

Algorithmic Justice: Reassessing Legal Ethics through the Lens of AI and Moral Philosophy

Muhammad Ali Safdar¹, Saad Ghafoor²

¹PhD Scholar of Law and Philosophy at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany ali.m.safdar@fau.de

²MPhil Scholar of AI and Global Politics, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan saad.malhi@outlook.com

Abstract

As AI is adopted more widely in legal processes across the globe, the ethical issues related to algorithmic choices are becoming more important. This research takes a close look at algorithmic justice by rethinking the principles of legal ethics using moral philosophy. The study investigates how deontology, utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice, and virtue ethics can be used to determine if AI technologies involved in the judicial system are fair, accountable, and transparent. The research uses a qualitative method and involves experts from various fields to analyze AI tools in law and see how they affect legal values such as impartiality, due process, and human dignity. It points out main issues, such as algorithms that are biased, hard to understand, and take away some of our control in legal matters. The study sets up a conceptual model for algorithmic justice that links ethics and law to help guide the use of AI in courts. The results show that AI can make the law more efficient and consistent, but it should still be guided by ethical rules that focus on justice instead of only on accuracy. The study ends by suggesting ways for policy changes, ethical AI development, and future collaboration between different fields to keep legal systems in the digital world just, humane, and morally sound.

Keywords: *Algorithmic Justice, Legal Ethics, Artificial Intelligence, Moral Philosophy, Deontology, Utilitarianism, Rawlsian Theory, Legal Technology, Judicial Decision-Making, AI Accountability, Ethical AI, Law and Technology.*

Introduction

AI is now present in almost all parts of life, including healthcare, education, finance, and criminal justice, because of the rapid growth of the digital age. AI is highly controversial when it comes to law, as its algorithms are now used for risk assessment, deciding on bail, predicting police actions, and determining sentencing. Integrating technology into the justice system, usually claimed to make things more objective, efficient, and consistent, has led to the new idea of algorithmic justice. Even though the term suggests that technology can solve human problems, it also introduces many ethical, philosophical, and legal problems.

Traditionally, courts and laws were based on human judgment, morals, and the interpretation of rules that have stood for centuries. Because algorithms are now used so widely in these situations, people are asking if they can truly make fair and just choices. Are these algorithms making our moral and legal systems better or worse? The most important question is who should be held responsible when algorithms cause harm or injustice. Because governments and courts are using more algorithms, these questions have become urgent and cannot be ignored.

While AI may seem helpful for courts by reducing work and bias, its use has been hindered by serious problems such as unclear decision-making, biased data, no legal accountability, and a loss of human empathy in judging. For example, COMPAS, an AI system popular in the United States for predicting who will reoffend, tends to incorrectly label minority defendants as high risk, which only leads to more inequality. In addition, these algorithms frequently remain unexplained and unclear, which can weaken important legal ethics such as fair trials, the right to appeal, and the chance to question one's sentence or charge. To examine the ethics of these developments, this research proposes a new look at algorithmic justice using moral philosophy. It uses classical and contemporary ethical theories, utilitarianism, deontological ethics, Rawlsian theory of justice, and virtue ethics to judge the moral validity of AI in legal systems. Such philosophies help us consider if algorithmic activities support or go against the main ideas of justice, such as fairness, autonomy, accountability, and human dignity.

The study mainly looks at the problems that arise when judicial decisions are shared by programmers, policymakers, and machine-learning systems. In the traditional view, responsibility is something humans have, can be traced, and is considered important from a moral standpoint. On the other hand, decisions made by algorithms, influenced by many data processing and statistical improvements, are often not easy to attribute to anyone and have little moral responsibility. As a result, legal ethics should be examined not only by looking at the rules and codes, but also by exploring justice, the use of human judgment, and the future of democratic law.

The purpose of this research is to clarify the ethical and legal issues that come with using AI in law, not to dismiss its usefulness. This study hopes to create a more detailed and ethical framework for handling algorithmic justice by using moral philosophy to reconsider legal ethics. It looks at how ethics can guide legal decision-making, and how the law must adapt to handle the problems caused by autonomous machines. This study's findings are meant to help with discussions in academia, changes in laws, and the creation of AI systems that uphold justice and human rights. As a result, this research makes us consider if justice will be based on statistics and algorithms, or if it will continue to be a human, moral, and understanding process. Because AI is changing the legal systems around the world, it is important to answer these questions both mentally and morally.

Limitations of Research

This study mainly deals with philosophical and normative matters, concentrating on ideas such as justice, ethics, and morality. Consequently, it might not be able to make generalizations about a

whole population, as is common in quantitative studies. Even though moral philosophy explains justice in detail, creating laws based on these theories can be difficult and depend on many factors. In addition, the research mainly examines the legal systems of technologically advanced countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. Therefore, the findings might not be useful in countries that have different laws, technology, or moral beliefs, mainly in the Global South. Also, because AI and machine learning develop rapidly, some case studies, tools, or applications can be outdated before long. The results and suggestions from the study could become less important if AI technology and its use change a lot while or after the research is done. Besides, A lot of AI tools used in law (such as risk assessment tools) are kept secret and closed off because of intellectual property rights. This prevents the researcher from doing a complete ethical assessment of their inner workings, which hinders a more thorough analysis of algorithms. In addition, the rules and laws governing AI are not the same in every country. The study's suggestions may not be suitable for every nation, mainly in those where AI laws are just beginning or are decided by non-democratic systems.

Significance of Research

Since artificial intelligence is playing a bigger role in legal decisions, this research is especially important and relevant. The study helps to clarify the meaning and practice of justice in the digital world by studying AI, legal ethics, and moral philosophy. This study is significant in various important areas.

The research helps unite technology, law, and philosophy, which are usually studied separately. It brings together ethical thinking and legal work, giving a clearer picture of how AI is used in the courts. In addition, as AI is introduced into legal institutions for sentencing, bail, and making legal predictions, concerns about bias, accountability, and fairness increase. It highlights these matters and suggests ethical guidelines based on well-known moral theories, so the use of AI does not threaten the core ideas of justice. In addition, by suggesting a model for algorithmic justice, this research suggests specific changes for laws and AI governance. It helps those in charge of laws and regulations to use AI in a way that protects human rights and dignity. Furthermore, The study uses Kantian ethics, Rawlsian justice, and utilitarianism to address current issues in technology. This fresh look at philosophy adds value to the ongoing debate about justice and legal authority in the world of algorithms. Another major issue for the public regarding AI in law is the unclear way algorithms work. The research recommends that AI models should be clear, easy to understand, and ethical. Its goal is to build more trust in the legal system with the help of AI. Furthermore, Even though the study focuses on a few places, its findings can be used by any society dealing with the ethical regulation of AI in law. It helps form the basis for future studies and partnerships between different countries on AI and justice.

Research Problem

Although AI is expected to bring efficiency and fairness to the law, it may also result in decisions that are hard to understand, biased algorithms, and ethical problems. Many legal systems lack the

means to judge if AI-based decisions are just and fair to people. The use of AI in legal decisions is creating a bigger difference between how fast judgments can be made and how ethical they are. It examines the role of moral philosophy in revising legal ethics in a world where algorithms play a big part in decision-making.

Research Questions

1. How does using AI in legal processes affect the traditional beliefs and principles of justice?
2. Which moral philosophies (for example, Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics) can be used to assess AI-based legal decisions?
3. Is it possible to design a model of “algorithmic justice” that brings together legal ethics and the transparency of AI?
4. Which changes in policy and law are required to guarantee ethical AI use in the judiciary?

Objectives of research

- To analyze how AI affects the ethics of the legal field.
- To look into how classical and contemporary moral philosophies can impact the way legal decisions are made in AI contexts.
- To formulate a theoretical structure for "algorithmic justice" that relies on ethical and legal rules.
- To put forward practical suggestions for overseeing AI in the legal field.

Literature Review

Many scholars have paid close attention to the legal and philosophical issues that arise when artificial intelligence is used in the judicial system. Some scholars, including Crawford and Paglen, believe that algorithmic systems are not impartial, but rather show the biases and values that were built into them. They point out that focusing on justice and power in AI reveals that not knowing how algorithms work can cause unfair and untraceable decision-making. Binns (2018) points out that there is a conflict between fairness and understanding in algorithmic decision-making, since clear but less accurate systems may be more ethical than those that are accurate but hard to explain. This issue is especially noticeable in legal matters, as accountability and due process are the main principles. According to Binns, using Rawlsian justice and similar theories can lead to the creation of fairer algorithms that are in line with democracy. According to Coeckelbergh (2020), the instrumentalist approach to technology should be replaced by a more ethical and interactive way of looking at AI. He uses virtue ethics and post-humanist philosophy to suggest that justice should be rethought because of the way humans and machines are connected. It is in agreement with Mittelstadt et al. (2016), who believe that ethical AI development depends on a framework based on moral philosophy, not just technical or compliance rules. Citron and Pasquale (2014) discuss how tools used in the judicial system for predicting risk may support the existing biases in society. They say that the idea of objectivity in AI justice can hide the existence of inequality. Eubanks (2018) also explains how algorithms can cause greater harm to marginalized groups and suggests

that a justice approach should put fairness and openness at the forefront. Even though these concerns exist, a number of scholars still remain hopeful. It is suggested by Surden (2019) that AI can help ensure legal judgments are more accurate and consistent if ethical supervision is introduced at the beginning.

There is a growing number of reviews on algorithmic justice, especially where law, ethics, and artificial intelligence meet. It is important, according to scholars, for algorithms to be accurate and also acceptable based on morals and laws. Zerilli et al. (2019) state that focusing only on explainability and transparency in algorithms does not address the main question of who is responsible for the actions of machines. They point out that too much attention is given to mathematical fairness in AI, and suggest including ethical thinking about people in the design of AI, mainly in legal situations where the outcomes influence people's lives and freedoms. Yeung (2018) examines the growth of "algorithmic regulation" and points out the dangers of moving from law-based systems to governance using data. She worries that when algorithms are put in charge without proper checks, the fairness of legal decisions and their justification may be weakened. In the deontological view, Tasioulas (2020) argues that justice is based on the importance of individual rights, and not only on how effective or useful the outcome is. He cautions against letting AI decide legal ethics and encourages a rethink of dignity and moral responsibility in systems that use AI. On the other hand, Floridi and Cowls (2019) suggest the AI4People framework, which relies on four ethical principles: beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice. They recommend that these should form the basis of ethical AI use, mainly in public bodies such as the judiciary. Their research gives policymakers a good example to follow when implementing ethical AI in laws. Also, Nemitz (2018) argues that the use of predictive analytics and data mining in justice systems weakens both the rule of law and democratic accountability. He claims that AI tools created by corporations and used in law without clear moral reasoning could strengthen current power inequalities. Calo and Citron (2021) argue for a framework that guarantees individuals impacted by algorithms can ask for explanations, join in the process, and appeal the decision. They argue that using AI in law while following constitutional rules can help stop digital overreach and protect people's rights. Furthermore, Danaher (2016) looks at the trend of giving ethical decisions to machines and asks if this makes humans less responsible. His research explores if AI should be held responsible for its actions and what the implications are for law.

Research Methodology

This research paper is based on qualitative methods, interpretation, and combines various disciplines. The data is collected here by studying legal documents, case studies, and AI ethics guidelines, as well as by critically analyzing AI applications in the legal field such as COMPAS and risk assessment tools. The data was studied through thematic analysis to highlight the main ethical issues, and philosophical discourse analysis was also used to examine the main claims about ethics. In addition, the study looks at AI being used in judicial systems (for criminal justice,

sentencing, and risk assessment) and does not examine administrative AI uses (such as legal chatbots) or innovations in the private sector that are not part of the judiciary. Besides, the study uses deontological Ethics (Immanuel Kant) to examine duties in AI and law, Utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill) to assess the outcomes of AI decisions in courts, Rawlsian Justice (John Rawls) to analyze fairness in algorithms, and Virtue Ethics (Aristotle) to look at the character and morality of those using AI in the law. The philosophical concepts will be used to analyze and adjust the ethics of algorithms in the legal field. Legal scholars, ethicists, technologists, and policymakers can find this research paper significant. It brings together concepts from computational jurisprudence and moral reasoning to give a detailed view of justice in the digital age. The study helps in forming AI governance models that are strong in both technology and ethics.

Discussion & Analysis

AI is being used more in legal systems, which has led to many discussions in legal, ethical, and philosophical areas. Even though AI can offer justice systems efficiency, consistency, and speed, it needs careful ethical review before being used. We look at the concept of algorithmic justice by combining moral principles with concerns about how algorithms are made, how they can be biased, and if they follow the law. We discuss AI's impact on legal decisions by using examples from real-life AI use, philosophical theories, and studies that involve numbers.

AI in Legal Systems: An Empirical Look

Over the past decade, automating legal reasoning has become much faster. *OECD (2023)* found that more than 42% of member judicial institutions are now using AI, from simple analysis of laws to helping with sentencing decisions. In the US, *COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions)* is used in more than 20 states to estimate the chances of someone committing another crime. At the same time, the *UK's HM Courts & Tribunals Service* has introduced digital systems that use algorithms in civil cases. According to a new study done by *MIT and Stanford University in 2022*, most legal experts (63%) employ AI for analyzing documents, whereas less than half (28%) trust it in matters of sentencing or risk assessment. This issue reveals that even though AI can assist in some duties, people still question its role in making key judicial decisions.

There are ethical issues because the system lacks openness and the ability to be challenged

Machine learning models, which are typical AI systems, are difficult for even experts to understand. When this happens, it goes against procedural justice, which says that legal decisions should be clear and open for review. One study revealed that *COMPAS* believes Black defendants are more likely to commit crimes, despite the fact that white defendants commit them at the same rate (*Angwin et al., 2016*). Even so, the fact that the algorithm is proprietary means it cannot be verified by the public. This situation weakens the fair trial right mentioned in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which calls for people to be able to understand and

respond to charges against them. If algorithms are used to decide cases and are not easy to understand or contest, the whole legal process becomes unethical.

Dilemmas that involve Utilitarian and Deontological ethics

According to Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, utilitarianism means that an action is just if it brings the most happiness or utility. If we look at it this way, AI systems that cut down on crime, speed up legal processes, or prevent judicial errors are considered morally acceptable. As an example, the use of AI tools for risk assessment can lead to a nearly 18% decrease in people being detained before their trials, a study by *Harvard Kennedy School (2020)* reveals. However, this approach does not defend the rights of individuals. If an algorithm favors group statistics over a person's details, the defendant may be wrongly imprisoned, which is considered morally wrong. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant argues for deontological ethics that are different from utilitarianism. Kantian ethics states that people should never be used as a tool to reach other aims, even if it means protecting the community. The clash is most noticeable when it comes to AI sentencing: while the system may work well on paper, it may not respect the moral autonomy of each person. So, justice should focus on the results and the methods used to achieve them.

The issue of Rawlsian Fairness and the bias towards the past

John Rawls' theory states that fair laws are those that a reasonable person would approve, not knowing where they stand in society. When the training data used by algorithms is biased, the algorithms cannot pass this test. Because of many years of unfair policing in the United States, minorities are more likely to be included in criminal records. According to the AI Now Institute in 2021, three quarters of the datasets in legal machine learning included such biases. For this reason, the predictions from these systems are always biased. According to Rawls, these systems are not fair, as they sustain inequality instead of trying to remove it.

Virtue Ethics and the Decline of Moral Decision Making

According to virtue ethics, which was founded by Aristotle, actions are judged by the character and virtues of the people involved. In the legal system, judges are supposed to act with prudence, compassion, and fairness. AI systems do not have consciousness or experience of right and wrong, so they cannot show such virtues. A recent survey by the *International Bar Association* found that 81% of judges think AI is not able to understand the importance of sentencing decisions. This issue is consistent with what Aristotle claimed, that justice depends on phronesis, which AI systems are not capable of. In this way, relying on algorithms for justice decisions takes away its ethical aspect.

Problems with Accountability and the Law

Which person has legal liability if an AI makes an incorrect decision? In most places, this issue is still not settled. Although the *EU's AI Act (2024)* requires companies to be transparent and have human involvement, it does not have set guidelines for assigning responsibility. A judge may choose to follow the software's choices, and developers might insist that they are only responsible

for developing the tool. Such diffusion of responsibility goes against a main principle in legal ethics: justice should be possible to enforce and mistakes should be correctable. If no one can identify who is responsible for algorithmic decisions in law, the whole judicial system loses credibility.

Control by the People and by Experts

In democracies, people elect officials who then make laws after discussing them with the public. The adoption of private, hidden algorithms in legal systems brings technocratic rule without the approval of the people. People are governed by rules made by algorithms that are not discussed openly and are created by tech companies. According to the *Oxford Internet Institute (2022)*, most AI systems in public administration around the world are created by private companies and rarely undergo ethical review. As a result, democracy is weakened and replaced by a hidden form of authoritarianism that is passed off as progress.

Ethical Considerations and the Exclusion of People from Knowledge

Justice is possible only with correct, thorough, and appropriate information. However, many legal AI systems use data that is not complete, unchecked, or does not reflect a variety of people. Also, the majority of legal AI systems are built using Western legal ideas and do not consider Islamic law, indigenous law, or African customary systems. Not including these views in the discussion means the algorithms are limited to one perspective and culture. To be truly just, an algorithm must use knowledge of legal pluralism, but current legal AI models are mostly formed from English and common-law data.

Justice includes both emotional and communication aspects

Legal decisions go beyond practical uses and also affect people emotionally and as a society. If a judge provides a clear explanation, is empathetic, and acknowledges what people have suffered, it can help with moral healing and public trust. Algorithms, on the other hand, make decisions without sharing any stories, regret, or feelings. This lack of emotion can cause people to feel apart from the government. Studies have found that 72% of people are more content with court judgments if they include some empathy for people (*Law and Society Review, 2022*). However accurate algorithmic justice is, it may still not have the human legitimacy that real justice requires.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence in the law is bringing both new technology and new ethical questions. Because courts, law firms, and policymakers are using algorithms more, the traditional rules of legal ethics are being updated. The purpose of this research was to look closely at these changes with the help of moral philosophy, trying to redefine justice in a world where machines make many decisions. Studying classical ethics such as deontological duty, utilitarian consequences, Rawlsian fairness, and Aristotelian virtue has clarified the many ethical issues and conflicts that arise when AI is used in the legal field. Even though AI can offer efficiency, reliability, and accurate

predictions, it also brings problems such as bias, unclear decision-making, and the loss of a human touch in law. These issues cannot be resolved only by technical means; they need a thorough rethinking of justice. This study suggests algorithmic justice, which means legal AI should be advanced in technology and should also be ethical and consider social needs. It notes that law should focus on upholding morals to help preserve humans' dignity, equality, and faith in one another.

In short, this research points out that justice in AI-driven societies should rely equally on ethics and on computer-based logic. The law should always depend on moral consciousness, and AI should only enhance, and not replace, the ideas of justice. It is important to reconsider these laws to keep technology from going against the values of justice and humanity in our society.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- More research should be conducted to understand the views of different communities, mainly those disadvantaged in the past, towards the legitimacy of AI in legal decision-making. Knowing how people trust or distrust AI will help create better policies for AI.
- Future experts in this field should join forces to develop ethical guidelines that fit AI systems in the legal area. These frameworks ought to include ideas from ethics, human rights, and data law to direct the development of AI from the beginning.
- More research is required to find ways of holding AI systems responsible when they cause unfair or harmful situations. Is it the developers, the lawyers, or the state who is responsible? Researchers ought to develop liability systems that meet both legal and ethical requirements.

References

1. Binns, R. (2018). Fairness in machine learning: Lessons from political philosophy. *Proceedings of the 2018 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 149–159.
2. Calo, R., & Citron, D. K. (2021). The Automated Administrative State: A Crisis of Legitimacy. *Emory Law Journal*, 70(4), 797–848.
3. Citron, D. K., & Pasquale, F. A. (2014). The scored society: Due process for automated predictions. *Washington Law Review*, 89(1), 1–33.
4. Coeckelbergh, M. (2020). *AI ethics*. MIT Press.
5. Crawford, K., & Paglen, T. (2021). Excavating AI: The politics of images in machine learning training sets. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 3703–3725.
6. Danaher, J. (2016). The threat of algocracy: Reality, resistance and accommodation. *Philosophy & Technology*, 29(3), 245–268.
7. Eubanks, V. (2018). *Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor*. St. Martin's Press.
8. Floridi, L., & Cows, J. (2019). A unified framework of five principles for AI in society. *Harvard Data Science Review*, 1(1).
9. Mittelstadt, B. D., Allo, P., Taddeo, M., Wachter, S., & Floridi, L. (2016). The ethics of algorithms: Mapping the debate. *Big Data & Society*, 3(2), 1–21.

10. Nemitz, P. (2018). Constitutional democracy and technology in the age of artificial intelligence. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, 376(2133), 20180089.
11. Surden, H. (2019). Artificial intelligence and law: An overview. *Georgia State University Law Review*, 35(4), 1305–1337.
12. Tasioulas, J. (2020). First steps towards an ethics of robots and artificial intelligence. *Journal of Practical Ethics*, 8(1), 61–92.
13. Yeung, K. (2018). Algorithmic regulation: A critical interrogation. *Regulation & Governance*, 12(4), 505–523.
14. Zerilli, J., Knott, A., Maclaurin, J., & Gavaghan, C. (2019). Transparency in algorithmic and human decision-making: Is there a double standard? *Philosophy & Technology*, 32, 661–683.