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AI and Theology: The Battle of Metaphors and the Fate of Humanity

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence continues to reshape the prevailing imageries of knowledge, identity, and values of humans. These emerging developments intensify the battle of metaphors in the contemporary Theo-tech domain. This study examines the growing tension between AI and theological metaphors in a comparative analytical method, producing insights through placing Biblical and Islamic perspectives at the center of contemporary debates with critical data studies. The study argues that AI metaphors often reduce human life to data points and probabilities, distorting the depth, dignity, and transcendence features of humans. Theological metaphors stand in stark contrast to this, presenting humanity as being relational and preserving its alterity, hope, and freedom. The paper concludes by suggesting that theology must continue to create counter-metaphors capable of meeting the challenges brough forth by AI metaphors and safeguarding human distinctiveness.

Keywords: Theology, Artificial Intelligence, Metaphors, Profilism, Code, *Imago Dei*

Introduction

We need metaphors to make sense of invisible realities, as literal languages cannot explain abstract or metaphysical experiences. According to McFague (1982), theological language lives by metaphors as only metaphors can speak of a depth of transcendence that cannot be directly described. Another study reinforces this perspective, suggesting that metaphors create new meaning by pushing imagination beyond ordinary description (Ricoeur, 1975). These insights allow us to claim that what is necessary for theology (i.e., metaphors) is also necessary for artificial intelligence (AI), seeing that both domains engage with the unseen in different ways. AI's data collection, algorithmic modeling, machine learning optimization, and other operational logics are processes that cannot be seen—they are hidden from direct human perception. For this reason, like theology, AI relies on metaphors such as profile, code, optimization, and prediction to describe its functions. We can therefore conclude here that both theology and AI rely on metaphors. AI employs them to make invisible operations understandable, and theology adopts them to interpret divine realities that cannot be seen by humans nor be directly fathomed by human comprehension.

Although both AI and theological frameworks converge on the employment of metaphors to explain realities beyond direct human perception, their directions immediately diverge on questions of faith, dignity, and human identity. Theological metaphors are largely oriented toward preserving human alterity, depth, and transcendence, assuming that people should not be

subjected to data points or probabilities. Meanwhile, AI metaphors indicate that human beings may be objectified through profiles and predictions.

This study situates itself precisely within this metaphorical conflict, providing a comparison of these two paradigms. It concludes that theological metaphors are more consistent with human nature, as it focuses on preserving our freedom, dignity, faith, values, and alterity. It also proposes a theological intervention to deal with the challenges of producing counter-metaphors (vs. AI metaphors) that can offer more life-giving visions of what it means to be human in the era of AI.

Literature Review

Contemporary debates on the intersection of AI and theology mostly converge on the point that AI systems are not neutral tools, seeing that they do not merely perform the assigned tasks, but also shape human meaning and identity. In this regard, Taylor (2007) believes that AI powerfully reshapes the background picture of human beings, specifically "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations". According to this view, AI systems directly distort the background picture by shaping human worldviews to perceive things as normal, desirable, and authoritative. These descriptions indicate that AI is not a neutral instrument we use, but rather is a main character influencing the ways in which societies organize themselves, make decisions, and view the world. Ellul (1964) extends this further by arguing that technique has taken over the whole of civilization, a totalizing gravitation toward optimization that is not simply instrumental but civilizational in scope.

Han (2017) also demonstrates that in addition to distorting the background picture, as described by Taylor (2007), AI also strips away the human characteristics of mystery and otherness. He claims that the AI era reduced human alterity to data streams, with an example being that a person's value as a human being has been reduced to living trends and the volume of activity measured through data, likes, and shares. Together, these philosophical views highlight how AI affects concepts of human meaning and identity through a systematic algorithmic imagination.

In the same context, critical data analyses demonstrate how this algorithmic imagination transforms in practice. There are studies concretely showing how the reduction of the human experience and alterity to data streams provides the foundation for profit and governance in the contemporary world. Zuboff (2019) notes that prediction is the be-all and end-all of algorithmic operations, and that surveillance capitalism extracts behavioral surplus for monetizable forecasts. This means that AI systems execute the assigned task, watch humans, take extra data from their online activities, and utilize them to predict what they will do in the future.

Moreover, some critical data studies have shown that AI systems often become destructive when dealing with humans in settings characterized by systematic unfairness. In some cases, they increase inequality rather solve problems, and it often becomes hard for the victims and even regulators to challenge AI systems in such contexts. For example, if data used for training the model show more male candidates in leadership roles, the model may prefer men over equally qualified women for a given role. In the same way, a Muslim searching for guidance on *Zakat* (Charity) may be a victim of flashy fundraising ads, as these enjoy higher visibility and clicks, pushing down the true spiritual meaning of Zakat. Other scholars have showed their concerns about how large-scale models, opaque to scrutiny, become "weapons of math destruction" as their feedback loops magnify inequality (O'Neil, 2016).

Noble (2018) outlines that search infrastructures can encode and reproduce social biases, and that algorithms are biased toward generating knowledge. For instance, for somebody who searches about Islam, AI systems may preferably highlight news articles about terrorism instead of showing the Qur'anic verses, mainstream scholarship, and interfaith dialogue, just because the former is more liked, clicked, shared, and mistakenly linked to Islam. A recent perspective shifts the debate from understanding the algorithm as a purely technical code to considering it as a tool for perpetuating the global system of inequality, arguing that "AI is neither artificial nor intelligent in any disembodied sense but is built on extraction" (Crawford, 2021). In a theological sense, this conclusion seems logical, as algorithms can undermine both the *Karamat e Insani* or *Imago Dei* of a believer, reducing acts of sacred worship to data streams by tracking prayers' time, devotional habits, and reading preferences, and then selling them to advertisers.

It is also factual that AI systems mediate how we appear to ourselves and others, as AI systems can reshape our identity over time, flattening it into algorithmic criteria. Coeckelbergh (2020) purports this matter with great concern, believing that such mediation can erode our relational identity by reconfiguring how we appear to ourselves and others. For instance, a Christian pastor who uploads sermons on YouTube as an act of devotion may feel pressured to simplify the theological aspect of the video for visibility, deciding to use sensational titles and controversial content because the platform's algorithm only promotes these content types.

Above all, algorithms are enormously reshaping religious thought, and the theological literature showcases how religions and religious affairs are changing as they enter and engage with digital spaces. For example, Campbell (2013) considers digital media as a central space where faith is expressed and contested while others (1998) posit that "religious knowledge is not merely propositional but experiential, rooted in encounter with the divine" (Polkinghorne. 1998). These analyses underscore the central challenges of faith in the age of algorithms. Faith cannot be reduced to propositions alone, but rather should be consistently regarded as a form of lived trust and encounter with the divine. We thus put forward that theology must critique algorithmic reductionisms to protect the experiential and relational essence of faith from being diminished into a form of data stream. Aligning with this remark, Herzfeld (2009) draws a deep anthropological boundary between humans and machines, insisting that "we create machines in our image, but they cannot reciprocate love, trust, or forgiveness". This means that computational systems cannot embody deep relational qualities such as love, trust, and forgiveness. AI systems, no matter how sophisticated, cannot enter the covenantal relations of humans with God, where risk, loyalty, and reconciliation are possible. Covenant depends on qualities such as freedom, vulnerability, responsibility, and the capacity for spiritual transformation. These qualities are uniquely human; therefore, AI cannot enter a real divine covenant like we do. However, it can develop a covenantal mindset where we design and manage AI systems based on trust, responsibility and ethical care. In this way covenant can be a useful framework to help us understand our moral responsibilities when building AI systems.

Classical Islamic theologists describe *īmān* (faith) as a holistic term. *Ibn Taymiyyah* (2003), for example, proposes that faith is something that "resides in the heart, is expressed upon the tongue, and acted upon by the limbs". *Al-Ghazālī* (2011), meanwhile, offers a powerful epistemic image for the irreducibility of faith, describing it as "a light which God casts into the heart of His servant". These accounts confirm that faith cannot be reduced to calculable behavior, as while AI systems may imitate religious acts and speech, they remain blind to the sincerity of the heart that gives

meaning to these actions. Therefore, theology must defend the holistic nature of faith against any computational process that attempts to collapse it into prediction and control.

Postman (1993) observes that algorithms have acquired, perhaps somewhat easily, a quasi-sacral authority in the public imagination, stating that "technology becomes mythic; it is perceived as part of the natural order of things". Postman's insights are relevant here, as when technologies embed themselves deeply into our culture, people cease to see them as humanmade tools and start treating them as inevitable and unquestionable realities. This renders theological critiques of utmost importance, as they can show that algorithms are neither natural nor divine, but mere human constructs. As such, authentic covenantal faith cannot be surrendered to their silent authority.

Despite their academic quality, the studies cited up to this point and their insights show some limitations. Prominent works of thinkers such as Ellul (1964) and Han (2017) provide grand diagnoses of the background logic of modern technology and how it contributes to reframing human existence. However, they sometimes remain under-specific regarding the counternarrative necessary to criticize this problem through theological, pastoral, or communal interventions. Additionally, while empirical data critiques—such as the aforementioned works by Zuboff (2019), O'Neil (2016), Noble (2018), and Crawford (2021)—provide a comprehensive account of the existential threats posed by AI systems (i.e., from surveillance capitalism to systemic bias and resource extraction) and are analytically sound, they often avoid theological categories such as transcendence, grace, and devotion. Accordingly, there is a need for theological reflections that can directly address how humans live in the algorithmic era. This gap is significant because it shows that prior works do not explore the ways in which the algorithmic imagination has mixed with various forms of faith that reveal mystery, trust, or the unseen.

Importantly, the extant religious studies that delved into digital topics, such as the research conducted by Campbell (2013) and other scholars, have generally focused on investigating the digital media spaces where religious identity is expressed and contested. Despite the value of these investigations for understanding the lived experiences of faith in digital media and how faith issues have migrated into online spaces, they do not critically tackle theological categories (e.g., providence, grace, and worship) within the context of algorithmic imagination. This entails that the relevant religious scholarship stops short of developing theologically-nuanced responses to the challenging aspects of AI. Additionally, while the traditional theological literature emphasizes human's irreducible nature, it offers very limited engagement with the distinctive logics of AI.

Theoretical Framework

The studies explored above suggest how AI systems have been shaping human culture through prediction, optimization, and control, often by subjecting humanity to data profiles. It is also shown that current religious research falls short of providing meaningful discussions about AI. This study fills these gaps by conducting a comparative metaphorical analysis, contrasting the algorithmic metaphors of profilism, optimization, prediction, and code with the theological metaphors of *Imago Dei*, *Agápē*, pilgrimage, and covenant. The intent is to show how theology can stand in the face of AI reductionism to offer a more suitable vision of humanity. For the theological terminologies and metaphors, I can trust the readers' background knowledge about what I am referring to, however, when I use the term Profilism, I mean the way algorithms shape identity by collecting behavioral data and categorizing who a human being appears to be moving beyond mere data collection. In the same way I use the term Prediction to refer to anticipation about future through

probabilistic modeling enabled by large-scale data analytics while refer to AI processes that turn complex human qualities into simple standards of efficiency as Optimization in a different way from ordinary usage. Similarly, my usage of Code as an AI metaphor represents the machinic behavior functioning as generative and regulatory structures. I believe that this level of specificity is enough for advancing an interdisciplinary analysis.

Methodology

A comparative analytical design is employed to examine critical studies on AI imagination, using a textual analysis of biblical and Islamic theological metaphors.

Distinction Between Theological and Computational Realities

Faith is a theological reality that can be expressed through different metaphors, like *Imago Dei*, *Agápē*, and covenant. AI represents a technological reality that can be expressed through metaphors like profile, prediction, optimization, and code. Before analyzing these metaphors, it is crucial to discuss the distinctive nature of faith and AI. Faith refers to a lived reality of trust, orientation, and surrender to the transcendent, whereas AI is grounded in data, computation, and prediction. This clarifies that the related metaphors do not arise in a vacuum; rather, they interpret the underlying reality they are assigned to describe. Thus, while theological metaphors gain strength from the pure reality of faith, AI metaphors gain strength from the computational logic of profilism, optimization, and predictions. This distinction prevents any conceptual confusion, and is important because if we do not consider faith as a reality of divine transcendence and AI as a calculative prediction, we may risk explaining these different metaphors using the same language and level. It is necessary to recognize their different foundations to understand why they matter in shaping the human imagination.

Historically, it has been perceived that faith is not merely an intellectual assent but is also associated with trust, surrender, and commitment, hence going beyond data algorithmic imagination. Theologians describe faith as a “leap of qualitative transition into a relation with the divine that cannot be secured by rational proofs but requires existential risk” (Kierkegaard, 1885). This quote clearly shows how faith is based on trust and operates within uncertainty and risk, whereas AI reduces risk and uncertainty through prediction. For instance, it is one of the tasks of theology to critique algorithmic reductionism and reconstruct the categories that preserve the mystery of faith, which in turn is what keeps alive the space where trust, surrender, and hope operate. Similarly, other scholars defined faith as “the state of being ultimately concerned,” emphasizing that it involves trust in the transcendent, not just a mere propositional belief (Tillich, 1957). According to Noreen Herzfeld, being in the image of God is not mainly about human nature and human abilities, it is rather about our capacity to love and relate with others. It is about what we are, what we can do and how we relate. She maintains: “Both fields [of AI and of the image of God] have viewed the intersection between God and humanity … in terms of (1) a property or set of properties … (2) the functions we engage in … or (3) the relationships we establish and maintain.” (Herzfeld, 2002). This suggests that our uniqueness is most convincingly articulated not through abilities that AI can imitate, but through the uniquely human capacity for relationality. This insight offers a theological tool to evaluate the limits of Artificial analogies.

The scriptures confirm this mysterious nature of faith. In this context Qur’an states: “Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in their prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them”. (Qur’an, 2:3). In this verse, *īmān* (faith) is characterized as a revealed truth, a *tawakkul* (reliance) on God, and an orientation toward the unseen. These excerpts make evident that faith has

historically been associated with trust in the transcendent, contrasting sharply with the logic of AI systems focused on prediction and control. Shatzer (2019) cautions against the dangers posed by the algorithmic dimension of contemporary culture, noting: “Technology does not simply help us do things more efficiently; it also shapes our understanding of what it means to be human”. Vallor (2016) similarly warns, albeit more broadly, that “we are building a future where human moral capacities are being quietly but steadily reshaped by our reliance on intelligent machines.” Besides this, AI eliminates human uniqueness and otherness, subjecting these concepts to data streams and making them predictable entities defined through behavioral patterns and probabilities. Valenzuela et al. (2024) have criticized AI’s reductionist behaviour, arguing that it compresses multidimensional human experience into overly simplified computational categories. They maintain: “Algorithms are reductionists. They need to translate human behavior, identity, preferences, and attributes into a smaller set of independent, computationally readable variables, parameters, and formulae… In this way, AI systems tend to objectify individuals and communities, compressing their unique characteristics and cultural contexts”. This point makes a lot of sense here because AI systems oversimplify our complex identity, behavior and culture, turning them into simple numbers that computers can deal with. This type of treatment costs us our individuality and context.

The mysterious nature of faith therefore preserves our depth and unpredictability as humans, although this nature is being increasingly challenged by algorithmic reasoning. Faith thrives on mystery and uncertainty, while AI systems work to dissolve them through prediction and control. According to Smith (2009), “faith is a matter of the heart and an orientation of love trained through liturgies over time”. This sharply refutes AI’s reduction of human life to a set of predictable cognitive patterns. Another theological foundation for the resistance against the reductionism of AI can be found in the works of Barth (1958), where he insists that “man’s being is determined by his being with God rather than by calculative efficiency”. Therefore, human identity is grounded in one’s relationship with the divine, not in the numbers and metrics determined in computational processes. Indeed, in Islamic theology, faith is bestowed upon humans divinely. It is not determined through social fame or online visibility, as God has honored the children of Adam to be his vicegerents on planet Earth (Qur’an, 17:70). This honor is universal and unconditional, as is rooted in divine gifts rather than human achievements.

These insights highlight faith’s irreducibility, as it involves dimensions that cannot be determined through data or probability, whereas AI systems make predictions through the processing of measurable datasets. A medical algorithm can estimate that a patient has a 10% chance of survival, but a believer may continue praying and hoping for his life through divine intervention. In the midst of a potential economic downturn, AI systems can warn investors and consumers of probabilities, while a believer can choose to donate generously in charity regardless of the situation. This is because “faith resides in the heart as knowledge, speech, and action, and when it is perfected, it governs the entire being” (*Qayyim*, 1999). When making moral decisions (e.g., whether to forgive a human mistake), AI systems may calculate risks and prevent a person from making a specific decision. Meanwhile, Williams (2014) describes faith as “the confidence of being held in a relationship that is deeper than our own thinking” underlining how faith cannot be understood through predictive logic because it encompasses a relational aspect of human life grounded in a trust in God. It becomes clear from these insights that AI systems can demonstrate probabilities, make predictions, and control through machines, but cannot replace prayer, forgiveness, or sacrificial love acts, as these acts are rooted in trust and transcendence.

Given the fundamental distinctions between the realities that theological and algorithmic metaphors seek to illuminate, along with the profound influence of emerging AI metaphors on human identity, values, and faith, it is warranted to place these metaphors in direct dialogue. The following sections compare some biblical and Qur'anic theological metaphors with AI metaphors to critically investigate their positive or negative impacts on human life. These comparisons highlight how theological metaphors defeat AI reductionism and deliver more suitable versions of what it means to be a human in the digital era.

Profilism Versus *Imago Dei* (*Karamah*)

The near human-like AI systems treat humans based on their profiles and the sum of their data, likes, shares, and purchases, and thus not as relational, spiritual, and moral beings. This type of treatment distorts our background image, shape-shifting us into measurable categories. Levinas (1969) specifies that the face of the other interrupts every attempt to reduce a person to an object; that is, the very presence of the other calls us to responsibility. The Levinas's perspective matters here, as it outlines that humans must go beyond the digital face (e.g., which may be classified as a low-value customer) and give due respect to the real face of another, regardless of the other's market profile. Similarly, Buber (1970) shows that "genuine relationships require seeing the other as a partner, not as an object of use", implying that humans should be treated as subjects rather than objects, and distinguishing between I-it and I-thou as the two fundamental modes of existence. Mbiti (1969) puts this very simply, declaring in his renowned phrase: "I am because we are", emphasizing that identity encompasses community and mutual relationships with others, thus not being a quantifiable object. This communal anthropology defeats the digital metaphor of profilism, which treats us first like objects and subjects us to something that can be used, categorized, and manipulated. Communal anthropology therefore protects us from being treated as detached data points. This critique does not mean that profilism is completely a damaging tool. It could be used as useful tool in certain ways. If the data-based profiling used responsibly it can enhance our well-being, enables personalized healthcare, improves educational support, and helps individuals with disabilities. It can help governments and institutions respond more accurately to the populations' needs. Beside this it can empower users and improve quality of life but only if the dignity, autonomy, and privacy of individuals remain central ethical priority.

Differently from AI's profilism, the theological metaphor of *Imago Dei* affirms that all humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), protecting human dignity. According to prominent Christian theologians *Imago Dei* is both an attribute and a relational reality, one whereby all human beings are invited into a fellowship with God and with one another (Moltmann, 1984). This interpretation defends human beings from being reduced to objects of use or control, considering that the divine image is irreducible to measurable traits. Therefore, *Imago Dei* protects humans against profilism.

In Islam, the concept of *Karāmah* affirms the same vision, outlining that honor and dignity are both divinely bestowed upon all humans. The *Qur'an* declares: "We have certainly honored the children of Adam". (Qur'an, 17:70). This verse indicates that human dignity cannot be achieved through social classification, but is grounded in God's creative act (Rahman, 1982). The concept of *Karāmah* protects human dignity and rights by placing our dignity in the divine, hence beyond the secular and utilitarian perspectives that subject our dignity to profiles and outcomes (Sachedina, 2009). This demonstrates that theological visions of identity strongly resist digital profilism, which in turn does not affirm the irreducible nature of humans. For example, our indemnity is relational, sacred, and irreducible when treated through *Imago Dei* framework. Theologically a human

cannot be exhausted by consumption behavior, search history or mobility tracking but the digital profilism treats us in that way, reducing our identity to behavioral patterns derived from data streams.

In addition, the theological metaphors of the family of God in Christianity and *Ummah* in Islam provide a true vision of human identity. In the Epistle to the Ephesians believers are described as members of the divine family, rendering others no longer strangers but fellow humans like the saints and other members of the church (Ephesians, 1989). Clowny (1993) explains that this metaphor provides a sense of belonging and sacred worth for every member within the divine fellowship. The concept of *Ummah* in Islamic theology runs parallel here, with the *Qur'an* conveying the following about it: "Indeed this, your community (*ummah*), is one community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me. (Qur'an, 21:92)" The Islamic prophetic tradition further affirms this as narrated by *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (2586): "The believers, in their mutual love, mercy, and compassion, are like a single body: if one part suffers, the whole body feels it" (Muslim, 2007).

These communal theological metaphors defeat AI profilism by protecting human dignity, identity, and our unpredictable nature. They insist that human dignity is grounded in *Imago Die*, *Karamah*, *Ummah*, and relational belonging, not on individual datasets. They also reaffirm the sense of mystery and scaredness of human existence, unveiling the real human identity beyond an isolated digital shadow.

Optimization Versus *Agápē* (Grace)

Similar to utilitarianism philosophies, AI systems measure humans based on optimization, efficiency, and productivity, whereas theology insists that the deepest meaning of life lies in divine grace and gift. Nearly all human-like AI models transform complex human activities into detectable outputs, measuring them based on keystrokes, delivery rates, and customer satisfaction. This type of treatment focuses only on performance, sidelining human values such as care, creativity, and moral responsibility in special human contexts (e.g., illness, discrimination, and disability (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). The optimization logic is based on the idea that the most efficient outcome is the most valuable; this notion, notwithstanding, often neglects the moral perspectives of increased stress, health risks, and discrimination of people who cannot keep pace with the robotic speed (Zuboff, 2019). Many scholars are indeed very concerned about this aspect of AI assessment tools, as they compare individuals against machine standards. They often degrade the productivity of older workers and those with disabilities despite their inherent dignity (Ajunwa et al., 2017). However, we cannot deny the meaningful benefits of optimization. When approached ethically, the optimization can help us in the intelligent allocation of resources, reduce waste and improves decision making processes. It can also help individuals enhance their quality of life by improving the medical diagnostics, streamlining public services, and supporting time management. But this can only be possible if the AI systems are guided by human centered values not by economic metrics.

In contrast to AI's utilitarianism, theological metaphors such as *Agápē* and divine grace ground humanity in relationality, affirming a vision that protects our depth and dignity. On this matter, Mauss (1954) maintains that "gifts are not mere commodities, but symbolic acts that establish bonds of obligation and gratitude" This outlining emphasizes that human values emerge from belonging and reciprocity, not calculative exchange. The graceful gestures or the acts of care performed in our societies like forgiving somebody or supporting a friend in crisis cannot be

reduced to measurable utility or economic benefits rather they are grounded in Agápē where the acts of kindness arise from mutual belonging without expectation of return.

The theology insists that God's generosity must circulate without competition or measurement: There is always a theological economy for the circulation of grace, by which God's favor is expressed towards the world in benefiting it, from creation through redemption (Tanner, 2005).

Tanner's economy of grace stems from the notion of *Agápē*, affording us a radical theological alternative to the algorithmic logic of optimization, and grounding human value in God's unconditional generosity rather than productive efficiency. Hyde (1983) explains that any gift loses its transformative power when optimized or traded, as it flourishes only when it is provided outside the idea of exchange. This supports the theological metaphor of *Agápē*, which clarifies that the deepest meaning of human life cannot be measured through algorithmic metrics.

This is closely aligned with the metaphor of *manna* in Christian theology, which is described in a topical biblical reference as a divine grace that transcends physical provision. It is a continuous blessing from God that provides believers with their spiritual and daily needs. This metaphor serves as a symbol of God's provision, spiritual nourishment, and sustenance of faith (BibleHub, Topical: Manna, n.d.). It supports sufficiency over maximization; trust over control; human dignity over productivity. Furthermore, it insists that humanity should not be measured as a robotic machine and that life is a divine gift that resists commodification. In so doing, it safeguards the dignity and deep mysterious nature of human beings, simultaneously defeating the algorithmic metaphor of efficiency.

Prediction Versus Pilgrimage

The metaphor of prediction is one of the most prominent features of algorithmic culture: through analyzing large datasets, algorithms give the user information on probable outcomes to make the future calculable and controllable. It is a matter of fact that AI systems establish a logic of "preemptive rationality in which action is taken not in response to actual events but to probabilities and potentialities (Rouvroy, 2013). This blatant feature of AI systems creates a culture in which the future is predetermined, hence not being open to surprise and transformation. It is easy to see how such a metaphor confines our freedom and the meaning of life to a narrow place of predictive control. It has significant implications for the meaning of human life, redefining uncertainty as risk and freedom as probability. However, the AI prediction tool can be used to support the individual and community's wellbeing when it is responsibly applied. It can help proactive decision making in medical field, climate management and public safety.

The predictive features of AI systems lead to profound social and ethical consequences, such as the elimination of trust and changes in the relational identity of human beings. Eubanks (2018) seems to hold much preoccupation about this feature of AI when it is applied for automated decision-making in welfare, policing, and public services, which may create feedback loops that affect vulnerable people. This uneasiness stems from these systems denying space for personal narratives, contextual circumstances, and moral dimensions, as well as treating individuals as datasets in the light of probabilistic standards. Pasquale (2015) alerts us about the possible effects of AI predictions from a cultural perspective, purporting that the "predictive turn promotes a black box society where opaque systems define worth and opportunity without accountability". This implies that as humans our values are increasingly being measured through the unseen logics of algorithms.

Meanwhile, the theological metaphor of pilgrimage treats the future as a journey toward a divine promise. The Christian theology describes the community of faith as a "pilgrim people, whose identity is shaped not by certainty of outcomes but by trustful movement toward God" (Agustine, 1998). Augustine's view is effective in protecting humans from reductionism for it honors our openness, vulnerability, and the mysterious nature of our faith. Medieval theology frames pilgrimage as a transformative journey beyond a calculable trajectory, which is characterized by uncertainty, risk, and grace. The *Qur'an* describes life as a *safar* (journey) on *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (straight path), which in turn is paved for humans through divine mercy (Qur'an, 1:6). One of the prominent Qur'anic exegetes. *al-Ṭabarī* (2000) interpreted *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* as the path of those who are blessed with the divine grace, not the way of those who go astray. In line with the scriptural imagery, Islamic *Sufi* traditions frame this journey as a spiritual *suluk* (pathway). The Sufis describes the walker as *sālik*, referring to the one who stops in spiritual stats of struggle, surrender, and the reception of divine grace (*al-Qushayrī, 2007*).

This analysis suggests that AI metaphors and theological metaphors reveal contrasting visions of the future. While AI systems ground human future in data trends, the theological metaphor of the pilgrimage affirms that the future is open and relational. It can be argued that the theological metaphors portray human life as a journey of hope and transformation, while the prediction-based AI systems may face difficulties in capturing all these unique dimensions of human life.

Code Versus Covenant

Code is becoming another emerging AI metaphor that is no longer limited to programming computers but is being utilized as a tool through which human beings and societies are being imagined. This metaphor portrays human life as a programmable software that receives fixed instructions to execute particular tasks, limiting individuality to predictable patterns and fostering a deterministic vision of humanity. AI systems translate human subjectivity into programmable categories, and increasingly shape our social life using calculative logic (Kitchin, 2017). The consequence of adopting a code metaphor for understanding humans is the development of a deterministic anthropology whereby people become programmable objects and stop being moral beings. Amoore (2020) demonstrates worry about the matter, considering that such an anthropology can foreclose the openness, unpredictability, and depth of humans as relational beings.

In contrast to the code metaphor, theology proposes the metaphor of the covenant. The covenant here refers not to a fixed script (e.g., a code) to imagine humans, but to a relational body of trust, understanding, and dialogue. According to contemporary ethicists, ethics emerges from community practices as they are shaped by worship acts, not from impersonal rules or technical systems (Hauerwas, 1983). This means that humans are not passive code executors, but rather are responsible, free agents called into mutual relations and partnerships, such as marriage, which enrich their framework. These descriptions are emphasized in some Qur'anic accounts (Qur'an, 7:172). The Qur'anic primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) indicates human's innate responsibility before God: every soul testifies the divine lordship (Qur'an 7:172). This Qur'anic description situates human life within trust and responsibility beyond data calculation. It is evident from these discussions that the covenant metaphor defeats the code metaphor in both the anthropological and ethical domains, strongly resisting the impersonality of the code, which operates beyond context and individuality. The covenant always seems to honor human particularities by binding them to God and to one another. The covenant binds us to God and to one another in relationships grounded in mutual responsibility and belonging and seems to honor

our particularities. This means that the covenantal relationship is not an abstract aspect our life but it is fundamentally relational. It recognizes us in our distinctive stories, context and identities. Therefore, it could be argued that the covenantal theology affirms that individuality is not erased but lived within a relational framework.

This position finds support in Brueggemann's (1997) theology, as he considers the covenant "fundamentally dialogical, sustaining, and dynamic relationship of promise and response that cannot be reduced to formulae".

This theological metaphor also protects human freedom. The code metaphor presumes compliance, leaving no space for deviation once the instruction is fed into a computer, creating then no space for failure, renewal, or repentance. This argument is grounded in Wright's (2006) analysis, wherein he considers biblical covenants to not be contradictory to human freedom; he posits that the Bible locates freedom within a framework of responsibility and grace, affirming both the risk of failure and possibility of restoration. Some Islamic perspectives lend additional weight to this argument, outlining that "human beings are not isolated datasets, but a community bound in trust, charged with preserving dignity and justice together." (Kamali, 2008).

Above all, the covenant metaphor provides a deep theological anthropology notion that confirms our mystery and transcendence. While the code metaphor presumes that reality can be made visible if computers are provided with the correct instructions, the covenant presumes that not all realities are calculable. This open vision refutes the code and protects the virtues of hope, wonder, and mystery as the incommensurable features of human life.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the clash between AI and theology is clearly a battle of metaphors. AI metaphors reduce human life to datasets and treat us as objects, while theological metaphors preserve the essential aspects of hope, wonder, mystery, and transcendence, offering a sound discourse of human worth, belonging, and freedom that confronts AI's reductionism. This study further delineates that today's emerging AI metaphors and algorithmic reductionism require broadened theological counter-metaphors that are capable of withstanding the clash. Future research should extend this debate across traditions and explore how theological metaphors shape the cultural and religious engagement with AI pushing forward the emerging discourse presented in this paper. This can be done by examining concrete case studies and developing practical models for AI governance informed by theological relational frameworks, keeping in view the wider conceptual resources that both AI and theology contain and remain unexplored here. Finally, this study demonstrates that theological metaphors defeat their AI counterparts by providing the fact that human life cannot be reduced to AI determinism and machine instruction, simply for its relational, irreducible, and transcendent nature.

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