



The Story of the Companions of the Cave and Modern Temporal Disruption: A Conceptual Analysis of the Quran in the Context of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The acceleration of computation, simultaneous processing, and predictive logic in artificial intelligence has disrupted the way humans understand time, which was previously perceived as linear, sequential, and progressive. Meanwhile, studies of the story of the Companions of the Cave in the Quran are still predominantly placed within a historical-didactic framework, so that its conceptual potential in reading the problems of modern temporality has not been adequately explored. This study aims to explicitly and purposefully analyze the construction of nonlinear temporality in the story of the Companions of the Cave and to engage in critical dialogue with the algorithmic temporality that underlies AI work. This study uses a qualitative approach based on conceptual-thematic analysis of Quranic verses related to time, with a method of critical-comparative dialogue between classical and contemporary interpretations, and theories of temporality in artificial intelligence studies. The results show that the story of the Companions of the Cave represents a nonlinear temporality model that emphasizes the relativity of human time experience, where objective duration is not identical to subjective perception. The conceptual analysis reveals three distinct temporal regimes: human temporality, existential, limited, and experienced; the quantitative, computational, and predictive temporality of machines; and the transcendent, absolute, and beyond-calculation divine temporality. This comparison emphasizes the ontological limits that AI cannot overcome, despite its massive, simultaneous time-processing capacity. In conclusion, the story of the Companions of the Cave expands the horizon of Quranic thematic interpretations of time. It provides a critical framework for assessing claims of artificial intelligence's temporal supremacy in the modern context.

Keywords: Companions of the Cave; Temporality; Quran; Artificial Intelligence; Philosophy of Time

Abstrak

Percepatan komputasi, pemrosesan simultan, dan logika prediktif dalam kecerdasan buatan telah mendisrupsi cara manusia memahami waktu yang sebelumnya dipersepsi linear, berurutan, dan progresif. Sementara itu, kajian terhadap kisah Ashabul Kahfi dalam Al-Quran masih dominan ditempatkan dalam kerangka historis-didaktis, sehingga potensi konseptualnya dalam membaca problem temporalitas modern belum dieksplorasi secara memadai. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara eksplisit dan terarah konstruksi temporalitas non-linear dalam kisah Ashabul Kahfi serta mendialogkannya secara kritis dengan temporalitas algoritmik yang menjadi dasar kerja AI. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis analisis konseptual-tematik terhadap ayat-ayat Al-Quran yang berkaitan dengan waktu, dengan metode dialog kritis-komparatif antara tafsir klasik dan kontemporer, serta teori temporalitas dalam studi kecerdasan buatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kisah Ashabul Kahfi merepresentasikan model temporalitas non-linear yang menegaskan relativitas pengalaman waktu manusia, di mana durasi objektif tidak identik dengan persepsi subjektif. Analisis konseptual memperlihatkan tiga rezim temporalitas yang berbeda: temporalitas manusia yang bersifat eksistensial, terbatas, dan berpengalaman; temporalitas mesin yang kuantitatif, komputasional, dan prediktif; serta temporalitas ketuhanan yang transenden, absolut, dan melampaui kalkulasi. Perbandingan ini menegaskan adanya batas ontologis yang tidak dapat dilampaui oleh AI meskipun memiliki kapasitas pemrosesan waktu yang masif dan simultan. Kesimpulannya, kisah Ashabul Kahfi memperluas horizon tafsir tematik Al-Quran tentang waktu sekaligus memberikan kerangka kritis untuk menilai klaim-klaim supremasi temporal kecerdasan buatan dalam konteks modern.

Kata Kunci: Ashabul Kahfi; Temporalitas; Al-Quran; Kecerdasan Buatan; Filsafat Waktu

Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence has fundamentally changed the way humans experience, understand, and interpret time. Machine learning-based computational systems operate through simultaneous calculations, probabilistic predictions, and automated decision-making that transcend biological rhythms and human reflective capacities (Janiesch, Zschech, & Heinrich, 2021). This condition gives rise to what can be formulated as modern temporal disruption, namely a structural asynchronous relationship between the phenomenological experience of human time and the accelerative, nonlinear, and predictive temporality of machines (Bogotá & Djebbara, 2023). This disruption has not only technical impacts but also affects ontological and epistemological realms, as it shifts the boundaries of knowledge, the role of consciousness, and the human position in the process of interpreting reality (Riccio, 2025). The Quran, as a revealed text, presents a symbolic narrative on the relativity of human time experience through the story of the Companions of the Cave, which sharpens the contrast between the temporal perception of the human subject and the reality of time as it exists within divine will. This narrative opens up a conceptual space for critically rereading contemporary time problems, particularly when claims of artificial intelligence as a superior predictive system confront human epistemic limitations.

Various global studies and reports have confirmed the temporal transformation caused by artificial intelligence. The World Economic Forum (2025) indicates that AI-based automation accelerates work cycles, decision-making, and social interactions beyond the capacity for human psychological adaptation. UNESCO (2024) identifies the phenomenon of temporal compression, namely the compression of the experience of time due to digital systems that operate continuously and simultaneously without reflective pauses. The OECD (2023) adds that big data-driven predictive systems shape a future orientation dominated by machine calculations, thereby increasingly marginalizing ethical reflection and human judgment. These findings emphasize that temporal disruption is not simply a side effect of technology but an inherent characteristic of artificial intelligence that reconstructs human relations with the past, present, and future. The limitations of technocratic and secular philosophical approaches in responding to this crisis underscore the need for an alternative, reflective framework that positions humans as meaningful subjects rather than mere components of computational systems. This space allows for conceptual dialogue with the revealed tradition.

Previous studies on the story of the Companions of the Cave have generally focused on the theological and moral dimensions. Lala (2024) emphasized God's power over time as evidence of the resurrection, but did not elaborate on its epistemological implications for contemporary humanity. Rahman et al. (2024) interpreted the story as a symbol of steadfast faith and resistance to political tyranny, but limited their analysis to a historical-religious context. Afzal (2025) discussed the relativity of time in the Quran through a comparison of human experience and divine knowledge. Still, he remained at a level of metaphysical abstraction, disconnected from the realities of modern technology. Faustino's (2022) study of time and technology in Western philosophy highlighted social acceleration and digital capitalism but neglected dialogue with the source of revelation as a conceptual alternative. Elmahjub's (2023) research on artificial intelligence in Islamic studies focused on the legal and normative ethical aspects, while only briefly addressing the temporal dimension. The limitations of these studies indicate a significant research gap, namely the absence of a conceptual analysis that systematically connects the Quranic narrative, especially the story of the Companions of the Cave, with the temporal disruption caused by artificial intelligence as an ontological and epistemological problem.

This research aims to answer the question of how the story of the Companions of the Cave can be understood as a conceptual framework of the Quran in reading modern temporal disruption triggered by artificial intelligence, and what its implications are for understanding the limits of human and machine knowledge. The research objectives include an analysis of the Quranic concept of time through the story of the Companions of the Cave, a comparison between human temporal experience and machine temporality, and a critical reflection on the position of

humans amid the dominance of intelligent systems. The research's initial argument is that the Quran not only serves as a normative guideline but also provides a relevant conceptual framework for understanding modern crises, including temporal crises. The story of the Companions of the Cave is presented as a symbolic representation of the limitations of human perception of time and the absoluteness of divine knowledge, which conceptually challenges the claim that artificial intelligence is a predictive system that seems to surpass humans. The contribution of this research is expected to include enriching the study of the Quran through a cross-disciplinary conceptual approach, expanding the discourse of the philosophy and ethics of revelation-based artificial intelligence, and offering an alternative perspective on temporal disruption that reaffirms humans as reflective and meaningful subjects.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method based on library research, with a thematic-conceptual hermeneutic approach to the Quran, enriched by the philosophy of time and critical studies of artificial intelligence, chosen because it is relevant to analyzing the issue of non-empirical temporality and the disruption of modern time experience theoretically. Primary data consists of the text of the Quran containing the story of the Companions of the Cave, along with classical and contemporary interpretations selected based on scientific authority, academic influence, and differences in interpretive patterns, thus representing an adequate hermeneutic spectrum. Secondary data include literature on the philosophy of temporality and scientific publications on artificial intelligence, sourced from reputable academic books and journals published in the last 10-15 years, treated as conceptual data to enrich the analysis. Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature search using thematic keywords, selective and in-depth reading of the main texts, and the recording of explicit and implicit temporal concepts, with source quality control based on publisher reputation and conceptual relevance. Data analysis was conducted thematically-conceptually and hierarchically, beginning with verse analysis and interpretation to extract the concept of Quranic temporality, followed by an abstraction of divine and human time frames, then a critical analysis of technological and artificial intelligence temporality, which was then brought together through an asymmetrical conceptual dialogue with the Quran as a normative horizon. The final stage was a reflective theoretical synthesis to formulate a coherent, critical, and contextual framework for interpreting modern temporal disruption.

Results and Discussion

Discontinuous Temporality in the Story of the Companions of the Cave

The story of the Companions of the Cave in Surah al-Kahf, verses 9–26, presents a temporal configuration that defies the principle of linear chronology as is

common in empirical historiography. The Quran does not frame events as a series of causes and effects based on the continuity of time, but rather as an ontologically discontinuous temporal structure (Basharat & Azhari, 2025). The duration of hundreds of years of “sleep” is not experienced as a gradual accumulation of experiences, but as a total suspension of temporal experience. Al-Ṭabarī’s (2001) interpretation of verse 11 emphasizes the closing of hearing as a divine mechanism that severs the subject’s relationship with the flow of social time, rather than merely as physical protection. This severance demonstrates that temporal discontinuity operates as a structure of existence rather than merely a narrative strategy. Time appears as a relational reality that can be suspended without erasing the subject’s existence. This conception challenges the assumption that time is neutral, continuous, and inherent to human experience, and positions temporality as a domain entirely dependent on a transcendent will.

The tension between human perception and divine knowledge of duration reinforces this construction of temporal discontinuity. The dialogue of the Companions of the Cave upon awakening, who estimate the duration of sleep as only a day or half a day, signifies a complete disconnect between human consciousness and the structure of objective time. Al-Qurtubi’s (1964) insistence that this error is epistemic, not psychological, suggests that human consciousness lacks direct access to cosmic temporal reality. The assertion of a duration of three hundred years plus nine years, followed by the statement that God knows best the length of their stay, demonstrates the function of numbers as rhetorical devices, not centers of meaning. Ibn Kathīr (2004) asserts that divine correction corrects human claims to knowledge while simultaneously subordinating chronology to the authority of revelation. Temporal discontinuity serves as a critique of the objectivism of numerical time and dismantles the illusion that quantitative measurements can represent reality in its entirety.

An ontological reading places temporal discontinuity as a category of existence that defines the existential status of the Companions of the Cave. Al-Rāzī (1999) interprets this long sleep as human *ta’ṭīl al-Af’āl*, namely the total suspension of existential activity so that the subject is no longer within the regime of worldly time. The existence of the Companions of the Cave during this period cannot be classified as active life or biological death, but rather a liminal state that transcends conventional ontological dichotomies. This state demonstrates that human attachment to time is not an essential trait, but rather a relationship that can be terminated without negating existence. Temporal discontinuity is not merely an anomaly but an ontological mechanism that reveals layers of reality beyond empirical temporal laws. This story thus offers a framework for an ontology of time that rejects reducing human existence to participation in the chronological flow.

The epistemological dimension of temporal discontinuity is apparent through the explicit limitation of human speculation regarding time. The assertion

that God knows best the duration of their stay serves as an epistemic declaration that time is not a completely transparent object of knowledge. Al-Baghawī (1999) interprets this verse as a warning against the tendency to make chronological precision the primary goal of narrative reading. The focus of revelation is directed toward meaningful significance, not temporal accuracy. This limitation demonstrates that human knowledge of time is derivative and contextual, not autonomous. The Quran positions temporality as a domain of divine knowledge revealed only insofar as it is relevant to guidance. Temporal discontinuity serves as an epistemological strategy that critiques the positivistic paradigm that equates truth with the measurability and continuity of temporal data.

The release of the Companions of the Cave from the chronological regime also has significant historical and sociological implications. During their slumber, they did not participate in the political, social, or cultural transformations that had unfolded over the centuries. Their awakening presents subjects disconnected from historical time, not simply chronologically late. Ibn ‘Āshūr (1985) interprets this alienation as a manifestation of the ontological distance between humans and historical time. Historical time appears as a social construct that regulates collective life, not an absolute framework for existence. This story implies a critique of the absolutization of linear history that positions humans as deterministic products of temporal progression. Human existence is not entirely determined by one’s position in history, but rather by one’s relationship with a divine will that transcends historical continuity.

The overall structure of the story of the Companions of the Cave emphasizes that temporal discontinuity is the narrative’s conceptual core, not an additional element. Through the suspension of the experience of time, the correction of human estimation, and the affirmation of divine authority over temporality, the Quran constructs a vision of time that rejects progressive linearity as a universal framework of meaning. Classical commentators consistently highlight the limitations of human understanding of time, while conceptual analysis reveals broader ontological and epistemological implications. The theoretical contribution of this reading lies in articulating time as a relational reality that can be suspended rather than an absolute entity. This framework provides a critical foundation for dialogue with issues of modern temporality, including the relativity of time and temporal disruption in the context of contemporary technology.

The Relativity of Time Perception and the Crisis of Human Epistemology

The story of the Companions of the Cave positions the human experience of time as a fundamental epistemological issue that reveals the limitations of the subject’s knowledge when confronted with temporal reality. According to al-Qurṭubī (1964), the characters’ ignorance of the duration of sleep does not function as a secondary narrative element, but rather as a conceptual strategy of the Quran to challenge the assumption that time can be fully known through human experience.

Al-Ṭabarī (2001) adds that when consciousness is interrupted, the subject's relationship with time loses its epistemic foundation, although time continues to exist as a cosmic reality. This condition indicates that temporal knowledge does not originate from the continuity of time itself, but rather from the involvement of consciousness, memory, and the structure of experience. This story rejects the assumption that time exists as a neutral fact that is automatically accessible to the rational subject. The Quran, through the narrative of the Companions of the Cave, presents human knowledge of time as always conditional, fragile, and dependent on the state of consciousness, rather than as a direct reflection of objective reality.

The stark contrast between the temporal duration stated in the Quran and the characters' subjective perceptions highlights the epistemic gap between time as a cosmic fact and time as a human experience. Information about hundreds of years of sleep is beyond the conscious reach of the Companions of the Cave, and therefore does not function as internal knowledge. This situation demonstrates that chronological duration is not identical to experienced duration. This argument aligns with Henri Bergson's (1910) notion of *durée* as time experienced qualitatively and irreducible to homogeneous quantitative units. Bergson (1911) rejected the understanding of time as a mechanical entity because human consciousness experiences time as an interpenetrating flow between memory, present experience, and future projections. When consciousness ceases, subjective duration collapses, so that claims to knowledge about time lose their phenomenological legitimacy. The story of the Companions of the Cave reinforces the critique of epistemological reductionism that reduces time to a mere object of measurement.

The temporal ignorance of the Companions of the Cave does not represent a cognitive failure, but rather conveys a deliberate epistemological message. The Quran does not depict the characters as subjects who neglect to calculate time, but rather as representatives of the human condition when knowledge is detached from the temporal structures of consciousness. This perspective leads to an explicit critique of positivist epistemology, which equates truth with measurement and quantification. Jones et al. (2022) show that temporal knowledge relies on memory retention and the potential for hope as fundamental structures of consciousness. When these two elements fail, as happened to the Companions of the Cave, temporal experience loses its internal coherence. Events continue to unfold objectively, but knowledge of their duration becomes impossible to obtain subjectively. The Quran, through this story, emphasizes that human knowledge is never detached from the state of consciousness that sustains it.

The epistemological crisis of time depicted in the story of the Companions of the Cave also leads to the dismantling of human claims to mastery of temporal reality. The characters' questions after awakening do not yield certainty, but rather limited speculation, reflecting the subject's inability to establish temporal truth independently. This condition demonstrates that time is not subject to human

rational authority. The existential approach positions time as a structure of human existence rather than an external object that can be controlled. Humans exist within time without the ability to master it epistemically (Reed, 2025). The story of the Companions of the Cave affirms this view by demonstrating the limitations of humans as temporal beings whose consciousness does not always align with the reality of time. Temporal ignorance serves as a critique of the modern illusion of rational control over all dimensions of reality, including time.

The relativity of the experience of time depicted in the story of the Companions of the Cave does not refer to the relativity of modern physics, but rather to the relativity of human consciousness. The contrast between the perception of a short sleep and a duration of hundreds of years confirms that time exists for humans as a meaningful experience shaped by memory and self-narrative. Banham (2025) points out that temporal experience is always tied to the continuity of the narrative constructed by consciousness. When memory is interrupted, the temporal narrative loses its foundation, so time cannot be articulated as knowledge. The Companions of the Cave lacked an internal narrative regarding the duration of sleep, so time did not exist as a meaningful fact. The Quran exploits this situation to emphasize that time never exists as a pure fact, but rather as a construction of meaning vulnerable to interruptions in consciousness.

The epistemological approach to the story of the Companions of the Cave demonstrates that the construction of temporal knowledge is limited, contextual, and non-autonomous. Human knowledge of time lacks absolute validity because it always relies on the continuity of experience and the structure of consciousness. When these structures are disrupted, claims of knowledge lose their reliability and coherence. This story conveys an implicit critique of the modern knowledge paradigm that separates facts from the subject's experience. The Quran emphasizes that knowledge cannot be understood merely as a representation of external reality, but rather as the result of a complex relationship between the subject, consciousness, and meaning. Thus, the story of the Companions of the Cave offers an alternative epistemological framework that positions human limitations as constitutive elements of knowledge, rather than as defects to be eliminated.

Temporal Disruption by Artificial Intelligence: A Critical Analysis of Algorithmic Temporality

The temporal disruption brought about by artificial intelligence marks a fundamental transformation of human relations with time, transcending technical acceleration and entering the ontological realm of temporal experience. Modern artificial intelligence systems operate through predictive inference, machine learning, and real-time processing mechanisms that convert time into measurable operational parameters (Ivanov et al., 2022). This process renders the past as a structured dataset, the present as a point for automated decision execution, and the future as a calculated probability oriented toward optimizing performance (Zhang

& Lu, 2021). Within this framework, time loses its status as an open horizon of consciousness and becomes a computational resource that can be compressed and manipulated. Rona-Tas (2020) points out that predictive algorithms frame the future as a statistical extension of the present, thus replacing existential possibilities with numerical projections. This transformation is not simply a change in the way time is managed, but rather a shift in how time is understood, experienced, and valued within the structures of contemporary social life.

Reducing time to an operational variable directly impacts the increasingly fragmented human temporal experience. Recommendation algorithms, notification systems, and content personalization mechanisms operate through rapid feedback loops that fragment time into repeating micro-units (Javed et al., 2021). Janiesch, Zschech, and Heinrich (2021) explain that machine learning achieves optimal effectiveness when user attention is distributed over short, high-frequency intervals. This fragmentation is not a byproduct, but rather a systemic design that underpins the attention economy and user retention. Temporal experiences lose narrative continuity because each moment is positioned as a discrete point of consumption without reflective interconnectedness. This condition gives rise to temporal fatigue, the inability of consciousness to distinguish between meaningful and functional moments due to rapid repetition without interpretive pauses. Time no longer flows as a series of meaningful experiences, but instead presents itself as a series of superficial, disconnected nows bound by the logic of algorithmic productivity.

Temporal compression and fragmentation demonstrate the anticipatory nature of artificial intelligence systems, shifting human orientation from anticipation to prediction. Anticipatory systems theory holds that predictive systems do not wait for events to occur; rather, they act on simulations of possible outcomes (Louie, 2010). In this context, the future is not understood as a space open to existential surprises, but rather as a target for probability-based optimization. Bernard Stiegler (1998) asserts that modern technicality creates a proactive temporality that precedes experience, positioning human consciousness as a follower of the machine's rhythm. Delays, hesitations, and postponements, which previously served as spaces for reflection, are now deemed dysfunctional. Algorithmic temporality suppresses the contemplative dimension of time and replaces it with the logic of rapid response. Consequently, temporal experience loses its depth of meaning as every decision is guided by instantaneous calculations that bypass ethical judgment and the maturation of consciousness (Bogotá & Djebbara, 2023).

Conceptual tensions arise when algorithmic temporality is compared with Quranic temporality, as articulated through the story of the Companions of the Cave. Quranic time is not conceived as a measurable chronological quantity but rather as a field of relations among Divine will, human consciousness, and the ethical orientation of existence. The long sleep of the Companions of the Cave does not

represent a temporal anomaly, but rather a revelation that the value of time is determined by its relational qualities, not its objective duration. Philosophical interpretations of this story emphasize that temporal suspension can function as a medium for inner transformation and the salvation of values (Al-Rāzī, 1999). This perspective contrasts with algorithmic temporality, which views every pause as inefficient. When time is reduced to an optimization variable, the openness of meaning narrows because future patterns are standardized through statistical predictions that close off the space for existential reflection.

This comparison reveals a fundamental difference between algorithmic novelty and existential meaning. Generative artificial intelligence systems generate statistical novelty through data combination, but this novelty is synthetic and not rooted in a transformation of consciousness. Quranic temporality views novelty as the result of the interaction between experience, values, and ethical orientations that develop over time. When the future is projected as a matter of probability, the dimensions of testing and reflection inherent to existential time disappear. Izutsu (2002) points out that the concept of time in the Quran is always linked to moral responsibility and inner change. In contrast, algorithmic temporality directs humans toward operational certainty, thereby reducing existential uncertainty (Amoore & Raley, 2017). This difference emphasizes that the conflict lies not in technology alone, but in the time paradigm that governs humans' relationship to the meaning and purpose of life.

The temporal acceleration promised by artificial intelligence also gives rise to the paradox of temporal alienation. The automation and efficiency afforded by predictive systems actually increase the demands on human response speed. Davis (2024) shows that the higher the level of automation, the more intense the temporal pressure experienced by users. Time is no longer experienced as a process, but rather pursued as a performative target. Hartmut Rosa (2013) describes this condition as a social acceleration that erodes human resonance with the world. Algorithmic temporality creates a regime of permanent urgency that erases the value of waiting and silence. The contrast with the story of the Companions of the Cave is even more stark, as long pauses do not result in a loss of meaning but rather maintain the integrity of values. Temporal suspension functions as a space for wisdom, whereas machine temporality views delay as a systemic failure to be eliminated.

The dominance of algorithmic temporality also threatens human temporal autonomy by forcing consciousness to adapt its cognitive rhythm to the speed of computation. Algorithms are devoid of doubt and reflection, while ethical decision-making requires cognitive processing time that cannot be reduced to instantaneous calculations. Cabrales et al. (2022) assert that reflective decisions require a temporal pause for value judgments to occur. When artificial intelligence systems regulate social rhythms, humans are pushed from a reflective mode to a reactive one.

Temporal autonomy, namely the subject's ability to determine the rhythm of experience and assess meaning, is eroded by the logic of optimization (Hauswirth et al., 2021). The story of the Companions of the Cave demonstrates that the suspension of action is not synonymous with a loss of agency, but rather a strategy for maintaining value orientation amid external temporal pressures.

This analysis emphasizes that the temporal disruption caused by artificial intelligence constitutes a conceptual crisis in humanity's relationship with time, not simply a technical issue. The clash between algorithmic and Quranic temporality reveals the conflict between the predictive-instrumental and relational-existential paradigms. The story of the Companions of the Cave serves as a critical point of dialogue that reveals the limitations of algorithmic logic when confronted with the incalculable dimension of meaning. Critical awareness of this paradigm difference opens up space for technological design that respects the reflective pause, temporal autonomy, and ethical orientation of humans. Without such reflection, the colonization of time by predictive systems risks reducing human experience to a series of instantaneous responses that lack depth, anticipation, and inner transformation.

The Ontological Boundaries of Temporality: Divine Time, Human Time, and Machine Time

The story of the Companions of the Cave presents temporal discontinuity as an ontological reality that cannot be reduced to a psychological perceptual disturbance or cognitive illusion. The cave youths' long sleep marks a rupture in the existential relationship between human consciousness and cosmic temporal continuity, not a linear acceleration of the experience of time. When consciousness is suspended, duration persists without phenomenological meaning for the experiencing subject. The radical difference between the subjective estimation of a single day and the historical reality of centuries demonstrates that human temporal experience is not identical to objective duration. Human temporality is rooted in the structure of consciousness, the continuity of memory, and the body's attachment to experience, so that the absence of consciousness negates access to meaningful temporal flows (Reggia, 2025). This discontinuity emphasizes that human time is not a self-contained entity that flows autonomously, but rather an existential construct dependent on the continuity of conscious experience.

The ontological distinction becomes even sharper when divine temporality is understood as an order that transcends experience, change, and the sequence of moments. Divine time does not operate as a series of successive events, but rather as a totality of knowledge encompassing beginning, continuity, and end simultaneously (Goodman, 1992). Divine knowledge of the duration of the Companions of the Cave's stay in the Cave is direct and non-inferential, independent of empirical signs, memory, or historical reconstruction (Sheikh, 2022). Human disagreements about duration reveal an ontological gap between absolute

knowledge and speculative knowledge bound by epistemic limitations. Divine temporality is more accurately understood as transtemporal, rather than merely atemporal, as it encompasses all temporal relations without being subject to change. This framework emphasizes that the representation of God's time through categories of human experience always risks misleading conceptual reduction.

Human temporality occupies a fragile, fragmented existential position, determined by the continuity of consciousness, which is always vulnerable to disruption. The perception of time is shaped by the relationship among memories, present experiences, and the projection of expectations, so that time is experienced as meaning, not as neutral duration (Huang et al., 2020). The story of the Companions of the Cave demonstrates that when consciousness is suspended, time does not disappear ontologically; rather, it ceases to be phenomenologically relevant. The youths' inability to recognize the duration of their sleep confirms that temporal experience is not objective but rather bound by the structure of consciousness. This condition gives rise to an epistemological crisis when humans confront temporal phenomena that transcend direct experience. Knowledge of time always relies on traces, narratives, and interpretations, so human temporal truth is probabilistic and open to different perspectives (Franz, 2022). Human temporality is interpretive, not absolute.

This crisis of temporal epistemology reveals the structural limits of human knowledge regarding a reality not directly experienced. The determination of the duration of the Companions of the Cave's sleep cannot be verified through internal experience, but rather through historical inference, which is always open to different interpretations. This situation demonstrates that human knowledge of time depends on narrative constructions and interpretive frameworks shaped by social and historical contexts (Straub, 2022). Historical time is not a transparent mirror of reality, but rather the result of the articulation of meaning from the traces of events. This limitation is not an incidental failure, but an ontological consequence of human position as temporal subjects situated within time. The story of the Companions of the Cave reveals a permanent tension between limited temporal experience and a temporal reality that transcends consciousness. This tension demands epistemic caution so that humans do not equate the results of temporal interpretations with absolute ontological truth.

Machine temporality occupies a distinct ontological order that cannot be equated with either human or divine time. Artificial intelligence systems operate time as a functional variable through units of account, system synchronization, and high-speed processing (Coeckelbergh, 2021). Algorithmic temporal representations are not rooted in experience, but rather in purely instrumental, relational calculations. Machines lack consciousness connecting past, present, and future as meaningful experiences (Colombatto & Fleming, 2024). Temporal prediction and simulation activities occur without existential memory or phenomenological

anticipation. Machine temporality is derivative because it relies entirely on human-designed timeframes (Agarwal & Nenkova, 2022). Referring to artificial intelligence as an entity that understands time is only metaphorical, not ontological, because there is no subject experiencing temporal flow as a dimension of existence.

The derivative nature of machine temporality demands ontological affirmation so that critiques of technology do not become trapped in merely normative judgments. Algorithmic time can be understood as a functional relationship between system states, structured for efficiency, rather than as a horizon of meaning. Machines are capable of manipulating the sequence, duration, and speed of processes without ever being within time as experience (Nagy, Eschrich, & Finn, 2021). This lack of existential dimension renders machine temporality ontologically empty, yet operationally rich. This emptiness does not negate the technology's usefulness, but rather emphasizes the categorical boundary between simulation and experience. Equating computational sophistication with ontological depth risks creating a philosophical fallacy that obscures the fundamental distinction between calculation and existence. This clarification keeps the discourse on artificial intelligence within a precise ontological framework.

The conceptual synthesis of the three levels of temporality reveals an ontological incommensurability that cannot be reduced to a single developmental spectrum. Divine time is transtemporal and absolute, human time is existential and relative, and machine time is simulative and relational. The story of the Companions of the Cave serves as a paradigmatic illustration that reveals the limits of human experience with temporal realities that transcend consciousness. The integration of the Quranic story with ontological analysis emphasizes that differences in temporality are not simply differences in degrees of complexity, but rather differences in types of existence. The three cannot be reduced to one another without a categorical error. This framework also prevents contemporary technological narratives from equating algorithmic time processing with existential or metaphysical temporal understandings.

The overall discussion emphasizes that temporality is an ontological structure that determines the possibility of existence and knowledge. The story of the Companions of the Cave reveals human limitations when faced with temporal discontinuities that transcend experience, while also highlighting the fundamental distinction between absolute and interpretive knowledge. Machine temporality, despite dominating the modern landscape, never transcends its status as an unconscious simulation. The conceptual distinction between divine, human, and machine time makes a theoretical contribution by enriching the discourse on the ontology of time and offering a critical framework for discussions of artificial intelligence. Thus, the Quran serves not only as a normative source but also as a relevant conceptual resource for developing a non-reductive temporal ontology in the modern context.

Conclusion

The Quran presents a nonlinear temporal construction that clearly distinguishes between divine time as a transcendent ontological horizon, human time as a limited historical experience, and machine time as an instrumental algorithmic calculation. This finding confirms that processing acceleration in artificial intelligence is not identical to meaningful understanding, because the dimensions of meaning, reflective consciousness, and ethical values lie beyond the logic of machine temporal efficiency. Theoretically, this study extends the study of the Quran into the realm of the philosophy of time and the epistemological critique of technology, while also offering an alternative conceptual framework for discourse on the ethics of artificial intelligence grounded in the perspective of revelation. Practically, this finding is relevant as a normative basis in formulating the ethics of the development and use of digital technology so as not to reduce humanity to algorithmic logic alone. The limitations of this study lie in its conceptual-normative approach, which lacks empirical analysis, and in its thematic focus on a single Quranic narrative, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, further research needs to develop comparative studies across Quranic texts, integrate contemporary philosophical approaches to time, and involve empirical or interdisciplinary methodologies to examine the relationship between temporality, digital technology, and the ethics of artificial intelligence more comprehensively.

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Author Contribution Statement

SC contributed to the formulation of the research idea, the development of the conceptual framework, the writing of the main draft of the manuscript, the integration of the analytical results, and final correspondence and editing. AS played a role in the collection and curation of sources, the literature review, the development of the methodology section, and the review of the substance to strengthen the scientific argument. FS contributed to data analysis and interpretation of the findings, preparation of the results and discussion sections, and checking the consistency of citations, academic language, and the overall suitability of the manuscript for publication.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that this manuscript was prepared and published without any conflict of interest whatsoever, whether financial, institutional, or personal. The entire research, analysis, and writing process was conducted independently without any influence from third parties that could affect the objectivity or scientific integrity. Therefore, the author confirms that there are no specific interests that could potentially bias the content, results, or conclusions presented in this manuscript.

AI Usage Statement

The author declares that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in preparing this manuscript was limited to improving language quality, correcting grammar, and assisting with text formatting to make it more systematic and readable. AI was not used to generate the scientific substance or main content of the research. All research results, findings, concepts, conceptual frameworks, analyses, data interpretations, ideas, and conclusions in this manuscript are entirely the result of the author's intellectual work. Therefore, academic responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the article's content rests solely with the author.

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