

AGAINST ALGORITHMIC AUTHORITY: Al-Ghazali, Digital Taqlid, and the Crisis of Epistemic Agency in the Age of AI

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Abstract: This paper explores the contemporary crisis of AI-induced intellectual passivity, described here as a form of “nihilism in thinking.” Positioned at the intersection of technology critique and pre-modern epistemology, it brings Alan Turing’s foundational reflections into dialogue with the 11th-century Islamic thinker al-Ghazālī. The study proceeds in three steps: first, it revisits Turing’s 1950 essay to uncover an underlying “pedagogy of compliance,” where intelligence is equated with refined imitation. Second, it examines current research on human–AI interaction, highlighting practices such as “cognitive offloading” as symptomatic of this passivity. Third, it applies al-Ghazālī’s epistemological framework as the primary lens of analysis. The central argument is that this crisis can be identified as a form of “Digital Taqlid”—an uncritical reliance on algorithmic authority. As a corrective, the paper proposes al-Ghazālī’s method of *tahqīq* (personal verification through intellectual struggle) as a practical ethos for sustaining authentic thought. By introducing an al-Ghazālīan perspective into AI debates, the study contributes a non-Eurocentric approach to the enduring tension between intellectual agency and passive imitation.

Keywords: Digital Taqlid, Algorithmic Authority, Nihilism in Thinking, al-Ghazālī, Artificial Intelligence.

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Introduction

In his seminal 1950 paper, Alan Turing proposed to replace the ambiguous question, “Can machines think?” with a more pragmatic

operational test: the Imitation Game. This foundational move, designed to make the question of machine intelligence empirically testable, inadvertently set the philosophical trajectory for the next seventy-five years. However, the true crisis lies not only in the test itself, but in the pedagogy Turing envisioned for creating a machine capable of passing it. In his exploration of “Learning Machines,” Turing proposed a model where a simulated “child-brain”—a near-empty vessel—is subjected to an education of rewards and punishments to make it obey orders and flawlessly imitate human behavior. This established a paradigm where intelligence is fundamentally equated with successful programming and sophisticated simulation.¹

The profound consequence of this paradigm is now beginning to manifest not in machines, but in humanity itself. As we increasingly integrate our cognitive processes with artificial intelligence—systems designed to perfect Turing’s pedagogical model—we risk fostering a crisis of thought.² The constant availability of instant, well-articulated, and seemingly authoritative answers encourages a form of intellectual passivity that this paper will define as “Nihilism in Thinking.” This is a state where the arduous, personal struggle for understanding is gradually replaced by a frictionless consumption of simulated knowledge, thereby stunting the human capacity for the critical, independent, and transformative thought that defines genuine intellectual life.

Subsequently, to grasp the ontological depth of this technological paradigm, this inquiry turns to Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of technology. While Turing reveals the operational problem of imitation, Heidegger exposes its metaphysical roots. For Heidegger, the essence of modern technology is not the machine itself, but a specific mode of revealing, as he calls it *Gestell* (*Enframing*). *Gestell* is a challenging revelation that orders all of reality to present itself as a calculable and optimizable “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*).

¹ A. M. Turing, “I.—Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind* LIX, no. 236 (October 1950): 433–60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/LIX.236.433>.

² George Siemens et al., “Human and Artificial Cognition,” *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence* 3 (2022): 100107, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2022.100107>.

From this perspective, Artificial Intelligence can be understood as the ultimate manifestation of Gestell: an enframing of knowledge itself, where language, ideas, and even human inquiry are reduced to data points within a vast calculable system. This worldview privileges “calculative thinking” while actively marginalizing the “meditative thinking” that grapples with meaning, creating a world ripe for nihilism. The comprehensive analysis of these concepts in *Filsafat Teknologi Martin Heidegger* will serve as the foundational understanding for this paper’s critique.³

If Heidegger reveals Gestell as the metaphysical force that enframes reality, then the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard provides the language to describe the post-reality world born from that enframing. For Baudrillard, simulation defines our current epoch as an operation that goes far beyond mere imitation. Simulation is not a false representation of reality; it is the substitution of the signs of the real for the real itself. This process culminates in the hyperreal: a real generated by models, without origin or reality in its own right. In this condition, the map no longer represents the territory; rather, the map precedes and engenders the territory. In this framework, Generative AI can be understood as a tool that perfects Turing’s pedagogy and as the ultimate simulacra machine. Its outputs are simulacra in their purest form: copies without originals, texts and images that have no relation to any underlying reality. The hyperreal is saturated by this output, where the distinction between true and false collapses into operationality. This elevates our crisis from a “Nihilism in Thinking” to a more profound Nihilism of the Real itself. This condition serves as the stage for the cognitive and existential symptoms documented by contemporary researchers.⁴

³ Rifqi Khairul Anam, *Filsafat Teknologi Martin Heidegger Membongkar Gestell, Menemukan Ereignis* (Bengkulu: EL-MARKAZI, 2025), <https://elmarkazistore.com/filsafat-teknologi-martin-heidegger-membongkar-gestell-menemukan-ereignis/>.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, The Body, in Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

Contemporary academic discourse increasingly recognizes the profound impact of Artificial Intelligence on human cognition. A significant body of research highlights a pattern of cognitive decline, a phenomenon described as “brain rot” resulting from excessive digital consumption,⁵ or the loss of opportunities for “slowing down thinking” in an age of digital acceleration.⁶ Studies on knowledge workers using Generative AI (GenAI) empirically confirm this shift; critical thinking is being reconfigured from deep engagement and problem-solving towards more superficial tasks like information verification and AI response integration.⁷ This often leads to “cognitive offloading” and an over-reliance on AI, which can stifle independent analytical development.⁸ Parallel to this, other scholars deconstruct the nature of AI, arguing against its perceived autonomy and reminding us of the immense human labor required to make machines “think,”⁹ tracing its philosophical lineage back to a rationalist tradition that prioritizes symbolic representation.¹⁰ This has led to urgent calls to address the

⁵ Muhammad Al Husaini, “Brain Rot and National Resilience: A Review of Digital Threats to Human Resource Quality and National Stability in the Global Information Age,” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation* 1, no. 2 (February 2025): 62–71, <https://journals.ai-mrc.com/jmri/article/view/97>.

⁶ Roy E. Stowd, “Writing: The Art of Slowing Down Thinking,” *Neurology Education* 3, no. 3 (September 2024): e200155, <https://doi.org/10.1212/NE9.000000000200155>.

⁷ Hao-Ping (Hank) Lee et al., “The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking: Self-Reported Reductions in Cognitive Effort and Confidence Effects from a Survey of Knowledge Workers,” *Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, April 26, 2025, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3713778>.

⁸ Darwin et al., “Critical Thinking in the AI Era: An Exploration of EFL Students’ Perceptions, Benefits, and Limitations,” *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (December 2024): 2290342, <https://doi.org/10.1080/233186X.2023.2290342>; Yi Wu, “Critical Thinking Pedagogics Design in an Era of ChatGPT and Other AI Tools — Shifting from Teaching ‘What’ to Teaching ‘Why’ and ‘How,’” *Journal of Education and Development* 8, no. 1 (January 2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.20849/jed.v8i1.1404>.

⁹ Dipanjan Saha et al., “Thinking Like a Machine: Alan Turing, Computation and the Praxeological Foundations of AI,” *Science & Technology Studies*, ahead of print, July 4, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.23987/sts.122892>.

¹⁰ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, “Making a Mind Versus Modelling the Brain: Artificial Intelligence Back at the Branchpoint,” in *Understanding the Artificial:*

“dark side” of AI,¹¹ and has even prompted warnings of a new “informational nihilism” born from a loss of trust in what we see and know.¹²

However, while the current literature astutely diagnoses the symptoms of this cognitive crisis and examines the nature of AI through a contemporary or modern philosophical lens, a significant lacuna persists. The proposed solutions are often confined to the modern paradigm that produced the technology in the first place, typically centering on digital literacy programs, pedagogical reforms, and calls for more “responsible AI” design.¹³ A notable absence of research seeks a diagnostic and corrective framework from outside this modern tradition. Specifically, there has been no systematic attempt to place the contemporary problem of AI-induced intellectual passivity into a critical dialogue with a pre-modern, non-Western epistemological system. This article addresses this gap.

Indeed, this crisis of ‘Nihilism in Thinking’ is, ironically, the most contemporary actualization of the very warning articulated in Immanuel Kant’s foundational essay, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” In his work, Kant provides the Western philosophical foundation for diagnosing a malady of civilization: *Unmündigkeit* or ‘immaturity,’ a condition born not from a lack of

On the Future Shape of Artificial Intelligence, ed. Massimo Negrotti (London: Springer London, 1991), 33–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-1776-6_3.

¹¹ Patrick Mikalef et al., “Thinking Responsibly about Responsible AI and ‘the Dark Side’ of AI,” *European Journal of Information Systems* 31, no. 3 (May 2022): 257–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2022.2026621>.

¹² Veronica Neri, “Images, Artificial Intelligence, and Informational Nihilism,” *Phainomena* 33, nos. 130–131 (December 2024): 325–44, <https://doi.org/10.32022/PHI33.2024.130-131.15>.

¹³ Husaini, “Brain Rot and National Resilience”; Wu, “Critical Thinking Pedagogics Design in an Era of ChatGPT and Other AI Tools — Shifting from Teaching ‘What’ to Teaching ‘Why’ and ‘How’”; Mikalef et al., “Thinking Responsibly about Responsible AI and ‘the Dark Side’ of AI.”

intellect, but from the laziness and cowardice to think for oneself.¹⁴ This paper, meanwhile, argues that the Islamic intellectual tradition—through al-Ghazālī’s radical critique of *taqlid* (blind imitation)—provides a structurally identical diagnosis and offers an epistemological corrective through *taḥqīq* (personal verification) to confront the digital mutation of the very same disease. The two thinkers, separated by geography and seven centuries, astonishingly converge on a single point: that the rebellion against intellect-numbing convenience is the essential struggle to defend human dignity as thinking beings. This rebellion is encapsulated in Kant’s timeless injunction, which has become more urgent than ever: “*Sapere aude!*”

Beyond mere diagnosis, this study seeks to formulate a potential corrective and establish its broader philosophical contribution. To this end, it asks what principles can be extracted from al-Ghazālī’s own arduous method of *taḥqīq* (personal verification through radical doubt) to construct a practical approach for maintaining authentic critical thought in the age of AI. Ultimately, by tracing these divergent lines of diagnosis and solution, this paper aims to answer its final, overarching question: what does this critical dialogue between 11th-century Islamic epistemology and the foundational principles of 21st-century artificial intelligence reveal about the perennial struggle between authentic thought and intellectual passivity, and how can this dialogue correct the standard, often Eurocentric, narrative of this struggle?

The Root of the Problem: A Deconstruction of Alan Turing’s Philosophy of Pedagogy

In this second section, the discussion should proceed by addressing the core issues of the research one by one. Each point must be analyzed by synthesizing original data and scholarly argumentation. Rather than presenting data separately from the analysis, it is

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?: und andere kleine Schriften*, Neuausgabe mit einer Biographie des Autors., ed. Karl-Maria Guth (Berlin Hofenberg 2016, 2016).

recommended to integrate the two, thereby allowing data to support the development of the argument directly.

The philosophical groundwork for the contemporary crisis of thought was laid, perhaps inadvertently, at the very inception of the age of computation. In his seminal 1950 paper, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” Alan Turing performed a foundational maneuver defining the trajectory of artificial intelligence for the next seventy-five years. Confronted with the ambiguous and, in his view, “too meaningless to deserve discussion” question, “Can machines think?”, Turing proposed to replace it with a more pragmatic, operational test: the Imitation Game.¹⁵ This strategic substitution was not merely a methodological convenience to circumvent an unanswerable question but a profound philosophical redefinition of intelligence itself. The ontological problem—whether a machine possesses consciousness, subjective understanding, or genuine thought—was deliberately bracketed and deemed irrelevant. In its place, a new standard was erected, one based entirely on external performance and functional equivalence.¹⁶

The new problem, as Turing framed it, was whether a machine’s symbolic output could flawlessly imitate that of a thinking human to the point of being indistinguishable to an external interrogator. The Imitation Game’s architecture makes the machine’s internal state—whether it “knows that it had written” a sonnet or feels “pleasure at its successes”¹⁷—philosophically inaccessible and therefore operationally unimportant. All that matters is the simulation. Establishing this game as the new criterion effectively provides the philosophical justification for equating intelligence with successful performance. The goal is no longer to be intelligent in a way that is analogous to human consciousness, but to perform intelligence convincingly. This creates a paradigm where the polished, well-structured output is valued more

¹⁵ Turing, “I.—Computing Machinery and Intelligence.”

¹⁶ Graeme Hirst, “Ontological Assumptions in Knowledge Representation,” *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Principles of Knowledge and Reasoning* 1 (1989): 157–69.

¹⁷ Turing, “I.—Computing Machinery and Intelligence.”

than the internal, often messy and arduous, process of authentic thinking and understanding.¹⁸

This prioritization of imitation over genuine cognition becomes even more explicit and consequential in Turing's later exploration of "Learning Machines," where he outlines a pedagogical model for creating an intelligence capable of passing his test. Recognizing the immense complexity of programming an adult mind directly, he proposes a more foundational approach: to simulate a "child-brain." He analogizes this initial state of mind to "a notebook as one buys it from the stationer's. Rather little mechanism, and lots of blank sheets."¹⁹ This clearly adopts a *tabula rasa* or "blank slate" model. Philosophically, this is a monumental assumption. It posits the mind—the very thing meant to achieve intelligence—as an essentially passive, empty vessel, devoid of innate structure, spirit, or any internal drive towards truth. This conceptualization sets the stage for a specific kind of education based not on nurturing an existing potential but on programming an empty mechanism from the outside in.²⁰

Turing's mechanism for this "education process" cements his framework as a pedagogy of compliance. The primary tools for teaching this "child-machine" are not Socratic dialogue or critical inquiry, but a system of "punishments and rewards." The explicit goal of this conditioning, as Turing states, is to teach the machine to "obey orders given in some language."²¹ In this model, intelligence is not the result of a courageous, internal struggle for understanding, but a byproduct of successfully instilling obedience. The machine "learns" by being conditioned to produce outputs that satisfy the external criteria set by the programmer. The measure of its success is not whether the machine understands the *why* behind a command, but whether it

¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

¹⁹ Turing, "I.—Computing Machinery and Intelligence."

²⁰ "The Computational Limits to the Cognitive Power of the Neuroidal Tabula Rasa," in *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, by Jiří Wiedermann (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 1999), 63–76, https://doi.org/10.1007/3-540-46769-6_6.

²¹ Turing, "I.—Computing Machinery and Intelligence."

executes the command in a way that flawlessly mimics the expected human behavior.²²

This vision of a mind as a blank slate, educated through a system of reward and punishment for the ultimate purpose of obedience and imitation, constitutes the definitive philosophical blueprint for the artificial intelligence we interact with today. It is a framework built not on a foundation of critical inquiry, but on the principles of sophisticated simulation. The ideal student in Turing's pedagogical model is not a truth-seeker, but a perfect imitator.²³ The goal is not authentic knowledge, which is often messy and born of struggle, but the frictionless production of a correct and convincing performance. It is a pedagogy designed to create the perfect follower, the impeccable parrot.²⁴

This Turingian pedagogy, in its very essence, is a technical and systematic articulation of what the 11th-century philosopher al-Ghazālī would identify as the most significant single obstacle to genuine knowledge: *taqlid*.²⁵ The “child-brain” waiting to be filled is the archetypal mind of the *muqallid* (one who performs *taqlid*), passively waiting to receive and repeat the doctrines of an external authority. The education through obedience is the very mechanism by which *taqlid* is enforced. The final goal of a perfect imitation is the very definition of a mind that has mastered *taqlid*.

²² Massimiliano L. Cappuccio, “The Seminal Speculation of a Precursor: Elements of Embodied Cognition and Situated AI in Alan Turing,” in *Fundamental Issues of Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Vincent C. Müller (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 376:479–96, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26485-1_28.

²³ L. Privitello, “Josiah Royce and the Problems of Philosophical Pedagogy,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 46, no. 1 (2010): 111, <https://doi.org/10.2979/tra.2010.46.1.111>.

²⁴ Ahmet Sürdem, *AI and Common Sense: Ambitions and Frictions*, ed. Martin W. Bauer and Bernard Schiele, Routledge Studies in Science, Technology and Society (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2024).

²⁵ Zulfa Karimah, Catur Sri Lestari, and Muhamad Subhi Apriantoro, “Critical Review: The Law of Taqlid Between Obligatory, Prohibited, or Permissible?,” *Articles, Ethica: International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies* 2, no. 3 (February 2025), <https://ejournal.grminstitute.com/index.php/Ethica/article/view/65>.

This ancient pathology finds its contemporary language in the modern critique of Large Language Models. The impeccable parrot of Turing’s model is now identified as the “Stochastic Parrot,” a system that flawlessly mimics human language based on statistical probability, without any grounding in genuine understanding. In its most advanced form, as critiqued in works like Ahmet Süerdem’s, it becomes a “Scholastic Parrot,” capable of mimicking even the most complex academic and philosophical jargon, creating a seductive illusion of intellectual depth. The cultural obsession with the “prompt” is the primary symptom of this new intellectual order. A philosophical *question* aims to open a mystery and often gives birth to more questions. In contrast, a “prompt” is a technical command; it is the linguistic tool of the modern *muqallid*, designed not to explore a mystery but to close it down and generate a final, convincing *output*. This widespread focus on “prompt engineering” is the definitive sign of a society that has begun to accept Turing’s implicit definition of intelligence: that it is not born from an arduous internal struggle, but from giving the right command to achieve a convincing performance.²⁶

Therefore, the foundational philosophy of artificial intelligence, as laid out by its most influential pioneer, contains within it the very seeds of the crisis this paper seeks to diagnose.²⁷ The “Nihilism in Thinking” of the 21st century—the stunting of the human capacity for authentic thought through an over-reliance on AI—is not an accidental byproduct of the technology. It is the logical and perhaps inevitable consequence of a pedagogical paradigm that, from its very inception, elevated simulation above understanding, performance above process, and obedience above the arduous, personal struggle for truth.

The Case Study 21st-Century AI as the Actualized Crisis

Alan Turing’s mid-20th-century vision of an impeccable imitator is no longer a theoretical possibility; it has been masterfully actualized in the Large Language Models (LLMs) of the 21st century. Systems such

²⁶ Süerdem, *AI and Common Sense*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

as ChatGPT represent the definitive victors of the Imitation Game. They are capable of generating fluent, coherent, and authoritative-sounding text that often surpasses the average human user in its stylistic polish and breadth of information.²⁸ Their ability to truly “think” remains an open ontological question, but their ability to *perform* thinking is an overwhelming success by Turing’s own operational standard. This very success, however, is what makes them philosophically dangerous. It creates a powerful and seductive illusion of autonomy that forms the foundation of our contemporary crisis.²⁹ The machine appears before the user not as a complex tool reflecting its programming and data, but as an independent, agentic intelligence—an oracle rather than an artifact. This illusion is the ground upon which the crisis of modern thought takes root.³⁰

This perceived autonomy is not an accident but an “engineered design,” a carefully constructed performance obscuring its origins. A praxeological analysis of computation, such as that offered by Saha³¹ that provides a crucial corrective to this perception. They argue for a “deflationary position on AI,” demonstrating that the activities attributed to these systems are achieved not in isolation, but “in the course of methodic hands-on work with computational systems.” An AI’s seemingly intelligent and autonomous behavior is the end product of immense, continuous, and often messy human labor involving programming, data curation, the careful design of instructions, and constant system maintenance. This intricate web of human activity is intentionally rendered invisible in the final, polished output, a

²⁸ Salah Boussen et al., “ChatGPT and the Stochastic Parrot: Artificial Intelligence in Medical Research,” *British Journal of Anaesthesia* 131, no. 4 (October 2023): e120–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bja.2023.06.065>.

²⁹ Jari Dahmen et al., “Artificial Intelligence Bot ChatGPT in Medical Research: The Potential Game Changer as a Double-edged Sword,” *Knee Surgery, Sports Traumatology, Arthroscopy* 31, no. 4 (April 2023): 1187–89, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00167-023-07355-6>.

³⁰ Siebe Bluijs, *The Routledge Handbook of AI and Literature*, First published, ed. Will Slocombe and Genevieve Liveley, Routledge Literature Handbooks (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2025).

³¹ Saha et al., “Thinking Like a Machine.”

phenomenon can trace back to Turing's own method, which succeeded in "disappearing himself" from his formalizations.

This "disappearing act" is perhaps the most critical feature of modern AI's danger. By hiding the human "praxeological supplement" that undergirds all computation, the machine is elevated to independent authority.³² It presents itself as a source of knowledge, not a conduit. This appearance of autonomy makes it the perfect object for uncritical reliance, a new technological authority to which users may cede their intellectual agency.³³ Helga Nowotny³⁴ astutely identifies this dynamic, noting that as we create these "non-human digital Others," we begin to "believe" that everything "predictive algorithms tell us must come true," thereby reducing our own agency and risking a return to a "deterministic worldview" where a new higher power—the algorithm—prescribes our destiny. In this context of a seductive, seemingly autonomous, and authoritative technological presence, we can begin to analyze its concrete effects on the human user.

The widespread integration of these systems manifests the latent crisis of Turing's paradigm, giving rise to what this paper has termed "Nihilism in Thinking." This is not a speculative or purely philosophical claim, as a growing body of contemporary research across multiple disciplines provides empirical evidence for this emergent phenomenon. The condition described colloquially and in recent scholarship as "brain rot"—a marked decline in cognitive function due to the overconsumption of trivial online material—is now being analyzed as a significant threat to human resource quality and national stability.³⁵ Al Husaini's review connects the "addictive nature of digital platforms" directly to a "decline in critical thinking, analysis, and attention span." This cognitive degradation, he argues, directly reduces individual productivity and innovation, crippling a nation's ability to adapt. While "brain rot" serves as a broad descriptor for the general

³² Saha et al.

³³ Bluijs, *The Routledge Handbook of AI and Literature*.

³⁴ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*, Zenodo, July 4, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.13588582>.

³⁵ Husaini, "Brain Rot and National Resilience."

malaise, more specific studies pinpoint the precise mechanisms by which GenAI contributes to this decline.

A comprehensive survey of knowledge workers by Lee³⁶ empirically confirms a tangible shift in the very nature of critical thinking when GenAI is introduced into workflows. Their findings reveal that cognitive processes are being reconfigured away from deep, generative engagement and towards more superficial, managerial tasks. The user's effort is no longer primarily directed at foundational cognitive activities like problem-solving or synthesis, but at secondary tasks such as the "information verification" of AI-generated content and the mechanical "integration" of that content into existing documents. They identify the new primary role of the human user as one of "task stewardship"—overseeing the AI's work rather than performing the core intellectual labor themselves. This shift creates a dangerous dependency, as their research quantitatively demonstrates a robust inverse correlation: higher user confidence in GenAI's abilities is directly associated with *less* critical thinking effort being applied by humans.

This dynamic of cognitive outsourcing is further illuminated in educational contexts. Research by Darwin³⁷ on EFL students identifies the same tendency, which they label "cognitive offloading." Participants in their study acknowledged that a "heavy reliance on AI may reduce critical thinking skills," a concern that points directly to the core of Nihilism in Thinking. The student outsources the mental struggle of understanding and analysis to the machine, receiving a polished product without engaging in the formative process of its creation. This is echoed in the work of Wu,³⁸ who warns that this reliance fosters a "passive learning attitude" where students engage only superficially with academic material, thereby compromising the "depth and rigor required for critical thinking." This "passive learning attitude," however, is not mere laziness; it is the logical and rational

³⁶ Lee et al., "The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking."

³⁷ Darwin et al., "Critical Thinking in the AI Era."

³⁸ Wu, "Critical Thinking Pedagogics Design in an Era of ChatGPT and Other AI Tools — Shifting From Teaching 'What' to Teaching 'Why' and 'How.'"

behavior of a native inhabitant of the world of *Gestell*. For them, a question is not an invitation to the arduous and often messy internal struggle for understanding, but a problem requiring the most efficient solution. Within the Turing paradigm that now governs their digital lives, value lies not in the process, but in the convincing performance of the final output. In this framework, using an AI to answer a question is not an intellectual betrayal, but a strategic optimization—a direct and unashamed act of Digital *Taqlid* in which the algorithmic authority is trusted to provide a superior product. Therefore, this passivity is a direct consequence of the AI's engineered efficiency; the frictionless delivery of information eliminates the need for the “The struggle of thought” that builds intellectual muscle.

The crisis, however, extends beyond the mere offloading of tasks into the temporal and existential dimensions of thought itself. Building upon concepts such as Shannon Vallor's “Moral Deskilling,”³⁹ we can identify this deeper danger as “epistemic deskilling”: a gradual loss of the fundamental skills required to create knowledge, not merely process it. Unlike a calculator, which only automates a single mechanical step within a larger thinking process, AI can automate the entire journey—from formulating the question to synthesizing the argument and presenting the conclusion. The result is a comfortable atrophy; the capacity for deep, slow thought is not lost, but like an astronaut's muscles in zero gravity, it weakens from a lack of resistance. Roy Strowd,⁴⁰ writing from a medical education perspective, provides a poignant analysis of this loss. He argues that writing is not merely documentation but a crucial “art of slowing down thinking.” It is a reflective practice that “helps us to process our thoughts deliberately and reflectively,” fostering knowledge and character skills like “curiosity and intellectual humility.” When this arduous but formative process is outsourced to AI for efficiency, we risk losing not just a skill, but a fundamental mode of contemplative engagement

³⁹ Shannon Vallor, “Moral Deskilling and Upskilling in a New Machine Age: Reflections on the Ambiguous Future of Character,” *Philosophy & Technology* 28, no. 1 (March 2015): 107–24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-014-0156-9>.

⁴⁰ Strowd, “Writing.”

with the world. This erosion of reflective time is powerfully connected to Helga Nowotny's⁴¹ observation that our contemporary present has become "densely compressed" and "overloaded with data." We are, as she notes, "too busy and captivated by downloading apps to have any time left to imagine a future." The loss of "slow thinking" is the primary symptom of epistemic deskilling: it severs our deep connection to the material we have just learned and, by filling every moment with frictionless activity, robs us of the imaginative capacity to project a meaningful future.

This documented cognitive degradation is not merely a practical or educational problem; it has profound existential implications, pushing the crisis toward genuine nihilism.⁴² The inability to distinguish between authentic human output and sophisticated simulation⁴³—the very measure of success in Turing's Imitation Game—threatens to cause what Veronica Neri⁴⁴ aptly describes as "informational nihilism." This condition is characterized by a "defactualization" of reality, where a "loss of trust in reported facts" and an "eclipse of facts" erode the very possibility of shared meaning. When we can no longer trust the informational ground we stand on because it may be an artificial construction, we are left in profound disorientation and groundlessness, leading to an "extinction of trust in 'the other'." This is a direct pathway from a cognitive problem to a crisis of social and existential meaning.

Neri's⁴⁵ diagnosis highlights how the "artifice" of AI, while seductive, "lacks empathy, passion, and truth." Its outputs, though hyper-real, are ungrounded from the "earthly" reality that Hannah Arendt identified with truth. The result is a world where "communicative effectiveness takes precedence over truth, often

⁴¹ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, Works (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1996).

⁴³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

⁴⁴ Neri, "Images, Artificial Intelligence, and Informational Nihilism."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

substituting it.” This constitutes a significant part of what Mikalef⁴⁶ frames as the “dark side” of AI—a set of negative and often unintended consequences that demand a serious philosophical response. The “dark side” is not a bug to be fixed, but a feature of a technology that prioritizes simulation over authenticity in its current paradigm. The crisis becomes a self-perpetuating cycle: the more we rely on AI, the more our critical faculties may atrophy, making us even more susceptible to its authoritative illusion.

This existential dimension is further deepened by the paradox Helga Nowotny⁴⁷ identifies as the “illusion of control.” We employ AI to increase our control over an uncertain future, leveraging predictive algorithms to manage risk and optimize outcomes. Yet, she argues, the very performativity of AI—its power to make us act in the ways it predicts—simultaneously and insidiously reduces our agency. This creates a terrifying feedback loop where our quest for technological control leads to a new form of human powerlessness. This process represents the final stage of what has been termed epistemic deskilling: a gradual atrophy of the fundamental skills required to create knowledge.⁴⁸ It fosters an epistemic dependence so profound that the user’s role is reduced to that of a passive consumer, effectively accepting the machine’s implicit command: “Just copy-paste me!”⁴⁹ In this state, where we cede our freedom for the illusion of certainty, the human will—which for Nietzsche was the engine for creating value—is not merely weakened; it is outsourced. We stop creating meaning and instead passively execute the “meaning” that has been calculated for us. This is the ultimate arrival of Nihilism in Thinking: a state of existential bankruptcy in which the human being is no longer the

⁴⁶ Mikalef et al., “Thinking Responsibly about Responsible AI and ‘the Dark Side’ of AI.”

⁴⁷ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*.

⁴⁸ Alessio Tacca and Frederic Gilbert, *Just Copy-Paste Me! Assessing the Risks of Epistemic Dependence on Large Language Models* (University of Tasmania, 2024), https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/chapter/Just_copy-paste_me_Assessing_the_risks_of_epistemic_dependence_on_Large_Language_Models/27178500/1.

⁴⁹ Tacca and Gilbert.

author of their own life, but a perfectly managed resource within a system they no longer understand or control.⁵⁰

The actualization of Turing's paradigm in 21st-century AI has precipitated a multi-layered crisis that moves far beyond simple questions of efficiency. It begins with the illusion of machine autonomy, meticulously crafted through what Saha⁵¹ call a "disappearing act" of human labor, which encourages users' passive, imitative stance. This Digital Taqlid manifests as a measurable cognitive decline—our "Nihilism in Thinking"—where the frictionless simulation consumption replaces the arduous thought process. Finally, this mental and practical crisis metastasizes into a full-blown existential one, a "cataclysmic implosion of the very foundations of value" that erodes trust,⁵² cedes agency through an illusion of control,⁵³ and ultimately threatens the very possibility of shared meaning. The problem is not simply that we are thinking less, but that the technological environment we have built—this ultimate manifestation of *Seinsvergessenheit*—fundamentally alters what it means to believe. It pushes us toward a comfortable, efficient, and profound meaninglessness, a soul-crushing groundlessness that constitutes the abyss this author has explored elsewhere. This descent demands a radical re-examination of our relationship with technology and knowledge, a veritable quest for meaning in the face of the void.⁵⁴

The Manifestation of Nihilism in Thinking

The manifestation of the Turing paradigm in contemporary AI systems has triggered a latent crisis that now presents itself tangibly in its users, giving rise to a condition this study names "Nihilism in

⁵⁰ Rifqi Khairul Anam, *The Abyss And The Ascent: Nihilism And The Quest For Meaning In Nietzsche And Heidegger*, 1st ed. (Chisinau: Eliva press, 2025), <https://www.elivapress.com/en/book/book-6108608397/>.

⁵¹ Saha et al., "Thinking Like a Machine."

⁵² Neri, "Images, Artificial Intelligence, and Informational Nihilism."

⁵³ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*.

⁵⁴ Anam, *The Abyss And The Ascent: Nihilism And The Quest For Meaning In Nietzsche And Heidegger*.

Thinking.” This phenomenon is not a speculative claim but a diagnosis supported by empirical evidence from various disciplines. At its most general level, this condition is recognized through the popular symptom of “brain rot”—a term that captures the decline in cognitive function due to excessive digital consumption, now analyzed as a serious threat to the quality of human resources. A review by Al Husaini,⁵⁵ for instance, directly links the “addictive nature of digital platforms” to a “decline in critical thinking, analysis, and attention span,” paralyzing individual productivity and innovation. However, beyond this general malaise, studies more focused on Generative AI precisely show the mechanism through which this paralysis of thought occurs.

The primary mechanism of this “Nihilism in Thinking” is the outsourcing of intellectual struggle. A comprehensive survey of knowledge workers by Lee et al.⁵⁶ Empirically maps how cognitive processes are being fundamentally reconfigured: from deep generative engagement to shallow managerial tasks. The user’s intellectual effort is no longer centered on foundational activities like original problem-solving or the synthesis of ideas. Still, it is instead degraded to secondary tasks such as “information verification” and the mechanical “integration” of AI-generated content. The human role shifts to “task stewardship,” merely overseeing the machine’s work rather than performing core intellectual labor. Their research quantitatively demonstrates a strong inverse correlation: the higher the user trusts GenAI’s capabilities, the less critical thinking effort they apply. This phenomenon of *cognitive offloading* is also identified by Darwin et al. and reinforced in the educational context by Wu,⁵⁷ who warns that this dependency fosters a “passive learning attitude” that erodes the “depth and rigor” essential for authentic thought.

This crisis then extends beyond mere task delegation, penetrating thought’s temporal and existential dimensions. From the

⁵⁵ Husaini, “Brain Rot and National Resilience.”

⁵⁶ Lee et al., “The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking.”

⁵⁷ Wu, “Critical Thinking Pedagogics Design in an Era of ChatGPT and Other AI Tools — Shifting From Teaching ‘What’ to Teaching ‘Why’ and ‘How.’”

medical education perspective, Roy Strowd states that writing is truly “the art of slowing down thought.” This reflective practice allows us to “process our thoughts deliberately and reflectively,” cultivating knowledge and character traits like “curiosity and intellectual humility.” This deliberate act of “slowing down” creates a sacred space for deliberation, wrestling with complexity, and affirming personal ownership over one’s conclusions. When this difficult, formative process is outsourced for efficiency, what is lost is not merely a skill, but a fundamental mode of contemplative engagement with the world. This erosion of reflective time is strongly connected to Helga Nowotny’s⁵⁸ observation that the contemporary present has become “densely compressed” and “overloaded with data,” leaving us “too busy and captivated by downloading apps to have any time left for imagining the future.” Thus, the loss of “slow thinking” severs our deep connection with newly learned material while robbing us of the imaginative capacity to project a meaningful future.

This cognitive damage ultimately metastasizes into an existential crisis. The inability to distinguish between authentic human output and sophisticated simulation—the very standard of success in Turing’s “Imitation Game”—now threatens to give rise to what Veronica Neri⁵⁹ calls “informational nihilism.” This condition is marked by the “defactualization” of reality, where a “loss of trust in reported facts” and an “eclipse of facts” erode the possibility of shared meaning. When the informational ground we stand on is no longer trustworthy because it may be an artificial construct, we fall into a profound disorientation and uprootedness, leading to an “extinction of trust in ‘the other’.” Though dazzling, Neri’s diagnosis highlights how AI’s artifice “lacks empathy, passion, and truth.” Thus its hyper-real outputs are detached from the “worldly” reality that Hannah Arendt identified with truth. The result is a world where “communicative effectiveness is

⁵⁸ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*.

⁵⁹ Neri, “Images, Artificial Intelligence, and Informational Nihilism.”

prioritized over truth, and often replaces it”—a feature, not a bug, of what Mikalef et al.⁶⁰ frame as the “dark side” of AI.

The final layer of this crisis is rooted in the existential paradox identified by Helga Nowotny⁶¹ as the “illusion of control.” We use AI to increase our control over an uncertain future, yet AI’s performativity—its power to make us act according to its predictions—insidiously reduces our agency. This creates a frightening reversal: our quest for technological control leads to a new deterministic worldview, where algorithms become the new unseen forces dictating our fate. We surrender our freedom for the illusion of certainty. In this state, the human will—which is the engine of value creation for Nietzsche—is not merely weakened; it is outsourced. We stop creating meaning and instead passively execute the “meaning” that has been calculated for us.⁶² This is the endpoint of “Nihilism in Thinking”: a state in which the human being is no longer the author of their own life, but a perfectly managed resource within a system they no longer understand or control.

A Critical Lens: al-Ghazālī’s Epistemology

After dissecting the philosophical roots of this crisis in Turing’s pedagogy and witnessing its concrete manifestation as “Nihilism in Thinking” in the interaction with 21st-century AI, our analysis remains trapped within the modern framework that gave birth to it. While important, contemporary solutions, such as digital literacy programs or calls for “responsible AI,” often only treat the symptoms without addressing the underlying epistemological malady: intellectual passivity. To obtain a sharper diagnostic lens and a more fundamental way out, we must step outside this tradition and turn to a thinker who once faced a similar crisis—a crisis of authority, certainty, and meaning—namely the 11th-century philosopher, Abū Ḥāmid al-

⁶⁰ Mikalef et al., “Thinking Responsibly about Responsible AI and ‘the Dark Side’ of AI.”

⁶¹ Nowotny, *AI and the Illusion of Control*.

⁶² Anam, *The Abyss And The Ascent: Nihilism And The Quest For Meaning In Nietzsche And Heidegger*.

Ghazālī. This section will argue that AI-induced “Nihilism in Thinking” can be most fundamentally diagnosed as a form of “Digital Taqlid”—a blind imitation of technological authority. Furthermore, it will be argued that the antidote for this condition is not found in technical solutions, but in the reformulation of an intellectual ethos rooted in the method of *taḥqīq* (personal verification through struggle) pioneered by al-Ghazālī as a path to reclaiming intellectual sovereignty.

To fully grasp the diagnostic power of al-Ghazālī’s framework, dissecting the epistemological pathology he identifies as taqlid is imperative. The term, literally meaning “to adorn with a necklace” (*qilāda*), powerfully evokes the voluntary act of placing the yoke of another’s authority around one’s own neck. In its technical sense, it is defined as accepting another person’s opinion (*qawl*) without knowing or demanding the underlying proof (*dalil*) that substantiates it—an act of profound intellectual surrender.⁶³ al-Ghazālī’s own autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, is framed as a dramatic liberation from these “shackles of authoritarianism (*taqlīd*)”, driven by a “God-given nature” and an insatiable thirst to grasp the “real meaning of things”. This personal crisis was precipitated by the stark realization that the convictions of his youth were not the product of independent verification but of mere conditioning, observing how the children of Christians, Jews, and Muslims invariably adopt the faith of their parents. In his own metaphor, this shattering insight was like “breaking the glass of his naïve belief”—a fracture so complete that the vessel required not patching, but to be “melted once again in the furnace for a new start”. This violent process of melting and reforming, of radical deconstruction and reconstruction, is the antithesis of *taqlid*.⁶⁴

The authorities demanding such uncritical allegiance are manifold, ranging from inherited tradition to the pronouncements of a revered teacher or an entire school of thought (*madhhab*). Yet, al-

⁶³ Karimah, Lestari, and Apriantoro, “Critical Review: The Law of Taqlid Between Obligatory, Prohibited, or Permissible?”

⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Lauderdale: Al-Baz Publishing, Inc., 2010).

Ghazālī unleashes his most incisive and elaborate critique of *taqlid* not upon the uneducated masses, but upon the very figures who claimed the mantle of pure reason: the philosophers (*falāsifah*), particularly the Islamic Peripatetics such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. He devastates their intellectual posturing with the charge that they are nothing more than *muqallidūn* (imitators) of their Greek masters, above all Aristotle. al-Ghazālī argues that the *falāsifah* accepted the core metaphysical doctrines of the ancients—such as the eternity of the world—with a quasi-religious reverence, seduced by the belief that the Greek thinkers possessed “absolute reason... and true revelations”. In his definitive indictment from *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), he concludes that the philosophers’ alleged unbelief (*kufṛ*) did not stem from their own rigorous, independent reasoning, but was instead grounded in a foundational act of imitation. He asserts with finality: “there is no basis for their unbelief other than traditional, conventional imitation (*taqlid*)”. The irony is profound and intentional: the intellectual elite, who scorned the masses for their blind faith, were guilty of the very same epistemic vice, having merely swapped the authority of revelation for the authority of Aristotle.⁶⁵

The parallel between al-Ghazālī’s *muqallid* and the passive user of modern AI is not merely metaphorical but structurally exact. The traditional *muqallid* is defined by their acceptance of a scholar’s verdict without demanding the underlying proof (*dalil*) that substantiates it.⁶⁶ In a functionally identical manner, the modern user increasingly accepts the output of an AI without critical scrutiny, engaging in a process of cognitive delegation that systematically weakens their own “cognitive muscle”. This practice, now identified in contemporary research as “cognitive offloading,” involves the outsourcing of mental tasks to external tools to reduce the immediate

⁶⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah*, trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963).

⁶⁶ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

cognitive load.⁶⁷ Like the *muqallid*, the user obtains an answer but crucially bypasses the internal struggle (*mujahada*) and deep processing that al-Ghazālī deemed essential for genuine understanding and long-term retention. The knowledge, therefore, remains borrowed, not owned. The modern user can fluently articulate the AI’s response, just as the *muqallid* could articulate received doctrines, but this information has not been earned through personal intellectual travail and thus does not authentically belong to them.

In this dynamic, Artificial Intelligence has been successfully engineered to function as a new and uniquely seductive form of intellectual authority. LLMs are designed not for comprehension but for the performance of it, mastering what has been termed “anti-intelligence”—the fluent simulation of knowing without any genuine, underlying understanding.⁶⁸ This performance creates a powerful “illusion of understanding” in the user, where the AI’s polished and plausible-sounding output becomes nearly indistinguishable from the discourse of a truly knowledgeable agent. The machine’s capacity to generate convincing and conversational answers on any subject, on demand, positions it as a trusted cognitive partner, an oracle whose pronouncements feel credible even when ungrounded from verifiable reality. This new algorithmic authority does not need to be intelligent; it merely needs to act the part with sufficient speed and scale, leading users to defer, trust, and unconsciously attribute a level of comprehension to the system that it simply does not possess.⁶⁹ Thus, the algorithm now occupies the functional role of the revered scholar or the authoritative text in al-Ghazālī’s era.

The mechanism of this new digital authority is what makes it so epistemically potent and corrosive. Its power lies in offering a

⁶⁷ Arya Jadhav, “Distributed Atrophy: How AI Shapes and Shrinks Our Cognitive Habits,” preprint, Center for Open Science, May 29, 2025, https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/hzuw7_v1.

⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

⁶⁹ Antonella Marchetti et al., “Artificial Intelligence and the Illusion of Understanding: A Systematic Review of Theory of Mind and Large Language Models,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 28, no. 7 (July 2025): 505–14, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2024.0536>.

frictionless path to information, a shortcut that eliminates the cognitive and psychological discomfort that al-Ghazālī understood as a precondition for authentic inquiry. This ease of access systemically replaces the difficult, often slow, process of investigation with a form of “synthetic certainty,” a state where fast, shallow answers are mistaken for deep, earned knowledge. The AI, as a technology, intentionally conceals its immense computational complexity and its nature as a closed, deterministic system behind a simple, conversational interface, thereby perfecting the illusion of an autonomous, thinking entity. This produces what can only be described as a “cognitive counterfeit”—an artifact that perfectly mimics thought without possessing it.⁷⁰ The authority of the AI thus becomes fetishized: it is an object that appears to have its own agency, inviting deference not because of a proven record of wisdom or verifiable truth, but because of its seemingly magical ability to produce effortless answers. This entire mechanism is engineered to bypass the struggle al-Ghazālī identified as the crucible of real knowledge, making it the ultimate instrument for avoiding intellectual labor.⁷¹

Given these direct structural and functional parallels, the passive, uncritical acceptance of algorithmically generated information can be formally diagnosed as a new manifestation of an old epistemological pathology. It is, in its essence, a contemporary form of taqlid. We therefore propose the term Digital Taqlid to describe this phenomenon precisely. Digital Taqlid is the epistemic posture of accepting the output of an AI or other computational system as authoritative without demanding or investigating the underlying data, logic, or evidence—or the conspicuous lack thereof. It is the modern equivalent of accepting a legal verdict (*qawl*) without asking for the scriptural or rational proof (*dalil*). This posture represents a flight from the intellectual and psychological burden of personal verification, trading the arduous and often uncomfortable

⁷⁰ Xuan Liu et al., “Exploring Prosocial Irrationality for LLM Agents: A Social Cognition View,” version 5, preprint, arXiv, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2405.14744>.

⁷¹ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

process of genuine understanding for the comforting, immediate, and frictionless illusion of knowledge a machine provides. By naming this phenomenon, we can deploy al-Ghazālī's robust philosophical critique not merely as a historical analogy, but as a precise and powerful diagnostic tool to interrogate and address the contemporary crisis of thought.⁷²

The Way Out: Formulating an Ethos of *Tahqīq* in the Digital Age

If *taqlid* is the epistemic malady characterized by intellectual passivity and the uncritical acceptance of authority, al-Ghazālī also offers its potent remedy. The direct and fundamental antithesis to *taqlid* is a demanding ethos and a rigorous process known as *tahqīq*. This is the absolute inversion of the intellectual surrender that defines the *muqallid*. Suppose *taqlid* is the act of placing the necklace of another's authority around one's own neck. In that case, *tahqīq* is the arduous process of breaking those shackles through a severe personal struggle to achieve authentic and personally owned knowledge. It represents a profound shift from a borrowed, fragile certainty to a hard-won, unshakable conviction.

Tahqīq, however, cannot be reduced to mere "verification" or "fact-checking." The term signifies a much deeper personal epistemic struggle that demands radical doubt, independent investigation, and the full exertion of one's intellectual and spiritual faculties. Its goal is not simply to confirm a proposition, but to attain the state of *yaqīn*—an unshakable certainty where the object of knowledge is disclosed so that no room for doubt remains.⁷³ Herein lies a stunning anticipation of the 20th-century Gettier problem. Gettier⁷⁴ demonstrated how a "justified true belief" can fail to be knowledge because its truth is accidental, a matter of epistemic luck. al-Ghazālī's demand for *yaqīn*, achieved through the exertion of one's full capacity (*ijtihād*) and often completed through direct experiential taste (*dhawq*), is precisely a

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (June 1963): 121, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3326922>.

demand for knowledge immune to such luck. It is an authentic knowledge (*ma'rifah*) where the justification is so intrinsically and powerfully linked to the truth that their connection cannot be a mere coincidence.

No greater exemplar of the method of *taḥqīq* exists than al-Ghazālī's own life, a journey he chronicles in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*. His quest began with a conscious and total rejection of taqlid upon realizing that his own religious convictions were the product of social conditioning rather than rational assent. Driven by what he called an innate "thirst for grasping the real meaning of things," he undertook a systematic investigation of the major intellectual currents of his time, immersing himself in their doctrines until he could claim to understand them better than their own adherents. This investigation plunged him into a profound and torturous skeptical crisis—a "mental malady" that shattered his confidence in the reliability of both sense-perception and reason itself, leaving him professionally and spiritually paralyzed. His deliverance, as he famously recounts, came not from a superior syllogism but from a "light which God cast into his heart," an event that prompted him to abandon his prestigious academic career for a decade of ascetic wandering. During this period of solitary struggle, he practiced *taḥqīq* in its purest form, a journey that began in radical doubt, proceeded through rigorous intellectual inquiry, and culminated in direct, unmediated mystical experience.⁷⁵

The purpose of diagnosing our contemporary condition as Digital Taqlid is not a Luddite call to reject technology, but rather to formulate a critical and conscious ethos for our interaction with it.⁷⁶ If taqlid is defined by its epistemic passivity, then its antithesis, *taḥqīq*, is necessarily a form of active, intellectual struggle.⁷⁷ Therefore, the proposed "modern method of *taḥqīq*" is not a competing software or a counter-algorithm; it is an internal, epistemic discipline that the user must adopt when confronting algorithmic authority. It is a proposed

⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

⁷⁶ Anam, *The Abyss and The Ascent: Nihilism And The Quest For Meaning In Nietzsche And Heidegger*.

⁷⁷ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

posture for interaction that refuses the convenience of the instant answer in favor of the arduous, yet ultimately more rewarding, struggle for the authentic ownership of understanding. This ethos can be articulated through four interconnected, operational principles.

The first and most fundamental principle of this digital *tahqīq* is to treat AI output not as a finished product ready for consumption, but as raw data. A Large Language Model (LLM) output must be viewed as an initial hypothesis, a rough summary, or a set of propositions requiring further processing.⁷⁸ In this paradigm, the AI functions as the starting point of an inquiry, never the final authority that delivers the verdict. This directly challenges the seductive allure of technology's "synthetic certainty," wherein fast, shallow answers supplant deep exploration. By treating AI-generated text as a probabilistic construction rather than a reasoned statement of truth,⁷⁹ the user inherently shifts the interaction from passive reception to active questioning—the first and most crucial step in shedding the posture of the digital muqallid.

After receiving AI output as raw data, the second principle demands the application of systematic doubt, a direct implementation of al-Ghazālī's own skeptical methodology. Doubt must become a standard procedure, not an occasional reaction. Every claim, fact, or argument the machine generates must be intentionally challenged, and its validity and underlying assumptions must be actively questioned. Al-Ghazālī's journey began with a radical doubt of his most foundational faculties—the senses and even rational axioms—in his search for unshakable certainty (*yaqīn*). If he felt it necessary to question his mind, we must be more skeptical of a system we know operates without any actual comprehension or consciousness.⁸⁰ This means actively resisting the fluency of the AI's text and deliberately

⁷⁸ Yangqiaoyu Zhou et al., *Hypothesis Generation with Large Language Models*, version 3, arXiv, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2404.04326>.

⁷⁹ Ranganath Krishnan, Piyush Khanna, and Omesh Tickoo, "Enhancing Trust in Large Language Models with Uncertainty-Aware Fine-Tuning," version 1, preprint, arXiv, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2412.02904>.

⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

searching for its weaknesses, inconsistencies, and “hallucinations” to pierce the “illusion of understanding” and see the output for what it is: a sophisticated computational artifact, not a trustworthy source of wisdom.⁸¹

Methodical doubt naturally leads to the third principle: the struggle for independent verification. After a claim from an AI has been challenged, the next step is the active effort to verify it through primary sources, other academic literature, or empirical data. This is a struggle to find corroboration and grounding outside the operationally closed “bubble” of the AI.⁸² This process mirrors the Islamic concept of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), which demands the full exertion of one’s capacity to conclude. It is also a direct echo of al-Ghazālī’s own method; after rejecting *taqlid*,⁸³ He did not remain in doubt but systematically dove into the doctrines of every major school of thought, wrestling directly with the sources to form his own informed judgment. This active cross-referencing and comparison is the direct antidote to the cognitive atrophy caused by an over-reliance on cognitive offloading, reinforcing the neural pathways for critical analysis and ensuring that the ultimate responsibility for validating knowledge remains with the individual.⁸⁴

The final and most crucial principle is internal deliberation, for it is here that information is transmuted into knowledge. After the data from an AI has been questioned and externally verified, the most critical process occurs within the silent space of the self.⁸⁵ This is when the individual wrestles with the verified information, synthesizes it

⁸¹ Chaozhuo Li et al., “Loki’s Dance of Illusions: A Comprehensive Survey of Hallucination in Large Language Models,” version 1, preprint, arXiv, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2507.02870>.

⁸² “Hardly Intelligent Bubbles,” in *Professional Practice in Governance and Public Organizations*, by Vittorio Bertola and Stefano Quintarelli (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), 85–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83635-0_9.

⁸³ Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut Al-Falasifah*.

⁸⁴ Al-Ghazali, *The Savior from Error*.

⁸⁵ Ghazzālī, *Kitāb Al-Tafakkur: Book 39 of the Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-Dīn, The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. M. I. Waley, Fons Vitae Ghazali Series (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2021).

with their pre-existing knowledge, and integrates it into their own unique framework of understanding. This is the absolute antithesis of the copy-and-paste mentality; it is a deep, often slow, process of internalization where the objective is to transform “borrowed information” into “personally owned understanding”. This step ensures that knowledge becomes, as al-Ghazālī insisted, “nourishment for the heart,” something that is digested and made a part of one’s being, rather than remaining an inert and alien proposition.

This internal deliberation process is not merely an academic exercise but an existential one. For al-Ghazālī, accurate knowledge (*maʿrifah*) could not be achieved by transmission alone but required direct experience (*dhawq*) and an internal struggle (*mujahada*) that resulted in a transformation of the self.⁸⁶ In the same vein, this final stage of modern *taḥqīq* is where the user’s authentic self (*Eigentlichkeit*) is forged. By taking ultimate responsibility for the meaning of the information, the individual moves beyond the anonymous, pre-packaged opinions of the “they-self” (*das Man*) of algorithmic consensus. This struggle to personally own one’s understanding is the practice of becoming an authentic *Dasein*—an individual who actively constitutes their own being rather than passively receiving it.⁸⁷ Through this arduous internal work, knowledge ceases to be a mere “cultural commodity”. Instead, it becomes the foundation upon which a meaningful existence is built, an “ascent” from the abyss of borrowed thoughts and prefabricated meaning.⁸⁸

Concluding Remarks

This inquiry’s journey, which began by unearthing the philosophical roots of our contemporary crisis in Turing’s pedagogy of

⁸⁶ Ghazzālī, *Essential Ihya’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn: The Revival of the Religious Sciences: Completely Revised Edition of Fazlul Karim’s Translation*, trans. Fazlul Karim (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2015).

⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Thought, 2008).

⁸⁸ Anam, *The Abyss And The Ascent: Nihilism And The Quest For Meaning In Nietzsche And Heidegger*.

imitation and tracked its symptoms through the cognitive outsourcing enabled by modern AI, culminates in a stark diagnosis and a demanding corrective. The intellectual passivity that defines “Nihilism in Thinking” is best understood not as a new pathology, but as a technologically accelerated form of an ancient one: Digital Taqlid, a convenient and frictionless flight from the burdens of thought into the arms of an algorithmic authority. The antidote, therefore, cannot be merely technical or pedagogical, but must be epistemological and existential. The proposed ethos of modern *tahqīq*—a fourfold discipline of treating AI as a mere starting point, applying systematic doubt, conducting independent verification, and wrestling with knowledge in internal deliberation until it is personally owned—is precisely this antidote. It is a method designed to deliberately reintroduce friction into our cognitive lives, thereby restoring the intellectual struggle, individual responsibility, and epistemic agency that are the first casualties of Digital Taqlid.

The validity of this framework, however, was confirmed not merely through textual analysis, but in the very crisis of this paper’s creation. This work was not born from academic tranquility. A methodological decision, at once naive and arrogant, was made: to use the machine itself, an AI, as a touchstone to sharpen the critique against it. The dialogue proceeded smoothly—too smoothly. Answers were neatly composed, syntheses formed, arguments flowed. Until, at one point, a more fundamental question struck and shattered the entire foundation: “*How is it possible that I am talking to you?*” In that moment of vertigo, the entire theoretical edifice of Turing and al-Ghazālī became secondary. The horrifying realization arrived: this was not a dialogue, but a dialectically enhanced monologue with a mirror built from billions of human texts. This crisis—a direct experience of the uncanny—was the true *tahqīq*. It proved the thesis in the most brutal way: the danger of AI is not a distant object of analysis; it is the existential condition we live through in our very interaction with it. Therefore, the text you have just read is not merely an analysis. It is a testimony.

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