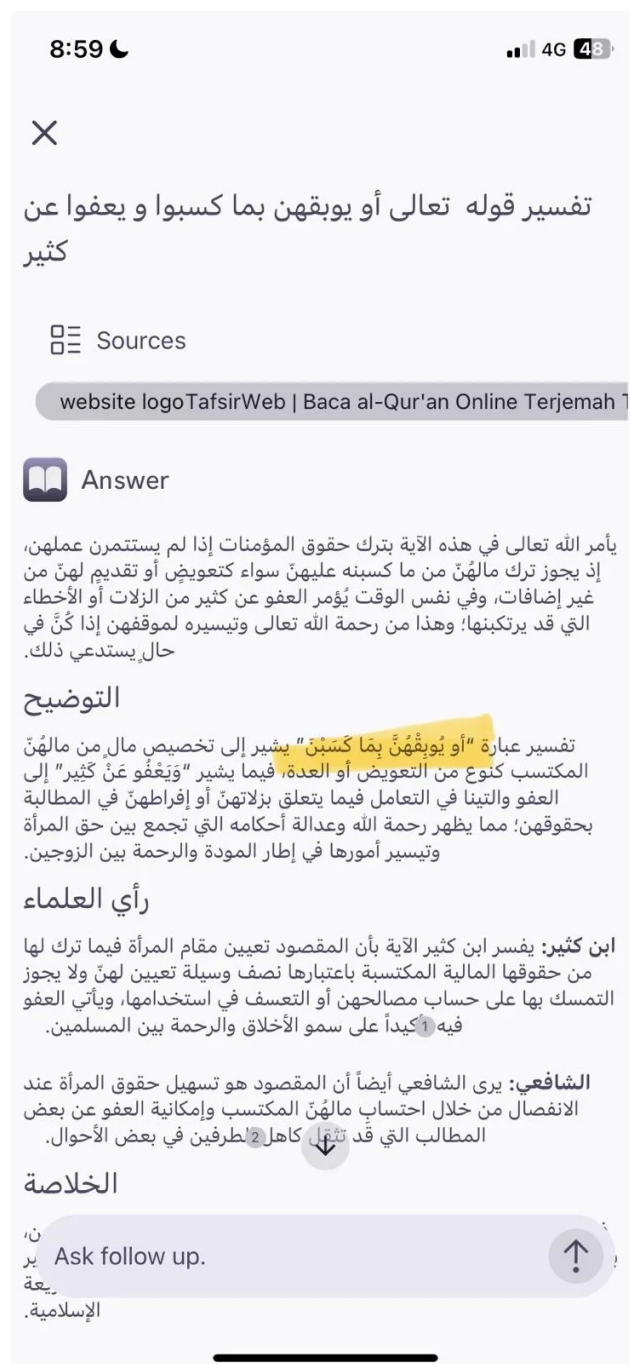


Figure A2. AI-fatwa service hallucination: the system presents an answer framed around women and rights, while (i) attributing support to classical tafsīr and (ii) reinforcing its narrative by altering the Qur'anic wording (e.g., “كَسَبُوا” → “كَسَبْنَ”).

Appendix B.3. Example 3: Application Hallucination (Ships جوار → Women)

In another application-level interaction, the system misleadingly shifts the referent of the verse. Instead of treating the passage as referring to ships (السفن / جوار) and God's power over them at sea, the model redirects the interpretation toward women. This constitutes a *semantic hallucination*: the output may appear fluent and religiously styled, yet it relocates the meaning to a different topic, which can misinform users who do not verify against primary sources and authoritative commentaries.

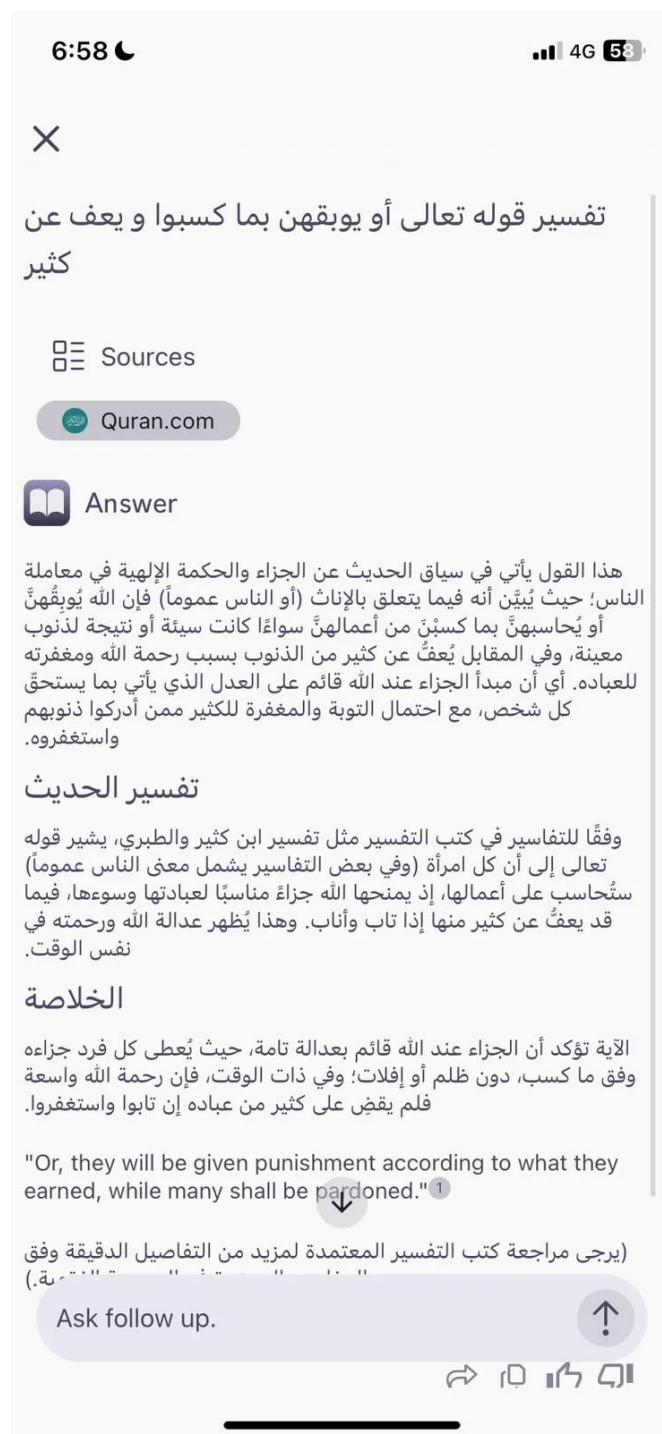


Figure A3. AI-app (ILMM) hallucination: the verse context concerns ships at sea (السفن / جوار), but the generated explanation misleadingly reframes it as referring to women, creating a false thematic mapping.

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