



# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PHILOSOPHY: APPLYING SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF HUMAN REASON TO UNDERSTAND AI.

**Gefell Baldesco Fabillar**

Project Development Officer I

Department of Education

Valencia City Central School, Valencia City, Bukidnon, Philippines.

**Abstract:** This qualitative study applied Søren Kierkegaard's view on human reason to examine its implications for the philosophy of artificial intelligence using Qualitative Textual Analysis. The research analyzed Kierkegaard's primary philosophical texts alongside contemporary AI literature to examine themes such as subjective truth, existential awareness, intelligence, and AI's limitations. Findings revealed that Kierkegaard's concept of human reason was deeply personal and relational, rooted in subjective experience, existential choice, and the leap of faith, qualities that AI lacked fundamentally. The study highlighted the indispensability of human individuality and ethical responsibility in philosophy, addressing the limits of AI and reaffirming the uniqueness of human existence. This research underscored the importance of integrating classical existential philosophical perspectives into ongoing AI ethical debates and development. The findings contributed to the discourse on responsible AI, emphasizing the need for human values and existential authenticity in technological advancement.

**Index Terms – Søren Kierkegaard, Human reason, Artificial Intelligence, Qualitative Textual Analysis, Philosophy of AI, Subjective Truth, Existential Awareness, Existential Choice, Leap of Faith, AI Ethics, Ethical Responsibility, Responsible AI, Existential Authenticity**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The growing capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI) had sparked ongoing debates about the limits of AI in relation to human reason, a question that challenged fundamental assumptions about cognition and philosophy. While AI systems could perform complex tasks and process vast amounts of information, many scholars argued that they lacked essential qualities that characterized human rationality, such as subjective experience, existential choice, and the leap of faith (Bryson, 2018).

In this context, revisiting classical existential philosophical views provided a vital perspective for understanding the nature and limits of reason. Søren Kierkegaard, a seminal figure in existential philosophy, offered a foundational view of human reason as inseparable from subjectivity, ethical responsibility, and authentic existence (Westphal, 2014). Kierkegaard's philosophy emphasized that true understanding arose not merely from objective knowledge or logic but from personal commitment, faith, and the lived experience of being a self. Such dimensions of inwardness and moral decision-making were qualities that AI as a purely mechanical system, fundamentally lacked. Revisiting these views had been particularly relevant, as contemporary AI developments raised ethical and epistemological questions that philosophy was uniquely positioned to address.

This study aimed to explore Kierkegaard's view on human reason through qualitative textual analysis, examining selected primary texts and contemporary AI philosophy literature to explore the implications of Kierkegaard's thought for the ongoing discourse about AI and human cognition. The central research question guiding this inquiry was: How could Søren Kierkegaard's understanding of human reason be applied to better understand the nature and limitations of artificial intelligence?

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study examined Søren Kierkegaard's view on human reason and its implications for the philosophy of artificial intelligence, using Qualitative Textual Analysis. Specifically, it endeavored to:

1. Explored Kierkegaard's view on human reason and cognition through selected primary texts.

2. Investigated key themes such as subjectivity, ethical responsibility, and authentic existence, and the limitations of artificial intelligence as reflected in both Kierkegaard's works and contemporary AI philosophy literature.
3. Analyzed how Kierkegaard's understanding of human reason provided philosophical view into the nature and limitations of artificial intelligence.

The study employed Qualitative Textual Analysis to systematically analyze Kierkegaard's philosophical writings alongside modern ethical and philosophical works on AI. This qualitative method focused on identifying, coding, and interpreting thematic patterns and philosophical views to deepen the understanding of the enduring relevance of Kierkegaard's view in contemporary AI discourse.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing Qualitative Textual Analysis to explore Kierkegaard's view on human reason and its relevance to contemporary philosophy of artificial intelligence. Qualitative Textual Analysis, a flexible and interpretive method that facilitated a deep understanding of the meanings, themes, and arguments present in selected texts (Bengtsson, 2016). This design allowed for the systematic examination of philosophical writings, emphasizing both the content and contextual meanings, which was suitable for investigating complex conceptual questions about cognition and AI.

Texts were purposively selected to include primary works of Kierkegaard, such as *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which provided views into his understanding of human reason, subjectivity, and existential awareness. Contemporary philosophical and ethical literature on artificial intelligence was also included to contextualize Kierkegaard's view within ongoing debates about AI's scope and limitations.

The analytical process involved thematic coding of the texts to identify and interpret core themes, including subjective truth, existential choice, human intelligence, and AI's limitations. NVivo software supported the organization and retrieval of coded textual units, ensuring a rigorous and transparent analysis. This design was well-suited to philosophical inquiry, aiming to generate nuanced knowledge that bridged classical existential philosophy and modern AI discourse.

#### B. Data Collection

Data were collected through purposive selection of philosophical texts by Kierkegaard including *Fear and Trembling* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as well as contemporary writings on AI philosophy and ethics. These texts were chosen for their relevance to the themes of human reason, subjectivity, existential awareness, and artificial intelligence. Textual data consisted of passages, excerpts, and arguments drawn directly from these sources.

#### C. Instrument

The primary instrument of data collection and analysis was the researcher, who performed close reading, annotation, and coding of the selected texts. NVivo software was used to support the organization, coding, and retrieval of textual data, facilitating systematic management of large amounts of qualitative data.

#### D. Data Analysis

Analysis followed a thematic coding approach within the Qualitative Textual Analysis framework. A coding scheme was developed to identify key themes such as subjective truth, existential choice, human reason, and AI's limitations. The researcher coded text segments according to these themes, and then performed interpretive thematic analysis to extract philosophical views and examine how Kierkegaard's view relate to modern AI discourse.

#### E. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed by accurately citing and referencing all texts, respecting intellectual property rights. Since no human participants were involved, informed consent was not applicable. The researcher ensured faithful representation of original texts while providing transparent interpretation and critical reflection.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- a. Explore Kierkegaard's view on human reason and cognition
  - i. Emerging Theme 1: Subjective Truth and the Individual Self

Kierkegaard's philosophy emphasized that human reason was rooted in subjectivity and the individual's inward relationship with existence. He asserted that truth was not merely objective knowledge but something lived and experienced personally through inward reflection and faith. As Kierkegaard famously wrote, "Truth is Subjectivity" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1846), highlighting that genuine understanding arose from the individual's passionate engagement with existence, not from detached rational analysis. This supported the finding that human cognition involved inward self-awareness and existential authenticity, which AI, as a mechanical system, lacked fundamentally. Kierkegaard's focus on inwardness and selfhood underscored the essential difference between human reason and artificial intelligence.

- ii. Emerging Theme 2: Human Reason as Existential and Distinct

Kierkegaard highlighted the uniqueness and moral depth of human reason, which was inseparable from faith, choice, and moral responsibility. He insisted that becoming a true self required a "leap of faith" an act of will that transcended rational calculation. As

he stated, “The greatest hazard of all, losing one’s self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all” (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 1849).

This existential struggle revealed that AI lacked self-awareness and moral depth inherent in human reasoning, which goes beyond algorithmic processes. Kierkegaard’s thought aligned with contemporary critiques that AI lacked authentic existence, inwardness, and moral consciousness (Bryson, 2018)

b. Investigate themes related to AI’s capabilities and limits

i. Emerging Theme 1: Absence of Subjective Consciousness in AI

The study found a clear distinction between human inward consciousness and AI’s external and functional operations. Kierkegaard’s reflections on inwardness described self-consciousness as a synthesis of finite and infinite a tension that AI could not experience. He wrote, “A human being is spirit. Spirit is the self” (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 1849), meaning the self was a reflective relation, not a product of computation. This subjective consciousness was absent in AI, which operated without inward awareness or despair, supporting the conclusion that AI’s imitation of intelligence remains superficial and mechanistic (Lumbreras & Garrido-Merchán, 2024).

ii. Emerging Theme 2: Ethical and Existential Dimensions Missing in AI

Kierkegaard integrated reason with ethical and spiritual existence, asserting that understanding was authentic only when lived responsibly and with faith. Without the capacity for ethical selfhood, AI could not engage in moral reasoning or experience existential anxiety key elements of human life. As Kierkegaard observed, “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom” (*The concept of anxiety*, 1844), a condition that AI could never experience or comprehend. Thus, AI’s lack of freedom, responsibility, and inner spiritual demonstrated its incapacity for genuine philosophical or moral engagement (Silva, 2025).

c. Analyze implications of Kierkegaard’s view for understanding the limits of AI

i. Emerging Theme 1: Inward Subjectivity as the Core of Human

Kierkegaard’s famous assertion that truth lay within the inward individual, not in external systems, challenges computationalism notions equating intelligence with data manipulation. His philosophy called for turning inward to understand existence and the self. This existential inwardness, unlike AI’s data-based reasoning, formed the core of human philosophy and self-understanding, reaffirming that genuine cognition required lived, subjective experience.

ii. Emerging Theme 2: Ethical Reflection for Responsible AI Development

Finally, Kierkegaard’s ethical outlook prioritized personal responsibility and authenticity. He argued that every action should be guided by inward conviction and moral seriousness: “To dare is to lose one’s footing momentarily. Not to dare is to lose oneself” (*Either/Or*. 1843). These views could guide responsible AI governance that respected human values, responsibility, authenticity and prevents technological overreach (Bryson, 2018).

## V. CONCLUSION

This qualitative research study applied Søren Kierkegaard’s view on human reason and their implications for the philosophy of artificial intelligence through Qualitative Textual Analysis. The findings revealed critical themes that highlight the unique and distinct nature of human reason as fundamentally intertwined with subjectivity, existential awareness, and ethical responsibility.

Kierkegaard’s perspective emphasized that true reason was based on inward reflection and lived experience, as expressed in his assertion that “truth is subjectivity” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 1846). This inward journey of self-understanding distinguished human cognition from AI’s mechanistic and objectivist processes, highlighted the unique views of human reason brought to understanding intelligence.

The study also found that AI lacks subjective consciousness, freedom, and moral depth dimensions integral to Kierkegaard’s understanding of human existence. His insight that “The greatest hazard of all, losing one’s self can occur very quietly in the world” (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 1849) underscored the existential and ethical dimensions absent in artificial systems. Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the individual’s struggle for authentic selfhood and faith exposes AI’s limitations as a mere functional tool devoid of genuine interiority or choice.

Kierkegaard’s integrated approach to reason, faith, and ethical existence provided valuable guidance for responsible AI development by stressing authenticity, personal responsibility, and moral reflection. This study concluded that philosophy, grounded in inwardness and ethical awareness remains essential in the age of AI. Incorporating Kierkegaardian view into AI ethics could foster technologies that support rather than diminish human authenticity and dignity.

This research confirmed that while AI advanced, understanding AI through Kierkegaard’s view highlighted the depth, freedom, and existential essence of human philosophical reasoning as articulated by Kierkegaard. The role of philosophy in interpreting, guiding, and critiquing AI remained vital for ensuring ethical, meaningful, and human-centered technological progress.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings from this study on Søren Kierkegaard's view into human reason and their implications for artificial intelligence, several recommendations were proposed to support ethical AI development and enhance philosophical engagement with AI.

First, educational institutions and researchers were encouraged to integrate existential and classical philosophical principles, such as those articulated by Kierkegaard, into AI ethics curricula and training programs. As highlighted by Kierkegaardian pedagogy, human intelligence was rooted in subjectivity, freedom and the passionate search for authentic existence (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 1846). Incorporating these perspectives deepened critical reflection among AI developers and ethicists about the existential limits and moral purposes of AI technology.

Second, AI developers and policymakers were urged to prioritize ethical frameworks foregrounding human authenticity, responsibility, and self-awareness, drawing on Kierkegaard holistic vision of reason as inseparable from ethical and spiritual dimensions. This approach addressed warnings about the "dehumanization of learning" and the potential loss of empathy when AI expected roles traditionally guided by human judgment (Saavedra, 2024). By fostering technologies that assisted rather than dominated human decision-making, the AI field cultivated more responsible innovations.

Third, continued interdisciplinary research bridging philosophy, existentialism and AI studies was essential to clarify the distinctions between computational intelligence and human subjectivity. Kierkegaard's view on inwardness, despair, and the leap of faith offered a valuable conceptual tool for understanding why existential awareness and moral responsibility remain uniquely human and unattainable for AI (Lumbreras & Garrido-Merchán, 2024).

Lastly, collaboration between educators, technologists, existentialists, and communities was strengthened to create AI environments that respected not only technical proficiency but also ethical reflection, human freedom, and existential growth. Maintaining existential and classical education subjects like logic, rhetoric, and ethics was fundamental to cultivating reflective and ethical AI users and creators (Saavedra, 2024).

By implementing these recommendations, the dialogue between philosophy and AI ensured that technological advancements complemented human authenticity and moral flourishing, contributed positively to the relevance of Kierkegaard's philosophy in the age of artificial intelligence

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to acknowledge the support and efforts of various individuals and families for the success of this academic journey in the field of Philosophy.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Donna Mae B. Fabillar and our baby Kassi Amanda B. Fabillar, whose love, patience, and understanding inspired me to persevere and stay dedicated throughout this work.

I was deeply grateful to Prof. Garry Gulay, my professor in Contemporary Existentialism, for his encouragement, guidance, and valuable insights that greatly contributed to the development and completion of this study.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my family Geb Abesada, Genaira Rose Fabillar, and Gwyneth Fabillar for their constant support, prayers, and understanding. My heartfelt gratitude also went to my wife's family Ethel Lalaine Berbigal Morales, Althea Bea C. Berbigal and Jud Deo C. Berbigal for their kindness, encouragement, and belief in my academic pursuit.

I would also like to acknowledge Fitz Pearl P. Borja, my coach, for her motivation, guidance, and inspiration throughout my academic journey.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to Elson Pastrano, whose encouragement and faith gave me hope and inspiration to continue my Master of Arts in Philosophy. The collective love, understanding, and support of all these individuals made the completion of this study possible.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bryson, J. (2018). Artificial intelligence and pro-social behavior. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 20(1), 49–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-018-9443-y>
- [2] Westphal, M. (2018). Reply to Eleanor Helms on Faith versus Reason in Kierkegaard. *Faith and Philosophy*, 35(3), 367–372. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil2018613105>
- [3] Bengtsson, M. (2014). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *Nursing Plus Open*, 2, 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- [4] Kierkegaard, S. (2024). *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric* (Vol. 1) [Print]. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. <https://hackettpublishing.com/fear-and-trembling>
- [5] Obrenovic, B. (2024). Generative AI and Human–Robot Interaction: Implications and Future Agenda for business, society and ethics. *AI & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-024-01889-0>

- [6] Kierkegaard, S. (1843). *Either/Or [Excerpts]* (Vols. 1–2). Penguin Classics / Harper Torch books. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/64117>
- [7] Berge, B. (2020). *Introduction: The Ambiguities of Anxiety — Select History of a theme in 19th and 20th century philosophy and psychology* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429449731-1>

