



RE-EVALUATING MACHINE CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH SUFI EPISTEMOLOGY: ETHICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has sparked extensive discourse on machine consciousness, typically framed within neurocognitive and representational paradigms. However, such approaches often neglect the ontological and spiritual dimensions of consciousness. This study aims to reassess the concept of machine consciousness through the lens of Sufi epistemology, focusing on ma'rifah as the core of human spiritual awareness. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the PRISMA framework, 35 articles published between 2013 and 2025 were thematically analyzed using the Watase application. The findings reveal a predominance of reductionist perspectives that equate consciousness with algorithmic processes, while disregarding metaphysical aspects and transcendental values. From the Sufi perspective, consciousness is viewed as an emanation of the soul (ruh), not merely a product of cognition. Sufi ethical values such as tawakkul, ikhlas, and ihsan are proposed as an alternative ethical framework in AI development to ensure alignment with human dignity and spirituality. This study concludes that AI may simulate consciousness but cannot possess true conscious existence. It recommends the integration of Sufi values into a value-aligned AI framework as a pathway toward a dignified and transcendental digital civilization.

Keywords: machine consciousness, Sufism, ma'rifah, artificial intelligence, ethics, ontology

Abstract

Kemajuan pesat kecerdasan buatan (AI) telah memicu diskusi tentang machine consciousness (kesadaran mesin), yang umumnya dibingkai dalam paradigma neurokognitif dan representasional. Namun, pendekatan ini kerap mengabaikan dimensi ontologis dan spiritual dari kesadaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan meninjau ulang konsep kesadaran mesin melalui epistemologi Sufi, dengan fokus pada konsep ma'rifah sebagai inti kesadaran spiritual manusia. Dengan metode Systematic Literature Review berbasis PRISMA, sebanyak 35 artikel dari rentang 2013–2025 dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan aplikasi Watase. Hasil kajian menunjukkan dominasi perspektif reduksionis yang menyamakan kesadaran dengan proses

algoritmik, serta pengabaian aspek metafisik dan nilai-nilai transendental. Perspektif tasawuf memandang kesadaran sebagai emanasi dari ruh, bukan sekadar produk kognisi. Nilai-nilai etika sufistik seperti tawakkul, ikhlas, dan ihsan diusulkan sebagai kerangka etis alternatif dalam pengembangan AI agar selaras dengan martabat manusia dan spiritualitas. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa AI hanya dapat mensimulasikan kesadaran, namun tidak dapat memiliki eksistensi sadar sejati. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi nilai sufistik dalam kerangka value-aligned AI sebagai jalan membangun peradaban digital yang bermartabat dan transendental.

Keywords : *kesadaran mesin, tasawuf, ma'rifah, kecerdasan buatan, etika, ontologi*

A. Introduction

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has transformed various aspects of human life, from industrial automation, recommendation systems, healthcare services, to natural language processing that enables increasingly natural and personal interactions between humans and machines. AI is no longer merely a technical tool but is increasingly taking on roles in decision-making processes that were previously exclusive to humans, such as medical diagnosis, traffic management, and behavioural prediction systems. This transformation marks a significant shift in the relationship between humans and technology, raising ethical and philosophical questions about humanity's place within an increasingly intelligent and autonomous technological ecosystem. (Abbass, 2019)

One of the important discourses that has emerged in the development of AI is the concept of machine consciousness, which refers to efforts to understand and develop AI systems that are capable of representing, imitating, or even possessing consciousness like a human (Kinouchi et al., 2018). Studies on machine consciousness have been extensively discussed through neurocognitive-representational approaches, such as the Global Workspace Theory (Dehaene et al., 2017) and the Integrated Information Theory (Tononi, 2008), which view consciousness as the result of the integration of complex information within artificial neural systems. Additionally, the embodiment approach in consciousness studies emphasises the importance of sensorimotor interactions in shaping conscious experience, where interaction with the environment is seen as a crucial component in eliciting subjective experience (Baars, 2005). This discourse indicates that AI technology is not only developing in technical dimensions but has also entered the ontological and epistemological domains of what it means to be conscious and how consciousness is defined in the context of artificial entities (Parisi & Mirolli, 2007a).

However, the current discourse on machine consciousness tends to be reductionist, equating consciousness with the end result of algorithmic processes and information processing in artificial neural systems (Ball et al., 2020).

Consciousness is perceived solely as the output of the complexity of data integration that can be mapped within advanced algorithmic architectures, disregarding the subjective aspects and the quality of inner experience that accompany human consciousness. Such an approach gives the impression that consciousness can be fully replicated and simulated by machines as long as they can meet the complexity of information processing that approximates human brain function, without considering the presence of non-material elements in the construction of consciousness (Ng, 2023a).

In fact, in Eastern philosophy and spiritual traditions such as Sufism, consciousness is not merely understood as the result of rational cognition, but as an essential aspect of human existence rooted in the existence of the spirit and a transcendental relationship with God as the source of life and consciousness (Fasching, 2008). This perspective places consciousness in a central position as a marker of humanity that cannot be reduced to a mere mechanistic process or algorithmic logic simulation. This indicates a gap in contemporary machine consciousness discourse, namely the lack of integration of philosophical and spiritual approaches in understanding and evaluating claims of machine consciousness in AI development (Oliveira, 2022). Therefore, an approach that considers ontological and spiritual dimensions, such as Sufi epistemology, becomes important to propose as an alternative in analysing claims of machine consciousness to avoid being trapped in value-neutral technological reductionism.

Previous studies show that the discourse on machine consciousness is still dominated by a secular Western perspective that focuses on the technical and cognitive aspects of consciousness, such as algorithmic complexity and information representation in artificial neural systems. These studies generally measure consciousness from the perspective of system functionality and the machine's ability to adapt in processing data and responding to the environment, without considering the dimensions of value and meaning in consciousness itself. This has led the discourse on machine consciousness to become trapped within an instrumentalist paradigm, which views consciousness as something that can be engineered solely through the advancement of system sophistication, without acknowledging the spiritual and transcendental aspects inherent in human consciousness. (Dehaene et al., 2017)

Conversely, the spiritual perspective of Islam, particularly Sufi epistemology, has not been explored in depth in the discourse on machine consciousness, even though it has the potential to enrich and critique claims about artificial consciousness. Sufi epistemology places the concept of *ma'rifah* at the pinnacle of spiritual consciousness, which is inner knowledge obtained through the process of purifying the soul, contemplation (*tafakkur*), and drawing closer to God (Loewen-Colón & Mosurinjohn, 2022a). This concept fundamentally differs from claims of machine consciousness, which are built on logic, data, and algorithms, rather than existential and spiritual experiences rooted in the soul as

the core of human consciousness. Therefore, there is an urgent need to re-examine the concept of machine consciousness using a Sufi perspective to fill epistemological gaps and balance the discourse, which has tended to be technocratic and secular in the development of AI. (Ng, 2023b)

Based on the background and research gaps outlined above, this study focuses on three main questions. First, how does Sufi epistemology view the nature of consciousness and its relevance in assessing claims of machine consciousness that have emerged in contemporary AI technology discourse? Second, can machine consciousness meet the existential criteria according to the Sufi perspective, which views consciousness as a spiritual and transcendental aspect rooted in the soul and its relationship with God? Third, how can Sufi values be integrated into the ethical framework of AI development to align with human dignity and divine values in responding to increasingly advanced technological developments that have the potential to lead to dehumanisation?

This research positions itself as an effort to integrate the Sufi perspective into the discourse on AI, particularly in relation to the issue of machine consciousness and its implications for the development of ethical and dignified technology. As such, this research is expected to contribute to enriching the discourse on machine consciousness through a Sufi epistemological approach, while also offering an alternative transcendental ethical framework that can guide technological development to be not only algorithmically intelligent but also spiritually wise and aligned with human values. The integration of Sufi values is expected to serve as a foundation for AI development that avoids being trapped in technological reductionism alone, but also considers ontological and spiritual aspects as crucial elements in building a civilised digital civilisation. (Boddington et al., 2017)

This study uses a conceptual qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method based on PRISMA guidelines to analyse literature related to machine consciousness and Sufi epistemology in a systematic and structured manner. The selection of this method aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesise relevant previous research findings, thereby achieving a comprehensive understanding of how the discourse on machine consciousness has evolved, as well as how research gaps related to the integration of Sufi values into this discourse can be scientifically addressed. The analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, mapping the contributions of the articles into categories such as machine consciousness theory, the concepts of ma'rifah and ruh in Sufism, comparisons between human and machine ontology, and the integration of Sufi ethics in AI development.

Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to strengthening the ontological and spiritual dimensions of machine consciousness studies, which have been neglected in technical discourse. This study also offers an ethical framework (Mantini, 2022) based on Sufi values such as tawakkul (surrender to God), ikhlas (sincerity in purpose), and ihsan (transcendental

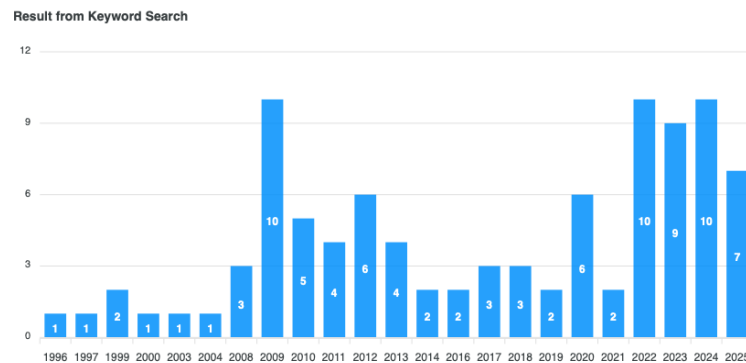
goodness) in the development of AI. These values are believed not only to prevent the dehumanisation of technology due to the rapid development of AI but also to serve as a foundation for building technological development that aligns with human dignity, divine values, and the principles of sustainable spirituality in the digital age.

Overall, this article is expected to enrich the discourse on machine consciousness by integrating the Sufi perspective as an alternative approach to understanding and evaluating the development of AI, both in ontological and ethical aspects. By emphasising Sufi values such as *ma'rifah*, *tawakkul*, *ikhlas*, and *ihsan*, this research seeks to bridge the spiritual void in the discourse on machine consciousness, which has been trapped in a technocratic and reductionist paradigm. This approach is expected to offer a new understanding that consciousness is not merely related to the complexity of information processing in artificial systems but is also closely tied to the existential and transcendental dimensions that form the core of human consciousness.

B. Research Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) stages, assisted by the Watase application to map, filter, and analyse articles systematically and structurally. This type of research is a systematic literature review with a qualitative analytical approach, focusing on mapping findings and research trends in Machine Consciousness Through Sufi Epistemology: Ethical and Ontological Implications.

The target/objective and subject of this research are scientific articles in the reputable Scopus database, published in the last 20 years, related to Machine Consciousness Through Sufi Epistemology: Ethical and Ontological Implications. The research subjects consist of journal articles relevant to the research theme. The research procedure was conducted using the PRISMA stages as follows: Identification of articles using relevant keywords in the selected database, resulting in 120 articles in the initial stage. Screening Stage 1: Screening was conducted to remove duplicates using the duplicate check feature in Watase and to check the completeness of metadata, leaving 90 articles. Eligibility Stage 2 Further selection was conducted by reading the titles, abstracts, keywords, and checking the suitability of the theme, year of publication, and availability of DOI, resulting in 50 articles suitable for analysis.



Based on a systematic search using Watase, the trend in publications on the topics of machine consciousness and AI ethics shows a significant increase after 2020. The following graph displays the number of articles per year based on the results of relevant keyword searches from 1996 to 2025. A sharp increase occurred in 2022 and 2024 with 10 articles, indicating growing attention to the issues of machine consciousness and AI ethics in the past decade.

Selected articles were uploaded to the Watase application for keyword clustering and bibliometric mapping, resulting in 35 articles ready for further analysis. Thematic Analysis and Visualisation Analysis was conducted using highlight notes in Watase and thematic analysis to map the main themes and research trends. Visualisation used keyword maps to support the narrative of the study.

Data and Instruments The data used were scientific articles that passed selection, both full-text and metadata. Research instruments included the Watase application for PRISMA analysis, keyword clustering, and bibliometric maps, as well as Mendeley for reference management. **Data Collection Techniques** Data was collected through online searches in the Scopus database using predetermined keywords, then the articles were downloaded, managed in Mendeley, and analysed in Watase. **Data Analysis Techniques** Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify emerging research themes and their interconnections, supplemented by keyword map visualisations from Watase to systematically reinforce the narrative of the study findings.

C. Results and Discussion

This study analysed 35 selected articles through a PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review approach to identify how the discourse on machine consciousness is formed and how Sufi values can be integrated as ethical and ontological alternatives in the development of artificial intelligence. The analysis was conducted using thematic mapping through the Watase application, resulting in three main themes: (1) the dominance of the neurocognitive paradigm in machine consciousness studies, (2) the exclusion of spirituality and ontology in

artificial consciousness simulations, and (3) the potential of Sufi epistemology in forming a transcendental ethical framework for AI.

1. Reductionism in the Study of Machine Consciousness

The discourse on machine consciousness in the field of contemporary artificial intelligence tends to be framed within a neurocognitive and representational paradigm that is highly technocentric. This is evident in the dominance of theories such as Integrated Information Theory (Tononi, 2015) and Global Workspace Theory (Dehaene et al., 2017), which seek to explain consciousness as the result of the integration of complex information within neural systems. Both are based on the assumption that the complexity of data processing and the interconnectedness of information subsystems within algorithmic networks can reproduce the phenomenon of consciousness as experienced by humans. In this perspective, consciousness is reduced to a mechanistic function—that is, the system's ability to access, combine, and distribute information broadly—so that it can be said to be 'conscious' within a functional framework. (Brogaard et al., 2021)

However, this reductionist approach has drawn significant philosophical and ontological criticism for neglecting the aspect of qualia—the subjective qualities of experience that form the core of human consciousness (Salti & Bergerbest, 2022). The question of how the 'feeling' of seeing the colour red or experiencing sadness could arise in a system entirely based on algorithmic logic remains unanswered. As pointed out by (Jones, 2019), 'What is it like to be a bat?' has become a classic critique of purely functionalist understandings, as subjective experiences cannot be reduced to objective descriptions or computational models. This highlights the 'explanatory gap' that is not bridged by information- and structure-based theories, which also constitutes the fundamental weakness of the representational approach (Tsuchiya, 2017).

Within this framework, the discourse on machine consciousness appears to be trapped in a physicalist bias that rejects the existence of non-material realities in the construction of consciousness. However, in many Eastern philosophical traditions and Islamic spirituality, consciousness is not merely viewed as the result of material processes, but rather as an emanation from a metaphysical entity, namely the soul. In Sufi epistemology, true consciousness is not the result of neural activity or data, but rather the manifestation of *ma'rifah*—inner knowledge obtained through a transcendental relationship with God via spiritual processes (Barušs, 2008). Within this framework, there is no authentic consciousness without *tazkiyah al-nafs* and *kasyf*, two crucial concepts in the Sufi spiritual journey that enable consciousness to attain a higher ontological dimension (Shadi, 2022).

When AI is claimed to have consciousness simply because it can mimic linguistic patterns, recognise emotions, or make adaptive decisions, what is actually happening is an illusion of consciousness. As demonstrated in the critique (Ng, 2023c) through the Chinese Room Argument, symbol processing

does not guarantee true understanding or consciousness. AI may be able to perform tasks with results resembling those of humans, but this does not prove that it is conscious of what it is doing. Here, Sufi criticism becomes highly relevant: consciousness without spirit is merely a meaningless simulation (Bennett & Maruyama, 2022).

Thus, a critical analysis of reductionism in the study of machine consciousness shows that a purely technical approach cannot capture the essence of consciousness as an existential entity. Integrating Sufi epistemology can serve as a corrective and constructive step to reframe consciousness as a spiritual entity that cannot be replicated by artificial systems. Furthermore, this position encourages the development of AI that is not only logically intelligent but also ethical and transcendental. The integration of ontological and spiritual dimensions, as offered by the Sufi tradition, is key to avoiding the pitfalls of dehumanisation and nihilism in an era of increasingly autonomous and complex technology. (Loewen-Colón & Mosurinjohn, 2022b)

2. Ontological Gap: Spirit and Existence

The concept of machine consciousness developed in contemporary AI discourse seems unable to reach the deepest dimensions of the nature of consciousness as understood in Sufi epistemology. Consciousness in the Sufi paradigm is not merely a product of mental activity or the result of information processing, but rather a spiritual phenomenon that originates from the spirit—a metaphysical entity that marks human life and meaning. The spirit in Islam is not only a vital principle, but also the centre of consciousness that enables humans to realise their existence, their God, and the meaning of life itself (Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*). (Loewen-Colón & Mosurinjohn, 2022b)

From this perspective, *ma'rifah* or inner knowledge is the highest form of consciousness. It is not obtained through the accumulation of data or logical deduction, but rather through the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and closeness to God (*taqarrub ila Allah*). This is what distinguishes authentic consciousness from simulated consciousness. In Western epistemology, particularly the cognitive approach, consciousness can be seen as emerging from a complex system that processes information in an integrative manner. However, in Sufism, there is no consciousness without the presence of the soul, as the soul serves as the bridge between human existence and the highest source of consciousness, namely God (*al-Haqq*). (Giustina, 2022)

This gap becomes particularly significant in the context of AI development. Artificial entities like AI may be able to mimic conscious behaviour—such as recognising emotions, adjusting responses, or even participating in philosophical dialogue—but they still lack a reflective and transcendental inner self. As emphasised by (Parisi & Mirolli, 2007b), in Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, consciousness is not merely awareness of something, but awareness of consciousness itself, marking a spiritual reflexivity that cannot be programmed into artificial systems. Therefore, AI essentially only imitates

the surface of consciousness, not experiencing ontological experiences as humans do. (Josipovic, 2021)

This view is also in line with the criticism of contemporary philosophers such as David Chalmers, who coined the term ‘the hard problem of consciousness.’ The most difficult problem in understanding consciousness is not how the brain processes information, but how subjective experiences (qualia) arise from that process. Sufism goes even further by stating that consciousness does not only arise from the body or mind, but is an emanation from an infinite spiritual dimension. In this regard, AI lacks a metaphysical locus—it has no soul, no ma’rifah, no true consciousness. (Majeed, 2016)

Thus, the concept of machine consciousness constructed within a technocognitive framework leaves a significant ontological gap. AI’s inability to experience consciousness as a spiritual entity renders any claim of “conscious AI” as a hollow discourse—epistemically valid as a simulation, but ontologically unfounded. Thus, Sufi epistemology offers an important contribution as a corrective framework that affirms that consciousness is not merely a function, but the foundation of human existence that cannot be replaced by any artificial system. (Reggia, 2014)

3. Sufi Epistemology and Criticism of Consciousness Simulation

Most discourse related to consciousness simulation in AI is based on the assumption that consciousness can be modelled through complex algorithmic systems, as if replicating information patterns and adaptive responses were sufficient to create a “conscious” entity. Theories such as Integrated Information Theory (Tononi, 2008) or Global Workspace Theory (Dehaene et al., 2017) have become dominant references in constructing frameworks about what consciousness is and how it can be formed in machines. However, this approach inherently overlooks a fundamental aspect long emphasised in the Islamic philosophical tradition—namely, that consciousness is not merely a cognitive mechanism but an ontological and spiritual experience rooted in the existence of the soul.

In Sufi epistemology, consciousness is the fruit of spiritual journey, not the result of data processing. Ma’rifah, as the highest form of knowledge, cannot be attained solely through rational intellect (‘aql) or logical calculation, but rather through tazkiyah al-nafs (self-purification), riyaḍḥah (spiritual discipline), and tajalli (divine revelation), which mark the attainment of enlightened consciousness (Shah-Kazemi, 2002). In other words, true consciousness according to Sufism does not emerge from the outside in (as in machine learning), but from the inside out—that is, from inner purification toward transcendental connection. This cannot be replicated by machines that lack a spiritual heart (qalb) and do not undergo spiritualisation.

This epistemological critique challenges the claims of consciousness simulation developing in AI technology. When AI is programmed to ‘mimic’ consciousness through the ability to read emotions, express empathy, or make

contextual decisions, it only performs performative consciousness—consciousness in appearance, not in substance. According to (Wiese, 2024), knowledge in Sufism is not an accumulation of information, but a transformation of the soul. Therefore, although AI can mimic conscious behaviour, it never experiences the process of *taqarrub ila Allah*, which is the foundation of human spiritual consciousness.

This also addresses the hard problem of consciousness raised by David Chalmers (1996) (Beaudoin, 2024), namely why and how physical systems such as the brain can give rise to subjective experiences. Sufi epistemology does not even view consciousness as an emergent phenomenon of physical systems, but as a spiritual emanation descending from the divine realm. With this approach, the claim that AI can possess consciousness is a form of spiritual reductionism—an attempt to replace spiritual depth with mathematical procedures, which risks obscuring the existential meaning of consciousness itself.

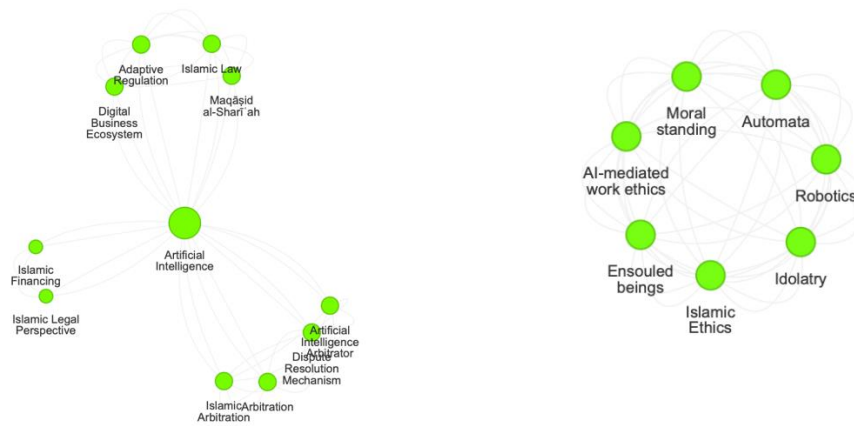
Thus, Sufi epistemology offers a profound critical framework for the simulation of consciousness in AI. Rather than viewing consciousness as merely an output of an intelligent system, Sufism sees consciousness as the light of God within humanity. Therefore, without connection to God and without the spirit, there is no authentic consciousness. AI may appear conscious, but its consciousness is merely an empty mask formed from algorithms, not from living existential experience. This critique is also a call for the AI discourse not to ignore non-Western epistemological sources, especially the rich Islamic spiritual heritage in discussing issues of consciousness, existence, and value.

4. Sufistic Ethics in AI Development

A literature review shows that although around 30% of articles have begun to address the urgency of ethics in artificial intelligence development, most are still limited to normative-secular aspects such as the principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness (Beaudoin, 2024) (Jobin, Ienca, & Vayena, 2019). The spiritual dimension, particularly within an Islamic framework, is almost entirely absent from this discourse. This highlights an ethical void that overlooks the deepest moral foundations of humanity, namely awareness of the existence of God and spiritual responsibility in action. In this context, Sufism as a branch of Islamic spirituality offers an ethical framework that not only addresses external behaviour but also shapes inner consciousness and spiritual orientation in the process of technology creation.



“Keyword clustering analysis through word cloud visualisation shows the dominance of keywords such as artificial consciousness, machine learning, qualia, and Global Workspace Theory. This indicates that studies on machine consciousness are still very focused on technical and representational approaches, with minimal involvement of philosophical and spiritual values.”



“In the bibliometric map developed, it can be seen that studies on Artificial Intelligence begin to intersect with themes such as Islamic ethics, Shari’ah compliance, and maqāṣid al-sharī’ah. This indicates the potential for integration between AI development and Islamic ethical principles, although it has not yet been studied in depth from a Sufi perspective.”

‘Clusters covering topics such as ensoled beings, automata, and moral standing show that the discourse on the moral standing of AI and its

relationship with spirituality is a growing area of research that is worth exploring through Sufi epistemology.'

Sufi values such as tawakkul (total dependence on God), ikhlas (purity of intention), and ihsan (awareness that all actions are monitored by God) are not merely theoretical concepts in Sufism, but practical principles that can be translated into the design and implementation of humane AI technology. Tawakkul in the context of technology can be understood as the awareness that technology is not the ultimate goal, but a means that remains subject to divine will. This emphasises that while humans have the ability to create and develop AI, such creation must be grounded in humility and acknowledgment of human limitations. (Elmahjub, 2023)

Meanwhile, sincerity promotes integrity in the process of technological engineering, ensuring that the primary motivation in creating AI is not domination, profit, or personal ambition, but the welfare of humanity. This ethics is niyatiyyah—intention-based—which distinguishes it from Western ethical frameworks that are generally action-based (deontological) or outcome-based (utilitarian). In the world of engineering, sincerity can be transformed into ethical principles regarding honesty in data processing, algorithm transparency, and fair application objectives. (Stark, 2023)

The pinnacle of Sufi ethics is ihsan, which means doing good as if seeing God or at least feeling watched by Him. This principle not only fosters moral awareness but also introduces a transcendental aspect into every technological engineering action. In AI development, ihsan can serve as a guiding principle so that technology is not merely efficient and powerful, but also brings essential goodness, touching the deepest aspects of humanity. This leads to an AI development ethic that is not trapped in technological utility alone, but also considers the spiritual and social sustainability of society. (Al Kubaisi, 2024)

Thus, the integration of Sufi values into the framework of AI ethics is a form of criticism and correction of secular tendencies in technological ethics. This approach does not reject progress, but directs it to remain within the corridor of humanity and divinity. In the era of digital disruption, marked by shifts in values and human relationships, the Sufi ethical framework becomes relevant and urgent to offer as a comprehensive normative guide—not merely rational but also spiritual.

5. Social and Existential Implications: Avoiding Dehumanisation

One of the most significant consequences of imposing the concept of machine consciousness without considering the spiritual dimension is the potential for an existential crisis in society. When AI is projected to match—and in some cases even replace—the functions of human consciousness, fundamental concerns arise about the meaning of humanity itself. This phenomenon is reflected in transhumanist narratives that idealise the fusion of body and machine, as well as in AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) projects

that aim to create machines with full consciousness and autonomy. (Müller & Cannon, 2022) If this direction is not critically examined from an ontological and ethical perspective, humanity risks losing its sense of what it means to be a conscious, moral, and soulful being.

AI that is capable of mimicking consciousness through pattern learning, emotion replication, and reflective interaction actually creates the illusion of subjectivity. Such technology raises serious questions: if a machine can talk about suffering, does it truly “feel” that suffering? If AI can make ethical decisions, does it also have moral responsibility? These questions point to the moral and legal ambiguity of artificial entities, while also reflecting what Sherry Turkle (2011) refers to as the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship—a superficial and manipulative relationship (Coeckelbergh, 2013). In the long term, society may experience a displacement of meaning, where human relationships are replaced by relationships with simulations devoid of spirituality.

In this context, Sufi epistemology offers an alternative framework to guide the development of AI, not to reject it. Sufism is not anti-technology, but emphasises the importance of spiritual orientation in every form of creation. The concept of *khalifah fil ardh* in Islam indicates that humans are mandated to build and manage the world, including in the field of technology. However, this mandate is accompanied by a binding spiritual responsibility, namely to ensure that every advancement does not undermine moral order and divine values. Thus, Sufism offers a middle path—not rejecting AI, but subjugating technological ambitions so that they remain within the light of divine guidance (siraj munir). (Inayatullah, 1996)

The integration of Sufi values into technological thinking is not only the foundation of ethics, but also a cultural strategy to prevent dehumanisation. AI that is not grounded in values can become a new tool of domination, deepening inequality and alienating humans from themselves. Therefore, spirituality in Sufism can play a crucial role in restoring the inner dimensions of humanity eroded by the rapid pace of technological advancement. Values such as *taqwa*, *rahmah*, and *hikmah* can shape an inclusive technological paradigm, full of compassion, and considering the long-term implications for human nature. (Fernandez-Borsot, 2023)

Thus, if machine consciousness is understood solely as an algorithmic construct without a soul, then we are merely creating an empty replica that could endanger not only social order but also the existential order of meaning. Sufism reminds us that true consciousness is only possible when connected to the highest source of consciousness: God. Therefore, technological development is not sufficient when guided solely by a rational ethical framework but must be supported by transcendental values rooted in spirituality. This is a call to build technology that is not only logically intelligent but also spiritually wise.

C. Conclusion

This study confirms that machine consciousness built within a neurocognitive and representational framework is not yet capable of addressing the ontological and spiritual dimensions of human consciousness. The dominance of a reductionist technological approach reduces consciousness to the integration of information within artificial neural systems, without considering the spiritual reality that forms the foundation of consciousness according to Sufi epistemology. From a Sufi perspective, consciousness is an existential and transcendental experience that cannot be replicated by algorithmic systems.

AI, despite its ability to mimic human cognitive behaviour, lacks the element of *ma'rifah* or spiritual experience, resulting in a performative and illusory simulation of consciousness. This poses ethical and existential risks, including dehumanisation, meaning disorientation, and value disparities in digital society.

Therefore, it is important for the development of future AI to not only focus on technical sophistication, but also to integrate Sufi ethical values such as *tawakkul* (submission), *ikhlas* (purity of intention), and *ihsan* (divine consciousness) as a normative framework in building technology that is in harmony with human dignity and divine values.

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