

Information Ethics: An Attempt to Preserve Autonomy and Self While Navigating through Determinism and Algorithms

Dr. Shweta*

*Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Miranda House, University of Delhi

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly digitized world, algorithms wield growing influence over individual decision-making, societal organization, and institutional power. This paper critically examines the interplay between technological determinism and individual autonomy, guided by classical philosophical debates on free will and modern developments in algorithmic systems. Drawing on perspectives from ethical theories, data studies, and legal frameworks, the study explores how personalization, predictive analytics, and algorithmic governance reshape concepts of identity, freedom, and agency. The erosion of human choice through opaque algorithmic operations raises urgent questions of moral responsibility, justice, and accountability in digital design. The paper argues that a philosophy-informed model of information ethics is essential for navigating the current landscape of automation and surveillance. It further evaluates international and national efforts, such as the EU's AI Act and India's digital governance structures, highlighting both their potential and limitations in safeguarding autonomy. Ethical design principles, including transparency, explainability, opt-out mechanisms, and human oversight, are proposed as necessary counterbalances to algorithmic control. The conclusion stresses the importance of embedding philosophical deliberation into AI policy-making and governance to ensure that emerging technologies enhance, rather than diminish, the conditions for human flourishing. This interdisciplinary analysis offers a foundation for future research into ethical AI systems that prioritize digital autonomy and reconfigure agency within algorithmic environments.

Keyword: Algorithmic governance, autonomy, technological determinism, information ethics, digital rights, AI policy

“Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.” – Jean-Paul Sartre

INTRODUCTION

The growing involvement of algorithmic systems into the process of human decision-making provokes severe ethical and philosophical questions, especially in terms of maintaining the autonomy and freedom in the world where automation is the dominant factor. With the rise of artificial intelligence tools in such areas as governance, healthcare, education, and commerce, the logic of machine control is slowly replacing the logic of human agency. This shift makes a problem with traditional understanding of moral agency, which is based on the premise that people have the ability to reason and make decisions.

Information is supposed to enable the agent to expand the area of mental exercise of making a conscious choice and empower the agent to act with intention. However, over time this changed. According to Floridi (2013), information has now become a basic ontological component, not only in our perception of the world, but also

in our own identity, moral subjectivity and political participation. This perspective does not view information systems as utilitarian tools only; they are epistemological and moral agents that define how people perceive, interpret and act in the world. As a result, the quick development of these technologies reveals the weaknesses of the classical models of morality in addressing the new types of ethical complexity. To this criticism, Moor (2005) proposes the notion of a policy vacuum, which emphasizes that emerging technologies tend to precede the establishment of the respective ethical and legal standards. This gap in the vacuum makes societies ill-equipped to address the special moral issues that AI and autonomous systems raise. This is compounded by the lack of clarity and accountability of the algorithmic decision-making process, which is becoming more and more influential in real-life scenarios, where people receive no control over the process or the ability to understand its mechanisms.

Therefore, the increasing dependence on automated systems does not only question the current moral frameworks but also requires a reconsideration of the basic ethical notions, such as responsibility, agency, and autonomy. With algorithms taking over the decision-making process in consequential decisions, it is high time to come up with sound ethical and legal paradigms that can effectively deal with the risks and liabilities involved in this change of technology. Mittelstadt et al. (2016) emphasize the appearance of new ethical risks that the algorithmic systems create, especially when their decision-making process is not transparent and their data-based results are not questioned. Such systems tend to lack sufficient appeal, redress or transparency mechanisms, which compromises the capacity of the user to participate in informed consent or moral deliberation. Lacking a clear understanding of the decision-making process, people remain disempowered and cannot challenge the results that influence their lives.

Apart from mindless technological advancement, the loss of autonomy is also aggravated by socio-political issues. Al-Hadrami et al. (2025) emphasize the need to incorporate ethical aspects in the development of AI to achieve sustainability. The authors claim that ethical AI must not only prevent harm but also promote both social and ecological welfare. Such a wider ethical context also requires the developers and policymakers to address not only the effectiveness of AI systems, but also their consequences on democracy, personal empowerment, and intergenerational equity. Floridi (2013) also argues that digital ethics should go beyond the concept of privacy and embrace more general concepts of informational self-determination and the right to shape one's identity in the digital environment. In addition, the lack of transparency in algorithmic decision-making interferes with the liberal principles of transparency and informed consent. According to Mittelstadt et al. (2016), the problem of algorithmic opacity results in the asymmetrical power distribution, with institutions having access to information and control over people who have little to no idea of how their decisions are reached. Moor (2005) further adds to this criticism by claiming that the pace of technological innovation is usually ahead of the ethical analysis needed to inform responsible use, thus leaving loopholes in responsibility. Such loopholes lead to what Zuboff (2019) calls the instrumentation power, which is a kind of behavioral control that takes place not by direct force but using algorithms. Nevertheless, the international scholarly and policy community has started to converge on frameworks of responsible AI design. Adams et al. (2023) encourage the use of explainable AI and the opt-out mechanisms to maintain the agency of a user. Similarly, Cleverley (2024) suggests the use of ethical guardrails in the implementation of AI tools in knowledge-intensive areas to make sure that human knowledge and discretion are not replaced. Stracke et al. (2024) emphasize the necessity of a strong multi-stakeholder involvement in the development of AI ethics, in which the concept of autonomy is not only about individual freedom but about the capacity to engage in critical participation as a collective.

This study will thus seek to question the relationship between algorithmic determinism and human autonomy from a philosophical perspective. Based on the classical ideas of moral agency and the contemporary theories of digital ethics, the paper examines the reorganization of selfhood and decision-making in the context of algorithmic space. Floridi (2013) provides a basis for comprehending such dynamics, with the main focus on the role of information in human identity. Roumate (2023) and Al-Hadrami et al. (2025) also put these issues into a practical and policy context, as they are essential to reconsider the approach to designing and regulating

digital systems. Finally, this question is concerned with two philosophical and ethical issues interconnected with each other: is meaningful autonomy possible in an environment where algorithmic logic prevails? And what ethics do we need to make sure that digital systems enhance the agency of humans and not restrict it? The questions are not merely academic but have an urgent practical relevance, especially in situations where algorithmic governance has become the default form of administration. That advancement cannot be stalled is a given. But the issue to find a cohesive way to integrate it in the system in a way that does not undermine human autonomy. Toward this end, the paper aims for the following:

- To discuss the philosophical basis and moral consequences of algorithmic determinism concerning human autonomy and moral responsibility
- To assess the level of national and international AI governance frameworks that deal with the maintenance of autonomy in algorithm-based decision-making contexts

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

Data mining has become a profitable venture. Zuboff (2019) coins the term surveillance capitalism to refer to the economic reasoning of such systems, which collect behavioral data, or what she calls behavioral surplus, to produce predictive data. She claims that algorithmic systems do not just observe human behavior but shape, and alter it in order to meet institutional profit motives. Within this context, the authentic personal freedom is substituted by the automated decisions that put the commercial interests above the individual freedom. This view is corroborated by O Neil (2016) in her criticism of so-called weapons of math destruction, to which she refers to algorithmic models that in the guise of neutrality and scientific accuracy, promote deep-seated bias and inequality. These models are used in the most critical areas including education, employment and policing without the knowledge or comprehension of the people. Consequently, they automate decisions that have a huge influence on the lives of people, making them data points and depriving them of consideration in a context-specific manner. All these critiques combined show that algorithmic systems allow ethical norms to be undermined in the following three ways:

- by stopping the process of decision-making,
- by undermining individual agency, and
- by affirming power over institutions functioning without adequate monitoring or responsibility.

The rise of ethical concerns regarding autonomy, consent, and control is even more acute, as AI is invading new spheres, such as knowledge production and educational processes. Roumate (2023) explains that the use of AI in higher education should be exposed to ethical examination, especially in cases where it interferes with intellectual freedom and research integrity. Likewise, Adams et al. (2023) introduce the ethical principles of the AI implementation in K-12 schools, noting that in the absence of human supervision, these tools can serve to limit student agency instead of broadening it. The two studies demonstrate that the more the AI pervades the cognitive and developmental space, the greater the need to make sure that systems do not program users to become passive recipients of knowledge. The question of algorithmic agency is also reflected in the policy debate on the global level. Stracke, Chounta, and Homes (2024) discuss the new trends in the world related to ethical and trustworthy AI and define the theme of autonomy as one that is frequently underrepresented in the technical implementation, although it is rhetorically highlighted. This shows a discrepancy between the stated ethical standards and practice. In the article about AI in the geological sciences, Cleverley (2024) cautions that the use of a language model and the result of an automated process can diminish the authority of an expert and decrease intellectual independence. Although automation could enhance efficiency, it might also cause overreliance on the results produced by machines and substitute reflective thinking with pre-written interpretations.

Classical Notions of Determinism and Free Will

The argument of autonomy in philosophy is very much entrenched in the ancient argument of determinism and free will. Classical determinism argues that all events such as human actions are entirely caused by antecedent events. Philosophers like Spinoza, Leibniz, and later Schopenhauer developed this position, and held that what seems to be voluntary human action is really the outcome of causal chains that must occur. Spinoza, to give an example, believed that human thoughts and desires are governed by natural laws, just as physical phenomena. In his opinion, the real freedom is not in overcoming these laws, but in comprehending the causal forces which determine our life.

Libertarianism (in its philosophical meaning), on the contrary, assumes that human beings have real freedom that cannot be limited by the preceding causes. Here, Jean-Paul Sartre is important, focusing on what he termed as radical freedom. Sartre once said that “man is condemned to be free”, that is, people are responsible of their actions no matter the situation. To libertarians, autonomy cannot be separated from moral responsibility and individual choice.

The compatibilism position, as argued by David Hume, lies in-between those two opposite views. Compatibilists believe that it is possible to be deterministic and at the same time morally responsible. In this perspective, one may be said to be free when he or she is acting in accordance to his or her inner desires and motivations, although these desires are causally determined. In this meaning, freedom is not the escape of causation but the action according to the character and will.

These three views of classical determinism, libertarian free will, and compatibilism have remained relevant in the current debate in the field of AI ethics and digital autonomy. With the growing influence of algorithmic systems in the field of decision-making, the issue of the possible compatibility of human autonomy and computational determinism becomes more topical. Both perspectives provide a model of how human agency and machine-based rationality are in conflict in the current technologically mediated world.

Technological Determinism: Historical and Contemporary Views

The classical discussion is also complicated by the advent of technological determinism, which is the opinion that modern technologies affect, shape, and even determine human behavior and social organization. Whereas the traditional determinism had to deal with metaphysical or natural forces, the current debate focuses on computational systems that are not only predictive but also directive, with algorithmic feedback loops. Such loops strengthen some decisions, patterns, and identities, usually without the full knowledge or consent of users. The algorithms, as Esposito (2022) claims, are not only data analysis tools but also produce the so-called artificial communication, forming a system of social intelligence that imitates interaction and slightly adjusts the autonomy of users. This algorithmic determinism is highly intrinsic in the digital infrastructures and operates based on personalization, surveillance, and behavioral targeting. These systems influence preferences by repetition, micro-incentives, and filtered exposure, instead of giving explicit instructions. This subtle shift is reflected in the move from Philosophical Determinism to Compatibilism and onto Libertarianism. Thereafter the choices succumb to Technological Determinism which has for all practical purposes evolves into Algorithmic Determinism.

The Rise of Algorithmic Determinism

The current algorithmic systems enhance deterministic trends by using huge volumes of behavioral data to predict and shape user behaviors. The AI systems are unlike the previous technologies, which merely enhanced physical or cognitive abilities, as they directly interfere with decision-making processes: they recommend content, serve advertisements, filter news, and make decisions in education, policing, and healthcare. This is what Simanowski (2018) calls a death algorithm, and it is a radical change in the tools of enhancement to tools of replacement, in which algorithms replace judgment with prediction. The result is a form of behavioral determinism in which users are frequently unaware of the forces that are influencing their decisions and that are based on computational modeling. According to Evers (2021), the loss of privacy is not only a problem of

data protection but a loss of power: the more people have power over data, the more they have power over people. The fact that users do not have any meaningful means to avoid algorithmic profiling robs the very fabric of autonomy. Algorithms are not coercive; they preclude choice, and the result is a system where the appearance of freedom conceals a more fundamental system of constraint. This reasoning is consistent with the idea of relational AI ethics proposed by Coeckelbergh (2020), who criticizes the premise that human subjects are still the central focus of technological spaces. He claims that ethical theories should take into account the co-constitution of humans and machines, where agency is spread in networks of sensors, systems, and code. Not only does autonomy get reduced in such a model, it gets redefined as well, necessitating the establishment of new standards of responsibility, transparency, and control.

AUTONOMY AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Autonomy and morals are interrelated, and they are the foundations of moral decision-making. Autonomy refers to the liberty of a human being to make informed choices about his or her life. It is an embodiment of the essence of human dignity because it acknowledges the right of every person to govern themselves and to make decisions based on their values. Ethically, autonomy is the right to make personal choices, and the idea of respecting autonomy is to give people the freedom to make their own choices even where they run counter to the general social trend. This concept is particularly critical in other circles, such as healthcare, where patients are required to provide informed consent prior to being treated. It makes sure that people can choose whether to refuse or accept medical interventions depending on their own beliefs.

Autonomy may occasionally conflict with other ethical values, which are significant, namely, beneficence (doing good to others) and justice (maintaining fairness). An example of this is when an individual makes a decision that may affect them or others negatively, it may cause an ethical dilemma - whether other people should interfere to avert the harm or whether the individual should be given the freedom to make their choices. In order to avoid such complications, systems that will allow making informed and thoughtful decisions should be developed. Such systems are to guard the freedom of an individual, but also take into account the necessity to avoid serious harm. Finally, a moderate ethical course will encourage respect for personal rights and the general welfare of society.

Kantian Autonomy: Moral Law and Rational Self-Governance

The idea of autonomy by Immanuel Kant is one of the strongest ethical theories for assessing human freedom. To Kant, autonomy does not merely mean the freedom of choice, but the ability to make right choices based on rational reasoning. This is brought about by following the categorical imperative- doing something that can be applied to all. A person is said to be autonomous when he or she legislates moral law to himself or herself using reason and applies the rules that can be accepted by any rational agent. To this end, it requires autonomy to self-reflect, think critically, and accept moral responsibility (Danaher, 2019).

But this Kantian ideal is being undermined by the increased use of algorithmic systems. In AI-enabled settings, personal reasoning is easily hacked by technological frameworks like recommender systems, default settings, and nudges concerning behavior. Such systems influence the choices of users in a manner that is not always visible, leaving little room for conscious thought and ethical consideration. Instead of shaping and pursuing universalizable moral principles, users are often directed to pre-determined results, maximized in the engagement or efficiency rates.

This transition brings forth some ethical questions: Are people still Kantian autonomous actors in the digital world under the influence of AI or do they become mere reactive subjects to the actions of algorithms? The concept of moral agency that is based on the ability to reflect is becoming difficult as more power to influence behavior is given to machine learning systems. Kantian autonomy, which focuses on the rational self-governance, seems to be even more challenging to maintain in settings where decisions are pre-engineered in a subtle way.

Mill, Berlin, and the Architecture of Liberty

John Stuart Mill liberal understanding of freedom highlights the point that people must be allowed to determine and follow their own idea of the good life, as long as they do not cause any harm to others in the process. Isaiah Berlin added to this an appreciation of two dimensions of liberty, the negative liberty (or freedom of non-interference), and the positive liberty (or freedom to act in order to define one own life and choice). Hypothetically, algorithmic technologies would be able to augment positive liberty by providing individual suggestions that would enable users to pursue their objectives with greater success. Nevertheless, in reality, the logic of operation of most digital platforms is very different. Greene et al. (2019) claim that the majority of AI systems are not created to promote user autonomy. They are rather designed to be engaging, predictable, and profitable. These systems employ more personalized choice architectures- algorithmic frameworks that influence user behavior in a manner that is hardly noticed.

It does not imply that the choices are taken away, but rather the options are redesigned and presented in a manner that the ability of the user to make independent decisions is passively compromised. The environment that is created undermines the deliberative space that is necessary in the exercise of liberty as Mill and Berlin envisioned. When algorithms guide people using nudges and personalized content, users can believe that they are making decisions freely, whereas their preferences are being shaped carefully to benefit commercial interests.

Therefore, although algorithmic systems have the potential of promoting personal freedom, they are currently designed in a way that puts the focus on control rather than empowerment, which reduces the very autonomy that liberal theories of freedom aim to safeguard.

DIGITAL WELL-BEING AND THE MIRAGE OF CHOICE

Digital interfaces create a false sense of control, which is similar to personalized feeds and recommendation algorithms, as well as predictive analytics, which imply that a user is in control. As a matter of fact, such systems are often run by commercial or political algorithms, which manipulate behaviour at the subliminal level and cover their tracks behind the illusion of individual power. This has been dubbed as the veneer of choice, which obscures the level that user autonomy is undermined by unseen algorithmic logic.

With this in mind, digital well-being cannot be evaluated only based on such metrics as usability, user satisfaction, or engagement. Instead, it ought to be considered according to whether a system promotes human flourishing and allows for to development a moral agency. Burr et al. (2020) make a strong case in this direction, stating that ethical digital design should be more concerned with higher values. They focus their review on the significance of informational self-determination, which is the possibility of individuals to regulate the use and interpretation of their personal information, as one of the core ethical issues in the contemporary digital context. According to them, this critical principle is threatened to be worn out by the design decisions made to maximize user attention and corporate profit. Engagement-optimized interfaces and algorithms are capable of limiting the freedom of truly autonomous choice, pushing users toward certain behaviors, strengthening bias in the mind, and limiting reflective decisions.

In order to exemplify the conceptual shift in the interpretation of determinism further, a comparative survey is presented. Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the main characteristics that separate classical determinism and modern algorithmic determinism. Where classical determinism deals with metaphysical causality and natural laws, algorithmic determinism works upon data-based forecasts and control mechanisms of behaviors that are incorporated into the digital infrastructure. This opposition shows that there is a necessity to evaluate critically the impact of modern technologies on human freedom, which is not always known or consciously accepted by users.

THE ILLUSION OF AUTONOMY: HAS CONCEDED DIRECT CONTROL GONE TOO FAR?

Handing over direct control to artificial intelligence (AI) brings serious ethical, practical, and philosophical concerns. As AI systems become more advanced, they are being used to make decisions in critical areas such as healthcare, finance, education, and public services. This offers both benefits and risks. On the positive side, AI can analyze large amounts of data quickly and find patterns that humans might miss. For example, in medical diagnostics, AI can review scans and detect early signs of disease more efficiently than traditional methods. Such capabilities can lead to better and faster outcomes. However, this efficiency comes at a cost. When we give too much control to AI, we risk losing human judgment and supervision. Algorithms may end up making decisions that deeply affect people's lives, such as medical treatments, loan approvals, or job screening, without enough transparency or human input. This raises important concerns about who is responsible when things go wrong and how much say individuals have in decisions that impact them.

In the digital setting, this is what Chiodo (2022) refers to as an illusion of autonomy. Users think they are making their own decisions, but they are usually preconditioned by algorithmic curation, predictive profiling, and behavioral targeting. Such systems affect preferences and behaviors by gradually reducing the range of available actions, and all this under the guise of freedom. This conceptual transformation since the classical theories of autonomy that were based on reason and moral agency have given way to the modern models that are influenced by the digitally mediated environments. These systems are artificial replications of the conditions of choice that tend to undermine the moral autonomy they seem to encourage. Digital autonomy, therefore, as scrutinized more closely, is representative of the position that power is most effective not when it forbids, but when it controls desire and action through its internalization.

Moreover, the risk of bias in AI systems adds another layer of concern. When algorithms are trained on past data, they can repeat and even strengthen existing social inequalities, resulting in outcomes that are unfair or discriminatory. This leads to important ethical questions—who should be held accountable when AI makes a mistake?

From a philosophical perspective, giving control to AI challenges our traditional ideas of autonomy and personal responsibility. If machines are making decisions for us, then what becomes of human judgment and moral accountability? This growing dependence on technology demands careful reflection. Instead of fully relying on AI, we must focus on building systems that support human oversight, responsibility, and meaningful collaboration.

From Moral Agency to Behavioral Engineering

The change of autonomy support to user behavior engineering is one of the most alarming trends in digital environments. A lot of AI systems are not made to facilitate moral reasoning but to maximize attention, click-through rates, or compliance. According to Teo (2023), this transition undermines human dignity, which is one of the central notions in law and ethics. Dignity means respect for persons as ends and not as a means to economic or political ends. The algorithmic systems that view people as data points to be guided, as opposed to agents to be involved, are in breach of this principle. According to Danaher (2019), these systems can also induce a certain form of moral atrophy, as the users delegate moral reasoning to systems that act like they have autonomy but do not need to be responsible. The outcome is what he calls functional autonomy, a system that is capable of making decisions but within the limits of algorithmic goals.

This table shows the way algorithmic systems redefine the concept of autonomy. Rather than being based on reason or self-legislation, autonomy turns into an issue of optimizing behavior using data. Users become free to act, yet their behavior is more and more predetermined by predictive modeling and personalization tools. Besides, decision accountability is blurred: should the user be blamed or the algorithm that nudged the user?

Reconciling Autonomy and Digital Determinism

The main question is how to create ethical and political models that would allow to combine the predictive potential of algorithms and the human ability to exercise freedom, reflection, and moral maturation. Although classical compatibilism provides a point of departure, which is the definition of autonomy as internal coherence, but not independence, it requires updating to a world in which even inner motivations are algorithmically influenced. Autonomy in this digitally mediated arena is no longer a self-directed phenomenon but it is becoming more and more co-created with technology.

Both Coeckelbergh (2020) and Burr et al. (2020) state that moral values should not be considered as a secondary parameter of the design of digital systems but rather as a primary one. Value-sensitive design, explainable AI, and opt-out mechanisms are some of these efforts toward this direction. Nevertheless, such tools need to be supported by philosophical understanding and well-developed legal structures to make sure that they actually empower people and not just a symbolic act.

The other essential element is the development of digital literacy and critical agency, especially in the educational system. Education should prepare the future generations of users and developers to know how to question and talk about the morality of algorithmic systems as they are shaped in the coming generations. As Simanowski (2018) claims, ethics should not be reduced to post-hoc analysis or audits, but it should be integrated into the ontological structure of digital technologies per se. Such preemptive strategy requires an ethics-by-design philosophy where consequences are predicted and developing ethically and, in a value-driven way is encouraged.

AUTONOMY AS A CORNERSTONE OF INFORMATION ETHICS

Autonomy is not only an abstract concept of philosophy, but it is also an underlying principle of information ethics and digital rights. In the absence of real autonomy, these ethical principles as informed consent, data privacy, and freedom of expression, are deprived of their moral validity. This is the issue that Vallor (2012) highlights in her work on the ethics of social networking by explaining how technology can transform our moral attention habits and virtues development. She says that moral autonomy is based on the capacity to see what is good and not the capacity to choose.

In online spaces, especially those that are algorithmically mediated, the range of what people are able to see and thus to take into account can be extremely narrow. In many cases, algorithms have created rankings and filtrations of information based on measures of engagement or assumptions of human behavior, and they are not transparent. Consequently, users can only be subjected to a limited set of content that supports the already established preferences or ideologies, limiting the chance of critical thinking and moral consideration.

This issue echoes with the general attempts to establish digital ethics in the modern platform-based society. By acting on the user experience in such a way that reduces the capacity to think about personal values, to traverse competing perspectives, to practice ethical self-reflection, applications and platforms are not only suppressing freedom, they are redefining it. The agency of the user is subtly changed, whereby the external systems predetermine the circumstances in which decisions are taken. It is not merely the preservation of autonomy as a right, but the cognitive and moral space within which autonomy can be applied that must be safeguarded. Technological systems that meddle with this process are not merely limiting freedom, as Vallor (2012) warns, but it change what freedom is itself.

THE ALGORITHMIC SELF: EROSION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Algorithmic self is a way of explaining how digital algorithms are related to our personal identity due to data collection and processing. Social media, search engines, and recommendation systems are some of the platforms in the current digital era that generate personalized content depending on our actions and interests.

On the one hand, this can make online experiences more interesting, but on the other hand, this leads to serious questions about the loss of individuality.

As algorithms are dictating more and more of what we see, think about, and want, they start narrowing our horizons. Then, people can begin to adjust to the patterns that these systems create, and as a result, they will have more homogeneous and less diverse identities. This reduces the chances of real expression and cancels the color of experience. Moreover, the exposure to the algorithm-mediated content continuously can result in the fact that people may see themselves through data-driven indicators, including likes, shares, and engagement rates. This may result in feelings of insecurity and mental distress as individual value is pegged on digital acceptance as opposed to actual values or performance.

On the one hand, algorithmic self poses a danger to classical ideas of autonomy and identity. To protect ourselves against the risk of losing our identity, we must be more conscious of the effects of algorithms and prioritize actual human interaction and self-reflection over online popularity.

Personalization and Identity Fragmentation

Personalization in the algorithm-driven digital world is not just a convenience but a strong force that is influencing individual identity. Algorithms develop personalized digital experiences by collecting data and profiling behavior, filtering what people see, interact with, and think about themselves. Lupton (2020) theorizes this shift as the development of the so-called data selves, in which the human identity is intertwined with the logic of personalization as algorithmic. These data selves are not fixed mirrorings but moving constructions, and they are being continuously updated by the algorithmic feedback loops that filter information and strengthen some preferences.

Karizat et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence of how users on such platforms as TikTok can co-produce their identities in reaction to algorithmic curation. Their analysis demonstrates how the algorithmic folk theories, the lay explanations in which people believe about how the recommendation systems operate, cause the users to adjust their content and behaviour to appear more consistent with what they think the algorithms want. This not only changes the way of expressing oneself but also imposes conformity, thus limiting the diversity of identities which is apparent in the interaction between algorithmic systems and user data and its effect on self-perception. The information about user behaviors is transferred into algorithmic processing and then back into the platform to influence individual identity in a recursive loop of personalization and control.

Outsourcing the Self

Outsourcing of self-reflection and decision-making to predictive technologies is one of the most drastic consequences of the algorithmic systems. The algorithm does not just suggest what one may like, as Seaver (2022) explains in his ethnographic study of music recommendation systems, but it slowly trains what one thinks one likes. The result of this recursive personalization is what is called an algorithmic taste, an identity that is more determined by backend systems than by a conscious choice. This coincides with the points of Lupton (2020) that the self is no longer sovereign in the digital world. Rather, identity is a collection of data traces, which are curated by systems that read intention based on behavior and not meaning. This leads to not only fragmentation but also loss of authenticity. People start to adjust their behavior and speech to make them algorithmically readable, usually at the cost of their multidimensionality. Moreover, Karizat et al. (2021) emphasize the development of algorithmic resistance, where users are trying to play with the system signals to resist algorithmic limits. This opposition, though, usually stays within the borders of the system and shows how confined and policed subjectivity is by design.

Algorithmic Governmentality and Surveillance Logics

The algorithmic control goes beyond personalization to the sphere of surveillance capitalism, which Zuboff coined and has been repeated in recent academic literature. Noble (2018) criticizes the ability of algorithms employed by search engines to duplicate and perpetuate current biases in society, especially racial and

gendered disparities. Through her study, she uncovers the fact that search rankings are not neutral but political, which is part of structural oppression in the name of personalization and utility. Taking this further, Couldry and Mejias (2023) decolonize algorithmic power and propose that it re-perpetrates epistemic violence in how contemporary data systems value machine-readable identity, at the expense of lived multi-dimensional humanity. They say that surveillance capitalism is not merely a process of extraction: it is a process of extraction of meaning, authority, and agency, replacing human self-determination with predictive models that pre-script future behavior. Such practices correspond to the concept of algorithmic governmentality that Rouvroy develops in her work, according to which the government is not exercised through the law but through the modulation of behavior through data flows. This regime is one in which subjects are not people with intentions but nodes in predictive networks. This makes identity plastic and proactively controlled to the extent that Deleuze (as quoted in secondary literature) referred to it as societies of control.

The operations of the algorithmic systems can be explained in terms of several important dimensions. The first and foremost is datafication, the continuing practice of converting human behavior, e.g., clicks, searches, or interactions, into data that can be measured. This is the foundation of the manner in which algorithms interpret and perform on users. The second is profiling, whereby people are categorized in terms of behavior by their data patterns. Such profiles are used to make assumptions about user preferences and influence the way digital systems communicate with each individual. Next is prediction, where the algorithms can be implemented to predict what a user will do next by using the past and real-time data. This can be seen through how platforms suggest products, videos, or news articles. The other dimension, which is crucial, is the dimension of modulation, where it is not just the system that predicts behavior but actively influences behavior. It takes place in the form of individualized suggestions, nudges, or limitations of content presentation, which slightly affect the user's choice in a hidden manner. Lastly, the enforcement of feedback loops describes the reinforcement of past behaviors. As one uses the content, the system learns what to recommend and will continue to recommend similar things, which can sometimes result in increased engagement but at the cost of exposure to diverse opinions.

CRITICAL SYNTHESIS: TOWARD A DATA-CONSCIOUS IDENTITY

The general outcomes of these perspectives make it necessary to reevaluate the autonomy in the age of predictive data systems. Identity is no longer a self-controlled, self-regulated process; it is now a publicly managed, system-mediated, behaviorally scripted process. Couldry and Mejias (2023) state that the unquestioned implementation of such a shift will turn predictive governance into a reality of the contemporary world. This can be compared to the plea of Noble (2018), who requests to examine algorithms critically to challenge the values that are coded in ranking, recommendation, and recognition systems. In a nutshell, algorithmic self is not merely being fragmented, but also rebuilt by data infrastructures that prioritize profit and control over plurality and selfhood. According to researchers, algorithms need to be restructured in a human-centered manner where interpretability, agency, and justice are not second-order considerations. Algorithmic determinism is not only about the individual but also the political arena. When implemented into the workings of the public services and governance, automated decision systems can strengthen existing systemic biases and limit the chances of effective contestation. According to De Sio (2024), the utilitarian and efficiency-oriented approach to AI development ignores the most important questions of freedom, responsibility, and pluralism. He proposes the term of qualified autonomy that acknowledges that freedom in a technologically mediated society needs both individual capabilities and institutional protection. In this view, opposing algorithmic determinism is not only a design issue but a policy and education issue as well. The democratic integrity is all about empowering citizens to be able to understand, question, and reject algorithmic decisions where needed. Esposito (2022) also states that the algorithmic systems are increasingly becoming the main actors in social cognition, not only determining what people select, but also what they consider worthy of selection. By substituting the sluggish work of the public reasoning with pre-processed information flows,

algorithms may limit the range of the public discourse and moral imagination. Simultaneously, Evers (2021) argues that people need to regain control over their data not only to safeguard their privacy but also to save their dignity and self-identity. Privacy is not a matter of seclusion, but a matter of power, participation, and agency in a world structured with digital means. People lack the power to control the information that forms the basis of algorithmic decisions, and, as a result, they are reduced to the status of nodes in a computational circuit where they have no narrative agency and moral authorship.

PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION: AUTONOMY IN DIGITAL SYSTEMS

The era of algorithmic governance has made the questions of autonomy not only theoretical but urgent, real-life issues that define everyday life, legal standards, and ethical norms in the world. The philosophical question of autonomy, Are we free, or are we just running programs, comes back with a vengeance as digital systems come to mediate more and more of our decisions, especially those that impact welfare, justice, and freedom. In this section, the author critically examines the question of whether autonomy is viable in a world that is awash with deterministic digital systems. It determines the moral accountability of designers and developers as well as states, retraces compatibilist theories of autonomy, and determines whether algorithmic systems can be ethically redesigned to accommodate human agency. The mentioned works have their contribution to the complexity of technical systems and ethical and legal discussions of freedom, control, and responsibility.

The issue of moral responsibility is central in any ethical debate about automation. As algorithms become part of the decision-making process in credit scoring, predictive policing, hiring, and even combat, responsibility is spread throughout the levels of code, design teams, corporations, and state agencies. Binns (2022) points out the issue of human-in-the-loop systems, which allegedly maintain accountability by having a person authorize automated outputs. This model is, however, deceptive. Practically, human control tends to be skin deep, as the decision-makers are overwhelmed by the cognitive load or the pressure exerted by the institution and are forced to trust the machine's results. This erodes the belief in personal justice, as is rightly noted by Binns, when the subjects involved are unable to adequately question or comprehend the logic of the algorithm. The consequences are even more serious in military use. Gülmez (2023) examines lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) that are capable of identifying and destroying human beings without any human intervention. When this happens, the issue of responsibility becomes obscured: who will be held responsible in the event of a wrongful death by a military robot? The programmer? The commander? The state? Gülmez contends that these systems are likely to undermine the fundamental humanitarian norms unless there are strict and definite ethical principles that can be enforced. The moral black holes around LAWS demonstrate a larger fact: the moral clarity of responsibility is lost as machines take up the role of decision-makers unless governance systems are reengineered to regain it. In addition, the data-driven era has a disturbing paradox: the more information systems gather about users, the less independent they become. Tufekci (2015) criticizes this inversion by addressing the feedback loops on which algorithmic platforms are based. Individualized content, personalized advertising, and behavioral nudging establish the conditions that define not only the behavior of the user but also the user's identity itself. That is, the freedom of choice is not limited by the explicit force but by the invisible hand of data analytics. Tufekci cautions that a lack of autonomy occurs when users do not realize how the platforms shape their tastes and restrict their access to a variety of views. In this case, information is not an instrument of liberation, but an instrument of control.

This loss of independence has a philosophical aspect that is based on determinism. When all the actions are a reaction to the stimuli that are curated by algorithms, is it possible to talk about freedom? Classical compatibilist theories hold that autonomy and determinism are not mutually exclusive. They say that one can be free when his or her actions are based on internal desires and not on external compulsions. This distinction is problematized by the digital environment. Liao (2020) develops the notion of capability-enabled agency as the model of agency that can be understood under these circumstances. Autonomy, he says, is not being free of influence, but having the ability to reflect, to make choices, and to act on significant alternatives. Algorithmic

systems, therefore, need to be structured so as to not only prevent harm but to facilitate these abilities in users. Autonomous design is not easy, however. According to Cath (2018), there is a variety of ethical, legal, and technical issues that have to be addressed to ensure that algorithmic systems can be aligned with liberal-democratic principles. These include the necessity of transparency, i.e., users should know how decisions are made, and contestability, i.e., users should be able to challenge decisions. Cath cautions, though, that proprietary black-box models and corporate incentives to keep algorithmic processes secret often compromise these objectives. In the absence of norms that could be enforced on transparency and contestation, algorithmic systems would become vehicles of epistemic injustice, leaving people without the capacity to influence or even understand the systems that control them.

This requires structural action on the policy and law level. Biber (2023) discusses the way European courts have started to interpret and control automated decision-making. He observes that legal systems such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the EU bring in the right to explanation and to object to automated profiling. The purpose of these legal tools is to reintegrate human judgment into the automated sphere and to support the dominance of human rights. Nevertheless, Biber warns that the application is uneven and frequently unable to keep up with technical progress. Therefore, the legal system itself will have to change along with the technologies that it is trying to control.

A new solution to this dilemma is a layered model of AI governance, proposed by Gasser and Almeida (2017). They imagine instead a multiplicity of overlapping layers, technical standards, organizational practices, legal frameworks, and ethical guidelines, all mutually reinforcing each other. This pluralistic approach can accommodate the various contexts in which algorithms are implemented and enables the trade-off between competing values like innovation, security, and individual rights. Gasser and Almeida point out that strong governance should have redress feedback loops, public participation, and periodic review, which integrate ethics into the lifecycle of AI systems as they develop. In addition to legal and technical solutions, ethical consequences of algorithmic systems should be interpreted globally and intersectionally. Ionita and Kanetake (2023) bring to the fore the applicability of the international human rights law in digital governance. They claim that international systems, especially those which are products of the UN system, can provide normative guidance in situations where national laws are deficient. Nevertheless, they also emphasize the importance of localization- universal rights have to be transformed into the culturally relevant values that take into consideration local histories, power structures, and community standards. This conflict between universality and specificity is particularly acute in postcolonial cultures that have to deal with imported technologies with extractive logic.

India is one such postcolonial setting where discussions about data sovereignty, digital rights, and algorithmic control are becoming more intense. Muhammed and Kachari (2025) promote the decolonial perspective of protecting personal data. They criticize the current policies as influenced by Western corporate interests and demand frameworks that focus on the experiences of marginalized communities. In their opinion, data protection is not only a technical problem but a social justice problem. Their effort shows how digital systems tend to reproduce structural inequalities unless they are specifically designed to overcome them. Lastly, Smuha (2021) asks a crucial question: whether a human rights-based approach is adequate to govern AI. Although human rights offer an effective normative framework, they might fail to represent the entire scope of ethical risks that new technologies entail. As an example, AI systems that nudge users into certain patterns of behavior without necessarily breaching any particular right can erode democratic agency in the long run. Smuha claims that a more comprehensive ethical system should be introduced to include the principles of solidarity, care, and ecological sustainability. She cautions against framing ethics as checklists or compliance regimes, and instead calls upon the re-conceptualization of the whole idea of building and living with intelligent systems.

Collectively, these viewpoints indicate that the autonomy in algorithmic spaces is not an abstract notion but a material activity that needs active development. It needs to be incorporated into design, legalized, culturalized, and ethically reflexive. The moral responsibility of designers, developers, and policymakers is shared: to make sure that digital systems do not undermine the very capacities, reasoning, deliberation, and participation

through which democratic life is constituted. The algorithmic autonomy paradox, in which more data means less freedom, can be addressed, and the only way to do so is to collectively and interdisciplinarily work to realign technology with human values.

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The unparalleled growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic governance has triggered an international regulatory effort that cuts across continents, legal cultures, and governance systems. These regulatory interventions are centred around some of the most important philosophical and political issues of autonomy, freedom, human dignity, and the level of control that individuals must have over the data-driven systems that are becoming the arbiters of their lives. International and national frameworks are currently trying to balance the potential of AI innovation and its dangers to human rights, privacy, and democratic agency. In this section, the author critically reviews the convergence and divergence of the contemporary legal frameworks especially the EU AI Act, UNESCO AI Ethics recommendations, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), UN resolutions with the domestic approaches in India especially the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, Aadhaar-linked services, and the emerging debates of algorithmic governance. The works of Biber (2023), Gasser and Almeida (2017), Ionita and Kanetake (2023), Muhammed and Kachari (2025), and Smuha (2021) are the basis of all analysis.

One of the most significant trends in the international regulation of AI is the European Union AI Act, which is one of the most detailed legislative efforts to regulate AI systems depending on their risk. As Biber (2023) notes, the AI Act is a major change in the interpretation and restriction of the autonomy of automated systems by judicial institutions. Biber points out that the Act also categorizes systems according to the risk (minimal to unacceptable) and explicitly forbids some applications, including biometric classification by race or social scoring. The key part of the AI Act is that it aligns with the principles of the GDPR, especially the right to explanation, right to contestation, and right to meaningful human control. The AI Act, according to Biber, supplements the GDPR, as it tries to impose the norms of the human-in-command over high-risk automated systems. This is a wider legal aspiration: to maintain the possibility of human intervention and moral judgment in the most computational of settings. The normative and ethical advice provided by international institutions like UNESCO and the United Nations complements the legal rigidity of the EU framework. Ionita and Kanetake (2023) examine the resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council and the 2021 Recommendation of UNESCO on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. They note that these papers emphasize the non-divisibility of human rights in the digital era and state that algorithmic systems should increase, not reduce, the underlying principles of human dignity, equity, and choice. Although these instruments are not binding, they provide states with a guideline on how to integrate ethical values into national regulatory frameworks. Ionita and Kanetake highlight the fact that the UN has been especially keen on the disproportionate impact of AI on vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and minorities, therefore, positioning AI governance as a central aspect of global justice. These frameworks promote transparency, public participation, and data justice as the main pillars of algorithmic accountability to be sought by states.

Gasser and Almeida (2017) view AI governance in structural and systemic terms. They suggest a layered model that works on technical, organizational, legal, and ethical levels. This model acknowledges that a single regulatory approach cannot explain the complexity and dynamism of AI systems. Rather, good governance has to be the result of the interaction between various mechanisms, such as industry standards, institutional ethics boards, national legislation, and international treaties. According to Gasser and Almeida, global cooperation is necessary but must leave space to local adaptation. In their model, governance is not a fixed code but a dynamic architecture that is intended to be iteratively accountable. It is not just the content of regulation that is important here, but the design of regulatory systems that can change with technological change.

Such a systemic perspective is especially critical to take into account in the context of national attempts to regulate digital identity, privacy, and algorithmic systems in India. The DPDP Act of 2023, a long-awaited

replacement of the earlier versions, is the first step for India into the world of comprehensive data protection laws. Nevertheless, as Muhammed and Kachari (2025) posit, the Act is still highly intertwined with the colonial administrative legacies of India and a surveillance-based governance framework. Specifically, they criticize the excessive discretionary authority of the state under the Act, such as the extensive exemptions to the Act on grounds of public order, or the lack of transparency of the operation of the Data Protection Board. Muhammed and Kachari do not consider these gaps as technical omissions but as political design elements that demonstrate a long-standing distrust of citizens instead of a desire to respect their independence. Their worries are put into greater focus when contrasted with the context of Aadhaar, the largest biometric identity system in the world. Tied to welfare distribution, banking, telecommunications, and tax compliance, Aadhaar is a paradigmatic case of algorithmic governance in the Global South. Whereas its advocates claim that Aadhaar is a matter of inclusion and transparency, Muhammed and Kachari state that it is a digital panopticon, which makes the poor hyper-visible and deprives them of any meaningful control over the use of their data. The technological risk is not only presented by Aadhaar-based exclusions in welfare and the possibility of biometric failure (e.g., failed fingerprint matches), but also systemic injustice. Such dynamics demonstrate that algorithmic control, when there are no sufficient safeguards, compromises not just privacy but the ability of individuals to have agency in key areas of life.

The AI governance systems based on human rights discourse may fail to cover the entire ethical landscape. Smuha (2021) calls on scholars and policymakers to go beyond a human rights-based approach because it does not address the subtle ethical issues that rights-based approaches fail to capture. Although Smuha concurs with the significance of rights as a moral and legal baseline, he cautions against using them as the ethical responsibility ceiling. She cites two great dangers: the danger of formalism, in which rights are recognized but not actually applied, and the danger of reductionism, in which difficult ethical questions are reduced to the problem of legal compliance. Rather, Smuha promotes an ethics of care and solidarity that acknowledges interdependence and ecological responsibility, particularly in the context of global AI systems that are beyond borders and jurisdictions. According to her work, ethical governance should entail a more profound cultural change than rule-making. Combining these views, it is clear that legal systems are essential to the reduction of the worst evils of AI, but cannot alone protect freedom and autonomy in a highly computational world. Biber and Ionita & Kanetake remind us of the need to have clear legal protection and institutional norms, and Gasser and Almeida encourage system designs that can keep up with the complexity of AI. Muhammed and Kachari raise important questions about the sociopolitical realities that inform national deployments, and Smuha makes us desire more than formal legalism in our thinking, more relational and justice-based paradigms.

The global trend of integrating ethics and rights in AI systems can be observed. The GDPR, the EU AI Act, and UN/UNESCO declarations share the common desire to strike a balance between innovation and human dignity. National strategies, especially in postcolonial settings, show the conflicts and divisions that appear when international structures meet local political economies. The Aadhaar and DPDP Act of India demonstrates the potential and the danger of algorithmic governance by states. Such systems, in the absence of participatory design, strong redressal mechanisms, and critical public discourse, can easily reify rather than question the status quo. Finally, the AI legal and regulatory environment is still being built. As systems of governance keep changing, the key issue will be to make sure that these laws do not just institutionalize the power to control people, but instead increase their abilities to self-determine, make decisions, and effectively contribute to the development of their digital futures.

RECLAIMING SELF DETERMINISM AND HUMAN AUTONOMY: EXTENDING THE SARTREAN 'EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE' POSITION

Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most prominent philosophers of existentialism, who advocated the concept of self-determinism, which is the view that people are free and responsible in determining the course of their lives

by making their own choices. This perspective is highly critical of determinist theories, which postulate that the forces that govern our actions are beyond our control, that is, they are determined by biology, social systems, or technology. In the age of algorithm, when it shapes most of our lives, Sartre philosophy challenges us to think about our autonomy, our agency as individuals, and the role of technology in our freedom of choice.

The main concept of Sartre, namely, existence before essence, implies that we are not born with a predetermined goal. How you do it also makes you what you are. This freedom is an empowering one, although with this comes responsibility since every individual has to face the outcome of his or her choices. Nowadays, algorithms are taking control of those choices by providing us with tailored recommendations and narrowing down the choices we can use. This begs the question whether these systems are in favor of our freedom or they constrain it.

The algorithms employed by such websites as social media, online stores, and search engines are programmed to forecast and manipulate what we consume. These systems are able to offer personalized content, which can be misleading since they analyze data continuously. They however narrow down the options that we perceive. The apparent convenience can result in the tunnel vision of the world and our inability to take the decisions of our own. Our decisions may no longer reflect our nature when we are already under the control of systems that we do not understand and which we are unable to control completely. This is particularly evident in social media settings where individuals tend to form their identity according to their likes, trends, and comments as opposed to their real values and wishes. Consequently, personal expression is codified and more of a fake nature.

Sartre also emphasized that there was no freedom without responsibility. We may outsource the responsibility of the decisions to the algorithms and get away with it. This may create a sense of loss of control over our lives and we are just being led by machines. As technology is not disregarded in the philosophy of Sartre. It is also a proof of time and again that technology is not determined. We are not yet a lost cause because, provided that we understand the influence algorithms have on us, we can consciously and thoughtfully make decisions. It entails asking why systems are how they are and what they are unable to do.

The concept of self-determinism developed by Sartre can be applied to analyze the connection between people and technology. The algorithms can assist in searching and alleviating, yet the dangers are that algorithms can restrict our freedom. It is in our hands to be responsible and remain critically involved in the use of digital tools to preserve our freedom and remain ourselves. The main issue is to remain aware of the influence of technology in our lives-remaining the creators of our lives.

Reclaiming Autonomy in AI Design

The task of criticizing the loss of autonomy is thus also a task of suggesting design principles and policy interventions that can recover or defend it. Greene et al (2019) demand the introduction of ethics into the architecture of AI systems, not as an addition to the finished product. This involves the openness of algorithm operation, opt-out options of automated decision, and user training to develop critical interaction. Teo (2023) also suggests that dignity-based design should be put in the forefront, where not only the accuracy or the effectiveness of a system should be taken into consideration, but also the extent to which the moral agency of users is preserved. This could include restricting personalization, making sure that exposure to a variety of views is provided, or making defaults that encourage deliberation rather than compliance.

CONCLUSION AND ETHICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In a world where algorithms and predictive reasoning are becoming more and more influential, the issues of autonomy, choice, and human dignity become more urgent than ever before. The paper was a critical analysis of how algorithmic systems organize not only the results of society but also the shape of human action. Technological systems, which appear to be autonomous, are human-designed and need to be held to moral design and responsibility. One of the major conclusions is that algorithms are not neutral instruments, as they

contain the political and philosophical assumptions that define behavior, perception, and choice. The use of predictive analytics and personalized systems tends to decrease instead of increase autonomy, causing a paradox of data-driven personalization as a source of decreased freedom. Autonomy is disintegrated into layers of computation and nudges of behavior. In this regard, designers, developers, and regulators have ethical responsibility. Technology needs to be directed towards purposeful ethical design, focused on transparency, explainability, and opt-out. The user needs to be viewed as a moral agent, not a data point, and they have a right to have control over their digital environments. Integrating human-in-the-loop systems (particularly, in such vital spheres as healthcare and justice) can be effective in maintaining accountability and indicating the shades of moral reasoning. In addition to technical protection, the paper demands a more profound incorporation of philosophical investigation into the regulation of technology. Design must be guided by ethical frameworks, which are based on virtue ethics, deontology, and care. This allows for a transition to proactive, morally conscious development. The next step in research should be what autonomy is in the algorithmic era. Is it sufficient to provide users with more options, or should autonomy be redefined in relational terms? The process of algorithmic control in marginalized communities should also be given attention, and how ethical models can put their voices at the center. Finally, this paper proposes critical, creative, and ethically-informed interaction with technology- once again, human values must be reaffirmed in a digital world where autonomy and algorithms must co-exist with each other with integrity.

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