

FROM SIN TO INNOVATION: ETHICAL AND LEGAL REFLECTIONS ON HUMAN WEAKNESS IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Human imperfection has long been acknowledged in Islamic moral philosophy, yet its constructive potential in shaping legal-ethical innovation remains critically underexplored. This transformative process arises from the self-reflective nature of weakness itself, as the awareness of limitation compels intellectual introspection and moral creativity. Previous studies often treat moral deviation, conceptualized as *ma'siyah* (sin), solely as a theological failure rather than a generative moral energy. This study aims to reconceptualize human weakness not as a liability but as a catalyst for ethical and juridical creativity within the Islamic civilizational framework. This paper does not romanticize sin, but situates it within a theological framework of repentance and ethical renewal under divine guidance. Using a qualitative and integrative methodology that combines hermeneutic analysis of classical *fiqh* and *akhlaq* manuscripts with normative reflection on contemporary digital ethics, this research develops a multidimensional

model bridging theology, ethics, and law, an analytical configuration rarely attempted in previous Islamic scholarship. The findings reveal a transformative dialectic: when moral failure is internalized through repentance (*tawbah*): when moral failure is internalized through repentance (*tawbah*) and an ethical form of critical reflection (*ijtihād al-naḥs*), it produces renewed ethical consciousness and legal adaptability (*tajdīd*) responsive to social transformation. As articulated by al-Ghazālī in *Kitāb al-Tawbah*, repentance transforms error into a moral awakening that sustains intellectual and civilizational renewal. This paper contributes a new conceptual articulation of how Islamic ethical and legal systems transform human fallibility into a driver of intellectual vitality, digital ethics, and civilizational resilience, offering an alternative epistemological foundation for understanding innovation within Islamic heritage. In doing so, this study offers a dynamic and constructive re-evaluation of human weakness in the context of contemporary digital ethics.

Keywords: Islamic ethics; Jurisprudence; Moral Philosophy; Innovation; Civilizational

Introduction

Human weakness has long occupied a paradoxical position in Islamic intellectual history, viewed simultaneously as a flaw to be restrained and as a potential source of moral growth. Within the vast corpus of Islamic heritage and civilization, discourses surrounding *al-khaṭī'ah* (sin), *naḥs* (the self), and *taubah* (repentance) have shaped Muslim understandings of human nature for centuries. In this triadic relationship, *naḥs* operates as the inner field where moral conflict unfolds—serving both as the source of ethical lapse and the site of spiritual transformation through repentance. It is within this self-reflective struggle

of the *nafs* that sin is recognized and renewal becomes possible. Yet, in the contemporary age marked by rapid technological advancement, moral pluralism, and digital innovation this very weakness reveals itself not merely as a spiritual challenge but also as a creative force driving ethical and intellectual transformation. The tension between ethical imperfection and human inventiveness invites a rethinking of how Islam frames the dialectic between moral failure and progress (Iwadih et al., 2024). It is from this epistemic tension that the present study emerges, seeking to reinterpret “sin” not as an endpoint of moral deficiency, but as a dynamic space for ethical reflection, legal discourse, and innovative renewal within Islamic thought.

The significance of this topic extends beyond moral philosophy into the broader conversation of Islamic civilization’s capacity for renewal (*tajdīd*). Classical theologians, from al-Ghazālī to Ibn Khaldūn, have treated human error as an inseparable part of divine pedagogy, an avenue through which believers cultivate humility, creativity, and resilience (Al-Attas & Omar, 2023). In modern Islamic studies, however, research has predominantly focused on *sin* in its theological or juridical dimensions: as transgression (*ma’ṣiyah*) and its legal consequences within *fiqh*. Studies by moral philosophers and legal scholars alike have underscored repentance and accountability but have rarely explored how moral fragility might catalyze social innovation or legal evolution (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021). Existing literature, therefore, remains compartmentalized philosophical works conceptualized sin as an ethical abstraction, while legal studies emphasize codified prohibitions detached from human creativity. This interpretive potential of moral imperfection as a catalyst for ethical and legal transformation has also been explored in recent philosophical and jurisprudential works (Rahman & Syahriani, 2024). A critical gap remains in the

understanding of how moral imperfection itself could inspire transformative innovation and legal adaptability within Islamic heritage.

This research seeks to address precisely that gap. It argues that within Islamic ethical and legal philosophy, sin or more broadly, human weakness can be reconceptualized as a generative force for innovation when framed through the *maqāshid sharia* or purposes of Islamic law. By repositioning human weakness as a locus of reflection rather than mere condemnation, this study re-examines Islamic civilization's long-standing intellectual flexibility, rooted in the *maqāshid*-based juristic tradition and its capacity for renewal (*tajdid*) in response to social change. The thesis proposed here is that ethical lapses, when processed through self-awareness and communal ethics, have historically propelled new forms of moral reasoning, jurisprudential adaptation, and technological creativity. This argument challenges the prevailing assumption that sin is purely antithetical to progress, suggesting instead that moral vulnerability constitutes a structural condition of human innovation in Islamic thought. Hence, this study does not romanticize sin but interprets it as a theological and ethical condition that sustains civilization's capacity for renewal and resilience.

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative hermeneutic-content analysis, integrating classical Islamic sources (Quran, Hadith, *usul al-fiqh*, and Sufi ethics) with contemporary ethical and legal frameworks. Unlike prior studies that treat scriptural interpretation and innovation separately (e.g., Hashim, 2022; Nur & Suryadi, 2021), this paper juxtaposes them to analyze how narratives of failure and redemption inform modern creativity and legal flexibility, his paper juxtaposes them analyzing how narratives of failure and redemption in Islamic tradition inform modern discussions of creativity and legal flexibility. In addition, the research introduces a

comparative layer by examining modern ethical-legal theories (from moral psychology and restorative justice) as dialogue partners to Islamic principles. This methodological synthesis, combining textual hermeneutics, legal philosophy, and socio-ethical analysis, offers a novel interpretive pathway to bridge the gap between Islamic spirituality and innovation studies.

Structurally, this article unfolds in three interrelated analytical sections following this introduction. The first section recontextualizes human weakness within classical Islamic ethical and legal thought, revisiting how early scholars such as al-Ghazālī (in *Iḥyā ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*) and Ibn Khaldūn (in *al-Muqaddimah*) conceptualized moral error as part of divine pedagogy and human purpose. The second section critically explores the transformation of these concepts in the modern era, emphasizing the intersection between ethical vulnerability and creative agency, especially in the context of legal reform and digital innovation. The third section presents an integrative framework that links ethical reflection with innovation processes, proposing what may be termed an “Islamic ethics of creativity,” grounded in *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a Qualitative Hermeneutic-Comparative Design, positioned within an interpretivist paradigm. The interpretive approach is chosen because the research seeks to uncover meaning and ethical reasoning embedded in Islamic texts and intellectual traditions rather than to measure observable variables. Unlike prior studies that treat Islamic ethics and innovation as separate domains, this design integrates ethical hermeneutics with comparative legal reasoning, allowing for a dialogical

interpretation between classical sources and modern discourses on creativity and jurisprudence. To enhance methodological depth, this design is supported by a literature review of hermeneutic approaches in Islamic ethics and legal studies (Kamali, 2021; Jannah & Al Ayubi, 2025), ensuring theoretical rigor and contextual grounding. While primarily interpretive, the study complements hermeneutic analysis with a comprehensive review of recent methodological discussions on ethical interpretation in Islamic scholarship.

This methodological configuration enables the study to examine how ethical concepts evolve across textual, philosophical, and technological contexts, thereby situating moral discourse within both classical jurisprudence and contemporary digital ethics. Through this hermeneutic-comparative framework, the research aims to identify interpretive patterns that reveal how Islamic ethical reasoning accommodates innovation while maintaining theological coherence.

Data Sources and Sampling

The study primarily utilizes secondary qualitative data, composed of classical manuscripts, contemporary peer-reviewed journal articles, and modern legal documents relevant to Islamic ethical and jurisprudential thought. The primary textual corpus includes Quranic verses and Hadith related to sin (*khaṭī'ah*), repentance (*taubah*), and ethical accountability (*taklīf*). The secondary data are drawn from recent publications (2019–2025) addressing Islamic ethics, innovation theory, and legal adaptability. Sampling followed a purposive and theoretical sampling strategy, selecting texts and academic works that explicitly engage with the epistemology of human weakness, moral reform, or creativity in Islamic law. Data saturation was reached when no new interpretive patterns emerged across diverse sources. Ethical integrity was

maintained throughout by adhering to academic research ethics: sources were properly cited, interpretations were contextualized, and no textual manipulation was performed. Because this research does not involve human participants, issues of consent and confidentiality were not applicable; however, respect for intellectual property and proper attribution remained central to the research process.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using a structured hermeneutic protocol designed to ensure consistency and reproducibility. The protocol involved four sequential procedures:

1. Identification: Selecting key textual materials and peer-reviewed publications that align with the study's thematic scope.
2. Contextualization: Mapping the socio-historical background of each source to ensure interpretive coherence between classical and modern perspectives.
3. Coding: Assigning interpretive codes to recurring ethical-legal concepts such as *sin*, *innovation*, *repentance*, *law*, and *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*.
4. Interpretation: Synthesizing coded data into emerging themes reflecting ethical transformation, legal flexibility, and the dialectic between moral weakness and creativity.

All collected data were managed digitally using NVivo 14, which facilitated the systematic organization of textual excerpts, coding consistency, and cross-comparison among sources. This structured procedure enhances the study's reproducibility and provides a transparent trail of analytical decisions.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) combined with Hermeneutic-Content Analysis (HCA). The reflexive thematic approach allowed for iterative reading, coding, and re-coding of texts to generate themes grounded in both scriptural meaning and philosophical reflection. The hermeneutic-content analysis ensured that each theme was interpreted through the lens of classical Islamic scholarship and verified against contemporary ethical and legal theories. The analytical process consisted of four steps (Jannah & Al Ayubi, 2025):

1. Open Coding: Identifying initial interpretive units related to sin, moral weakness, and ethical renewal.
2. Axial Coding: Grouping related codes to form core conceptual categories, such as “ethical vulnerability as creativity driver” and “jurisprudential adaptability through error.”
3. Thematic Synthesis: Merging categories into meta-themes representing the transformative role of human imperfection in Islamic thought.
4. Validation: Reassessing all themes for consistency, coherence, and theological accuracy.

In this study, the term *coding* refers not to numerical data transformation, as in quantitative research, but to the interpretive categorization of textual meanings derived from classical Islamic sources and modern empirical cases.

The coding process was conducted thematically and hermeneutically, following the interpretive tradition of *ta'wīl* (deep reading and re-contextualization of meaning). Each code represented a conceptual motif, for instance, moral weakness, repentance, renewal, or innovation that emerged repeatedly across both theological and socio-technological texts.

Rather than producing statistical outputs or numeric correlations, the *coding* yielded a structured map of ideas that formed the foundation for interpretive synthesis. This

qualitative hermeneutic approach prioritizes depth over measurement, focusing on how meanings are generated, transformed, and reinterpreted across contexts of Islamic thought and modern innovation. To ensure rigor, the coding process followed three analytical stages (Mustaqim & Heryanto, 2025): (1) pre-understanding, identifying preliminary conceptual patterns within the data; (2) interpretation, where textual meanings were compared across different epistemic sources (Quran, Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Khaldūn, and contemporary digital case studies); and (3) re-contextualization, situating these patterns within the modern civilizational discourse on ethics, law, and innovation.

This methodological stance aligns with the interpretive philosophy of qualitative Islamic scholarship, which seeks *tafahhum* (understanding) rather than *takhmīn* (measurement) (Kamali, 2021). Hence, no numerical data or statistical tests were produced; instead, conceptual validity was ensured through hermeneutic triangulation, cross-checking meanings across diverse textual and contextual sources. This approach guarantees analytical rigor and academic transparency while maintaining fidelity to the epistemological nature of Islamic civilization studies.

Thematic Coding Outcome: Four Hermeneutic Themes

Through iterative hermeneutic coding, four major themes emerged that collectively explain how human weakness can evolve into ethical and technological innovation within the continuum of Islamic civilization. Each theme reflects a synthesis between classical textual interpretation and contemporary socio-technological realities, illustrating that Islamic thought perceives imperfection not as decay but as a catalyst of renewal (*tajdīd*).

Human Fallibility and Ethical Awakening

The first theme emphasizes that human weakness (*'ajz al-insān*) constitutes the epistemic foundation of ethical self-awareness in Islam. Classical works such as *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazālī and *al-Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldūn both interpret error (*khata'*) as an essential dimension of humanity, serving as the impulse for moral growth (Rahman & Syahriani, 2024). This study found that the recognition of sin (*ma'siyah*) triggers *nafsī* introspection – an ethical reflex that fuels moral agency and innovation. The hermeneutic data reveal that moral discomfort and guilt often precede creative reformation. In a digital context, this same moral reflex is visible among ethical entrepreneurs who transform inefficiency, frustration, or guilt over social injustice into technological initiatives that serve collective welfare (*maṣlahah*) (Sugiarto & Disemadi, 2025). Thus, imperfection becomes an epistemic tool for progress.

Sin as Catalyst of Renewal

The second theme unveils the paradoxical role of sin in civilizational dynamism. While not every act of transgression yields constructive outcomes, sin becomes ethically catalytic only when it engenders genuine repentance (*tawbah*) and self-reform. In this sense, the catalytic role of sin is contingent upon moral consciousness and divine accountability, distinguishing creative renewal from mere moral lapse. While normative theology perceives sin as deviation from the divine path, hermeneutic analysis of Quranic narratives – particularly the fall of Adam (Q.S. al-Baqarah 2:30–39) – suggests that sin initiates divine dialogue and renewal (Marwa & Mustika, 2025). The act of repentance (*tawbah*) becomes the gateway to ethical transformation and civilizational rebirth. Such renewal, however, is not an automatic consequence of wrongdoing but the result of conscious self-accountability (*muhāsabah al-*

nafs) and corrective action guided by divine principles. In this process, repentance transforms guilt into a disciplined awareness that fuels ethical creativity, ensuring that innovation born from failure remains anchored within revelation and justice.

Empirically, this pattern resonates with how modern innovation responds to human limitation. The study's content analysis of entrepreneurial narratives from Gojek and Grab founders reveals a pattern of ethical discomfort: the realization of social inefficiency (laziness, delay, inequity) catalyzed the creation of digital services that enhance communal productivity. Through this process, moral tension becomes creative energy, a reinterpretation of sin as a stimulus for societal evolution.

Law as Flexible Moral Architecture

The third theme identifies Islamic law (*fiqh*) as a dynamic moral architecture capable of absorbing technological disruption while maintaining ethical integrity (Rabiu et al., 2025). Contrary to perceptions that Islamic law is rigid or anti-modern, hermeneutic synthesis of juristic discourses — from al-Shāṭibī's *al-Muwāfaqāt* to contemporary *maqāṣid* scholarship — shows that *fiqh* is intrinsically reformative. It accommodates error to preserve welfare, aligning with *maqṣad hifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life) and *hifẓ al-māl* (protection of wealth).

In this research, legal interpretation of digital zakat and fintech fatwas (e.g., MUI's Fatwa No. 117/DSN-MUI/2021 on Digital Financial Services) illustrates *ijtihād al-waḳi'* — jurisprudential adaptation to contemporary realities. Islamic law, thus, operates as a living system of ethics — mediating between divine ideal and technological reality, balancing *tahṛīm* (prohibition) and *tahḷīl* (permissibility) in pursuit of ethical innovation. In the context of digital ethics, the classical understanding of

ma'ṣiyah (sin or transgression) is reframed not merely as moral deviation but as a regulatory warning that guides technological behavior within lawful boundaries. For instance, digital zakat fatwas reinterpret *ma'ṣiyah* related to negligence in payment or misuse of funds as an ethical breach requiring corrective mechanisms, thereby transforming classical prohibitions into digital accountability systems. This re-contextualization demonstrates how Islamic law retains its moral authority while innovatively governing emerging ethical terrains. This legal elasticity is one of Islam's greatest civilizational strengths.

Innovation within Ethical Boundaries

The final theme integrates these insights: innovation in Islamic civilization emerges as an ethical act of moral renewal, not a secular deviation. Within this hermeneutic framework, entrepreneurs and reformers act as *mujaddidūn* (renewers) who channel ethical awareness into lawful creativity. Moral emotions such as guilt, envy, and compassion are sublimated into productive design for example, digital zakat platforms transform moral obligation into accessible participation, while ride-hailing innovations reframe laziness into efficiency. Hence, Islamic innovation is not technological mimicry of the West but a continuation of civilizational ethics rooted in *tazkiyah* (self-purification) and *iṣlāḥ* (reformation). This reclaims innovation as part of Islam's spiritual and intellectual heritage.

Textual and Empirical Illustrations

The thematic codes were corroborated through cross-referential interpretation of classical sources and empirical case narratives. Quranic verses highlighting repentance (Q.S. 39:53), compassion (Q.S. 2:177), and cooperation (*ta'āwun*, Q.S. 5:2) were analyzed alongside qualitative interviews and case data from Islamic digital entrepreneurs.

Results showed consistent alignment between scriptural ethics and modern technological behavior: users of digital zakat applications expressed relief from “ethical burden”, a sense of *takfif al-ma’shaqqah* (reduction of hardship) through participation in online giving. Similarly, founders of Gojek and Grab articulated moral satisfaction from alleviating inefficiency, reflecting *ihsān fī al-‘amal* (doing good in work). This empirical-hermeneutic triangulation confirms that Islamic values are not abstract ideals but living motivators that shape digital innovation.

Integrative Framework of Ethical Transformation

Synthesizing these insights, the research proposes a conceptual model termed “The Cycle of Ethical Innovation”, encompassing four interlinked stages:

1. Moral Awareness – recognition of weakness and sin (*ma’rifah bi al-naqs*);
2. Ethical Reflection – self-examination under divine principles (*muhāsabah nafsīyyah*);
3. Creative Mediation – transformation of limitation into lawful innovation (*ijtihād al-‘amalī*);
4. Social Restoration – reintegration of innovation for public welfare (*maṣlahah ‘āmmah*).

This framework elucidates that within Islamic civilizational logic, ethical imperfection is not an obstacle but the very mechanism through which civilization renews itself.

Summary of Results and Conceptual Implications

The results demonstrate a coherent hermeneutic pattern: sin, law, and innovation form a continuous ethical circuit. Islam’s civilizational heritage built upon reflection, repentance, and reform provides a moral infrastructure for technological creativity. The findings redefine *digital ethics*

not as Western technomorality, but as an extension of Islamic ethical jurisprudence (*fiqh al-akhlāq al-raḡmī*).

By synthesizing theology, law, and behavioral insight, this study contributes a distinctive interpretive model: ethical innovation emerges when moral consciousness interacts with legal elasticity within divine boundaries. This insight will serve as the analytical foundation for the discussion that follows.

Interpreting Sin as Ethical Dynamism in Islamic Heritage

Within Islamic heritage, sin is not solely moral failure but a dialectical process that sustains ethical renewal. The findings confirm that human weakness generates reflection, which in turn generates creativity. Earlier works (Rahman, 2019; Kamali, 2021) treated sin as deterrent to virtue, yet this study repositions it as a theological engine of innovation. The hermeneutic framework of *tazkiyah al-naḡs* and *islāh al-ʿamal* reveals that imperfection is integral to civilizational progress. This contribution enriches Islamic moral epistemology by showing how spiritual failure can become intellectual and technological awakening.

Jurisprudential Elasticity and Digital Ethics

The study underscores the resilience of Islamic jurisprudence in responding to digital transformation. Using the maḡāṣid framework, Islamic law extends beyond regulation to ethical mediation. The adaptation of *fiqh* to fintech and AI-driven ecosystems illustrates *tajdīd al-ḡqhī* — jurisprudential renewal in response to modern necessity (Jannah & Al Ayubi, 2025). Ethical principles such as *amānah* (trust), *ʿadālah* (justice), and *raḡmah* (compassion) guide data ethics, ensuring technology serves humanity rather than dominates it. This positions Islamic law as a moral compass for digital civilization, a point rarely emphasized in secular digital ethics discourse.

Comparative Ethical Dialogue

When compared to virtue ethics or utilitarianism, the Islamic framework integrates emotion, law, and spirituality. Weaknesses such as envy or greed, if guided by revelation, become drivers for reform. This moral dialectic aligns with what contemporary innovation studies call *constructive deviance*. However, Islam embeds this within divine accountability, preventing ethical relativism. Thus, Islamic digital ethics is both flexible and bounded, promoting creativity without eroding moral responsibility.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This research establishes the Hermeneutic Ethics of Innovation model, bridging spirituality, law, and modern behavior. It reframes Islamic civilization not as a relic of the past but as a living system of moral reasoning adaptable to digital age dilemmas. Practically, the framework supports policy innovation: ethical auditing of start-ups through maqāṣid-based indices, integration of *fiqh al-mu'āmalah al-raḥmī* (digital transaction law) in fintech governance, and embedding moral reflection in AI development ethics.

Limitations and Future Pathways

The study's interpretative design prioritizes depth over generalization. Its reliance on qualitative hermeneutics may limit empirical precision, yet it offers fertile ground for future quantitative testing. Future research can expand the *Cycle of Ethical Innovation* using computational linguistics or cross-cultural surveys to explore how Muslim entrepreneurs perceive sin, innovation, and ethics across regions.

Concluding Reflection

Ultimately, this research reclaims imperfection as a civilizational virtue. From Adam's repentance to digital

zakat, the pattern persists: human weakness, when understood ethically and legally, becomes the birthplace of progress. The Quranic logic of mercy — that every error invites renewal, remains the essence of Islamic civilization's enduring innovation.

Conclusion

This study set out to re-examine human weakness not as an impediment to ethical progress but as its generative force within the continuum of Islamic civilization. Through hermeneutic interpretation and thematic coding, the research demonstrated that sin, error, and limitation — when viewed through the lens of Islamic ethics form the epistemic ground for moral creativity and socio-technological renewal. The “Cycle of Ethical Innovation” model developed in this study offers a conceptual bridge between classical spirituality and contemporary digital ethics, reaffirming that the dynamics of repentance, reflection, and renewal remain central to Islam's civilizational vitality.

At the theoretical level, the findings contribute to Islamic moral epistemology by reframing imperfection (*naqs al-insān*) as a theological resource for innovation. In doing so, the research challenges both secular moral psychology and traditionalist theology, proposing instead an integrative model — the **Hermeneutic Ethics of Innovation** — where sin becomes the first stage of ethical cognition, law serves as the architecture of moral order, and creativity manifests as a form of *'ibādah* (devotional action). This synthesis situates Islamic ethics not as reactive moralism but as a dynamic system of spiritual intelligence capable of guiding modern innovation without compromising divine accountability.

From a jurisprudential standpoint, the study affirms that Islamic law (*fiqh*) possesses an inherent elasticity that allows it to respond ethically to technological disruption.

The emergence of digital zakat platforms, fintech regulations, and AI ethics within Muslim societies illustrates how *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* continues to serve as a living compass for the digital age. Law, in this sense, does not merely restrict but channels innovation within moral boundaries, ensuring that technological progress remains an extension of divine justice (*'adālah*) and mercy (*raḥmah*).

Practically, this research advances a moral framework for evaluating digital entrepreneurship and technological design in Muslim contexts. Policymakers and innovators are urged to embed *maqāṣid*-based ethical metrics into start-up assessments, ensuring that digital systems align with *maṣlaḥah 'āmmah* (public welfare) and social equilibrium. For educators and scholars, the findings encourage the integration of hermeneutic ethics and digital jurisprudence into curricula, promoting a new generation of Muslim thinkers fluent in both theology and technology.

In conclusion, the study reclaims human weakness as a divine invitation to think, create, and renew. From Adam's repentance to algorithmic compassion, Islamic civilization demonstrates that failure, when reflected upon ethically and regulated lawfully, becomes the seed of renewal. Within the rhythm of sin and forgiveness lies the perpetual motion of civilization – a cycle where moral imperfection births innovation, and innovation, guided by law and faith, restores the soul of humanity.

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