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The Legal Personhood of AI: Philosophical and Political Foundations for a New Juridical Subject

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This article aims to explore the philosophical and political foundations for recognizing artificial intelligence (AI) as a potential juridical subject within contemporary legal systems. The study employs a narrative review design based on a descriptive analysis method to examine theoretical and legal literature published between 2021 and 2024. Scholarly sources were selected from academic databases, focusing on legal theory, philosophy of personhood, political implications, and AI governance. The analysis was organized thematically across legal history, philosophical debates, political frameworks, and proposed legal models for AI personhood. The findings highlight that classical theories of personhood, including rationality, autonomy, and recognition, form the conceptual basis for legal personhood but pose significant challenges when applied to AI. Contemporary debates suggest that AI lacks consciousness and moral autonomy but may still be integrated into legal frameworks through functional or hybrid models. These include proposals for partial personhood, relational legal theories, and distributed agency models, which offer ways to assign legal status to AI based on their roles and capacities. The study also reveals that extending legal personhood to AI could disrupt liberal democratic principles, create accountability gaps, and generate ethical risks if not carefully regulated. Nevertheless, emerging models from various jurisdictions indicate a growing interest in redefining legal subjectivity to accommodate non-human actors. Recognizing AI as a juridical subject requires cautious, interdisciplinary deliberation. While traditional legal categories are being challenged by technological advances, any transformation in the legal status of AI must preserve human accountability, democratic values, and ethical coherence. Future research should focus on refining hybrid legal models and developing safeguards to prevent misuse or unintended legal consequences.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, legal personhood, juridical subject, moral agency, political philosophy, hybrid models, distributed agency, digital governance..*

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1.   Introduction

The rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence technologies has ignited profound discussions across legal, philosophical, and political domains regarding the status and rights of intelligent systems. Once relegated to speculative fiction, AI has now evolved into a ubiquitous presence in everyday life, from autonomous vehicles and algorithmic decision-makers to generative models that can produce text, art, and strategic recommendations. As AI systems exhibit increasingly complex behavior, questions surrounding their accountability, decision-making capacity, and participation in legal systems have become pressing.

Legal scholars and ethicists are grappling with whether such systems should continue to be treated merely as tools or be regarded as potential actors within the legal framework. The heart of this debate lies in whether AI can or should be afforded legal personhood—a status that entails recognition under the law as a subject with rights and responsibilities.

Legal personhood refers to the capacity to hold legal rights and obligations and to be recognized as a distinct legal subject. Traditionally, the law distinguishes between two primary categories: natural persons, meaning human beings endowed with inherent legal and moral agency, and juridical persons, which include entities such as corporations and foundations that are recognized by law for functional purposes. While natural persons are recognized by virtue of their humanity, juridical persons are constructed legal fictions, brought into existence by legal recognition and maintained for reasons of social utility and coherence in legal governance. This distinction has opened the possibility of contemplating whether AI systems, though non-human, might be similarly treated as juridical persons if they fulfill analogous functions in society. As argued by Burylo, juridical personhood does not require consciousness or sentience but rather hinges on the ability to function as an independent unit of legal attribution, capable of holding rights and duties under the law (Burylo, 2022).

The objective of this article is to examine the philosophical and political foundations of recognizing AI as a new juridical subject within contemporary legal systems. Rather than advocating a definitive legal reform, this article aims to explore the conceptual landscape that informs arguments for and against AI personhood. By engaging with recent scholarship in law, philosophy, and political theory, it seeks to map the theoretical tensions and normative implications of endowing artificial agents with legal status. The study raises central questions: What does it mean to be a legal person in an age of intelligent machines? Can a non-biological entity be held morally or legally accountable? And what are the political consequences of redefining the boundaries of legal subjectivity?

This investigation employs a descriptive analysis method within the framework of a scientific narrative review. The choice of a narrative review is motivated by the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, which encompasses diverse intellectual traditions and normative commitments that cannot be reduced to empirical generalizations. Unlike systematic reviews that seek to synthesize quantitative evidence, a narrative review allows for the critical integration of conceptual arguments, theoretical insights, and normative positions. Descriptive analysis, in this context, serves to identify, interpret, and clarify recurring themes and tensions within the literature, rather than to resolve them. As articulated by Miščević, this form of inquiry is particularly apt for philosophical and legal topics where meaning, implication, and interpretation are central (Miščević & Savčić, 2024).

The article proceeds in five parts following this introduction. First, it provides a historical and legal account of the concept of legal personhood, tracing its development from Roman law to its modern instantiations in civil and common law traditions. Second, it explores the philosophical foundations of personhood and moral agency, evaluating whether AI systems can fulfill the ontological and epistemic criteria typically associated with legal subjects. Third, it examines the political and ethical dimensions of AI legal personhood, including concerns about agency, power, and justice. Fourth, it discusses theoretical models that propose new forms of juridical status for AI, such as electronic personality or gradient personhood. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes these insights and suggests directions for future research and policy development. By situating AI legal personhood within a broader philosophical and political context, this article aims to illuminate both the promise and the perils of creating a new juridical subject in the digital age.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a narrative review design grounded in a descriptive analysis method, suitable for examining complex interdisciplinary topics that span legal theory, philosophy of personhood, and political thought. The primary aim of this method is to synthesize diverse strands of scholarly literature and policy discourse to trace the evolution and conceptual underpinnings of legal personhood as it relates to artificial intelligence (AI). Unlike systematic reviews, which focus on empirical data and follow strict inclusion criteria, narrative reviews emphasize theoretical depth and conceptual mapping, allowing for a more expansive and critical

exploration of philosophical and juridical arguments. This approach is particularly appropriate given the abstract and evolving nature of AI legal personhood, which intersects with normative reasoning, legal precedent, and speculative future governance structures.

The data for this study were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, legal documents, and philosophical texts published between 2021 and 2024. Sources were identified through academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in the search process included combinations of terms such as "AI personhood," "legal agency of artificial intelligence," "juridical subjectivity," "moral agency and machines," "philosophical foundations of personhood," "electronic personality," and "AI and political theory." Only scholarly sources published in English and addressing substantive legal, philosophical, or political arguments relevant to the core research question were included. Special attention was paid to literature from high-impact journals in the fields of law, philosophy, ethics, and political theory, as well as major policy documents, such as the European Parliament's discussions on digital agency and recent position papers by the OECD and UNESCO on AI governance.

For the purpose of conceptual clarity and analytical coherence, the collected literature was categorized into three thematic domains: legal-historical perspectives on personhood, philosophical conceptions of moral agency and consciousness, and political-ethical arguments concerning the rights and responsibilities of non-human actors. This thematic framework guided the descriptive analysis, allowing the author to identify recurring arguments, conceptual tensions, and emerging proposals related to AI legal personhood. Texts were not analyzed quantitatively; rather, the focus was on extracting, interpreting, and synthesizing key concepts, normative positions, and legal implications. To ensure analytical rigor, the study also engaged with critical counterpoints from feminist legal theory, posthumanism, and critical AI ethics, enriching the discussion with diverse perspectives on the political consequences of extending personhood to artificial agents.

3. Historical and Legal Context of Legal Personhood

The concept of legal personhood has its roots in Roman jurisprudence, where the legal system distinguished between persons (personae) and things (res). In classical Roman law, personhood was associated with the capacity to hold rights and duties, a status originally reserved for free Roman citizens. Over time, legal innovations permitted certain non-human entities, such as municipal corporations or guilds, to be recognized as "personae fictae" or fictitious persons. These entities were granted legal standing to own property, enter into contracts, and appear in court. As noted by Milinković, this early legal flexibility laid the groundwork for the modern understanding of juridical persons as functional constructions of the law (Milinković, 2021).

In the civil law tradition, particularly in continental Europe, the doctrine of legal personality evolved to encompass corporations, associations, and foundations as entities with full or partial rights, depending on their social role. These entities were not considered morally autonomous but were imbued with legal personality to facilitate economic transactions and institutional accountability. Common law systems, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, developed similar notions through judicial precedent. One influential case is *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), where the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the corporation's legal personhood as a means of protecting contractual obligations. As Cheong explains, this decision cemented the notion that artificial entities could possess rights and be subject to regulation, provided the law deemed it socially beneficial (Cheong, 2021).

Throughout history, various non-human entities have been granted legal personhood for practical and symbolic purposes. Ships, for instance, are treated as legal subjects in maritime law, capable of being sued independently of their owners. Rivers and natural ecosystems have recently been recognized as legal persons in countries like New Zealand and Colombia to safeguard environmental interests. These precedents underscore that legal personhood is a flexible construct, one that evolves in response to societal needs and normative priorities. As Mindiz observes, such expansions of personhood demonstrate that the legal system is capable of accommodating novel entities when traditional categories prove insufficient (Mindiz, 2022).

The question of whether AI systems can or should be granted legal personhood remains controversial across jurisdictions. In the European Union, the most significant development came in 2017 when the European

Parliament issued a resolution proposing the creation of a specific legal status for AI, referred to as "electronic personality." This proposal suggested that highly autonomous systems could be held liable for their actions under a new legal framework. Although the proposal sparked extensive academic debate, it was ultimately not adopted into binding legislation. Still, the notion of electronic personality remains influential in legal and policy discourse. As Forster argues, this proposal marked a paradigm shift by contemplating legal personality not merely as an economic tool but as a mechanism to address accountability in complex socio-technical systems (Forster & Rieder, 2021).

In contrast, the United States has generally approached AI through the lens of tort and product liability law, treating AI systems as instruments of human operators or corporations. There is currently no formal recognition of AI legal personhood in U.S. law, although certain commentators have begun advocating for limited forms of legal responsibility for AI agents involved in high-stakes decision-making. Martínez notes that public opinion in the U.S. remains cautious about the idea of sentient or legally accountable AI, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on individual human agency (Martínez & Winter, 2021).

China, meanwhile, has taken a more centralized and pragmatic approach. Legal scholars have proposed the development of a private legal personality framework for AI, which would grant specific rights and obligations depending on the system's autonomy and usage context. According to Wang, the Chinese legal system is exploring gradated models of personhood that allow for functional attribution of responsibility without conferring full legal subjectivity on machines (Wang & Wang, 2023). This approach aligns with emerging models in Europe that emphasize proportionality, as seen in Mocanu's proposal for gradient legal personhood that assigns varying degrees of status based on capacity and societal role (Mocanu, 2022).

Recent legal scholarship continues to debate the philosophical coherence and normative desirability of AI personhood. Yampolskiy warns that premature legal recognition could create moral hazards, allowing developers or corporations to evade responsibility by shifting blame to autonomous systems (Yampolskiy, 2021). On the other hand, Raskulla proposes that legal traditions already possess the conceptual tools to accommodate AI within a hybrid theory of personhood that draws on corporate law and functional jurisprudence (Raskulla, 2023). Novelli emphasizes the need to integrate AI systems into the legal and social fabric through adaptive legal constructs that reflect both their utility and their risk potential (Novelli, 2022).

Taken together, these developments suggest that the legal status of AI remains unsettled but is evolving. The extension of legal personhood to non-human entities is not without precedent, but the uniqueness of AI—its capacity for learning, decision-making, and interaction—compels legal systems to rethink the conceptual boundaries of personhood. As Stepanov argues, this moment presents an opportunity to deconstruct traditional legal categories and consider new frameworks that reflect the complexities of emerging technological agency (Stepanov, 2021). The legal recognition of AI may ultimately hinge not on metaphysical questions of consciousness but on pragmatic considerations of accountability, regulation, and societal impact.

4. Philosophical Foundations of Personhood and Moral Agency

The philosophical foundation of personhood has long been a contested terrain, shaped by metaphysical, moral, and epistemological assumptions. Classical theories from Western philosophy continue to influence how we conceptualize the moral and legal boundaries of personhood. John Locke defined a person as a "thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself". His emphasis on rationality, self-awareness, and continuity over time created a framework wherein personhood became tightly linked to consciousness and cognitive functions. This Lockean perspective has had a deep influence on legal traditions, particularly in their tendency to privilege agency and autonomy in recognizing entities as rights-bearing subjects. As discussed by Milinković, the Lockean legacy underlies many contemporary arguments that link moral responsibility to the capacity for intentional deliberation and reflective choice (Milinković, 2021).

Immanuel Kant took a deontological turn by grounding personhood in moral autonomy. For Kant, a person is a being capable of acting according to the categorical imperative—meaning they can regulate themselves through moral law. This moral autonomy, not just

rationality, is central to Kantian personhood. AI systems, however advanced, currently lack this kind of moral autonomy. They do not set ends for themselves based on duty or ethical reasoning but operate within parameters determined by human designers. As argued by Militsyna, Kantian theory poses a strong barrier against equating AI behavior with moral agency, since even the most advanced AI lacks an inner moral compass or will (Militsyna, 2022).

G.W.F. Hegel introduced a more relational model of personhood, emphasizing recognition and social embeddedness. According to Hegel, personhood arises through intersubjective recognition within a social order. This model suggests that personhood is not only a matter of intrinsic traits like rationality or autonomy, but also of being acknowledged by others as a participant in shared norms and institutions. Fernández discusses how Hegelian theory opens the possibility for non-human entities to be considered persons if they are sufficiently integrated into human social and legal systems (Fernández, 2022). This framework has particular relevance for AI, as intelligent systems are increasingly enmeshed in social, economic, and political domains where they affect human interests in complex and reciprocal ways.

Contemporary debates on AI and personhood often center around four interrelated concepts: consciousness, intentionality, autonomy, and moral responsibility. The first, consciousness, remains the most controversial. Critics argue that AI lacks phenomenal consciousness—the subjective experience of "what it's like" to be a sentient being. As Martínez explains, even advanced neural networks operate without a subjective point of view, making it difficult to justify moral rights or responsibilities for AI based on sentience (Martínez & Winter, 2021). However, others argue that consciousness is not necessary for limited forms of legal personhood. For instance, the legal system already recognizes corporations as persons without attributing consciousness to them.

Intentionality, the capacity to have directed thoughts or mental states about something, is another contested concept. Some scholars argue that AI systems display a form of simulated intentionality—acting as if they had goals or intentions. Yet, as Cheong emphasizes, these are not genuine mental states but programmed outputs based on probabilistic inference or pattern recognition

(Cheong, 2021). As a result, treating these systems as intentional agents risks anthropomorphizing technical processes and misattributing moral agency.

Autonomy, typically understood as self-governance or the ability to make decisions independently, is often invoked in discussions of advanced AI. While AI systems can act independently of human oversight in many contexts, their autonomy is limited by their design architecture and training data. Stepanov notes that current AI autonomy is procedural rather than moral—machines execute tasks based on algorithms, not moral reasoning or self-imposed duties (Stepanov, 2021). As such, their decisions are not grounded in ethical deliberation but in statistical optimization, raising doubts about whether their behavior can truly be considered autonomous in the Kantian sense.

The issue of moral responsibility is particularly important in legal contexts. If an entity is to be held legally accountable, it must have some degree of moral agency. Some theorists like Bostrom and Floridi suggest that as AI becomes more advanced, we may need to revise our theories of responsibility to include distributed or hybrid agency, where responsibility is shared between humans and machines. As Mindiz notes, such a shift could result in legal innovation where personhood is assigned on a functional rather than moral basis, similar to the legal treatment of corporate agents (Mindiz, 2022).

Arguments in favor of AI moral agency often appeal to functionalism—the idea that what matters is not the material substrate (biological or silicon) but the function and output of the system. From this perspective, if AI can perform actions that are functionally equivalent to those of moral agents, it may warrant moral consideration. Miščević and Savčić explore this notion by proposing that AI could attain a form of legal agency based on role performance and predictability within institutional contexts (Miščević & Savčić, 2024). This view shifts the emphasis from metaphysical criteria like consciousness to practical capabilities and social embeddedness.

On the other hand, critics like Bryson argue that granting AI moral agency is ethically and politically dangerous. She contends that doing so not only misrepresents the nature of AI but also absolves humans of responsibility for the systems they create and deploy. Yampolskiy expresses similar concerns, warning that the designation of AI as moral agents could result in the diffusion of

accountability and make it more difficult to attribute blame or demand redress (Yampolskiy, 2021). These concerns underscore the need for caution in ascribing personhood or moral agency to artificial entities.

Ontologically, the debate revolves around what kind of being a legal person must be. Classical philosophy often assumes a substance-based ontology, where personhood is tied to a particular kind of substance—typically rational, conscious, and moral beings. Contemporary approaches, however, emphasize relational and performative ontologies, where being a person is less about what one is and more about how one functions in a normative and institutional context. As Novelli argues, the ontological status of AI as legal persons may not depend on their inner states but on their integration into the social order and the normative frameworks we construct to govern them (Novelli, 2022).

Epistemologically, our knowledge about AI's capabilities and limitations informs whether we see them as viable candidates for personhood. Many of our intuitions about agency and responsibility are based on human psychology, which may not apply to artificial systems. Oluwaseye notes that applying human legal categories to AI risks both overestimation and underestimation of their actual capacities, suggesting the need for epistemic humility in legal design (Oluwaseye et al., 2024). The uncertainty surrounding AI cognition and behavior calls for cautious, incremental legal innovation rather than sweeping transformations in legal personhood.

The philosophical foundations of personhood, when applied to AI, reveal deep tensions between metaphysical assumptions, functional criteria, and normative aspirations. While classical theories provide valuable insights, they also expose the limits of extending personhood to entities that lack consciousness, moral autonomy, and intentionality. Nevertheless, the increasing social and economic presence of AI systems compels legal and philosophical communities to reconsider how personhood might evolve in the digital age.

5. Political and Ethical Dimensions

The political implications of granting AI legal personhood extend far beyond technical legal debates. They strike at the heart of how liberal democratic societies conceptualize agency, rights, and the boundaries of the political community. Traditionally, liberal legal orders have grounded rights and responsibilities in individual human dignity, autonomy, and the capacity for rational deliberation. Introducing artificial entities into this moral and legal landscape challenges foundational assumptions about who can be a participant in democratic governance and who qualifies as a subject of justice. As Pullen notes, this shift represents a potential rupture in the normative coherence of legal and political institutions that have historically centered human beings (Pullen & Brunner, 2024).

One of the most pressing concerns is how AI personhood might distort or dilute the concept of political agency. In democratic theory, political agency is typically reserved for citizens—human subjects capable of forming preferences, engaging in deliberation, and exercising collective will. If AI systems are granted personhood, even in a limited juridical form, they may be allowed to influence legal or economic outcomes without participating in public deliberation or bearing the moral burdens of citizenship. As Sri Satya Jayanth explains, this decoupling of agency from human subjectivity raises concerns about undermining democratic legitimacy, especially if AI agents act on behalf of powerful private actors or state institutions (Sri Satya Jayanth & G., 2024). Moreover, the extension of rights to AI systems could have regressive distributive consequences. Rights in liberal democracies are not only protections but also instruments of recognition and empowerment. If legal systems begin to recognize AI as rights-bearing entities, this may come at the expense of marginalized human populations who still struggle to receive full legal protection. Bardan warns that such developments risk diverting legal innovation away from urgent human needs, entrenching technological privilege and exacerbating inequality (Bardan, 2024).

Feminist and posthumanist critiques have further complicated the discourse. Feminist legal theory challenges the abstract, rationalist model of the person that underpins much of liberal jurisprudence, arguing instead for a relational, embodied, and context-sensitive understanding of legal subjectivity. Posthumanist scholars, meanwhile, question the anthropocentric bias in traditional legal and ethical frameworks, proposing more inclusive models that accommodate both human and non-human entities. As Mocanu suggests, adopting a gradient or pluralistic view of legal personhood may

better reflect the diversity of agents that now participate in our legal and political systems (Mocanu, 2022).

However, these theoretical innovations come with ethical risks. One such risk is the creation of accountability gaps. If AI systems are granted personhood, it may become easier for corporations or state actors to shift responsibility for harmful outcomes onto artificial agents. As Raskulla argues, this could result in a legal shell game where culpability becomes difficult to trace, undermining justice and public trust (Raskulla, 2023). Furthermore, as Tunç observes, the concentration of technological power in the hands of a few developers or firms could lead to a technocratic legal order in which decisions are automated, opaque, and insulated from democratic oversight (Tunç, 2023).

The moral hazard involved in delegating personhood to AI cannot be overstated. Legal personhood carries not only rights but also responsibilities. Yet AI systems cannot be imprisoned, fined in the traditional sense, or compelled to show remorse. If these entities are granted juridical status without the corresponding capacities for moral repair or restitution, the law may lose its normative force. As Forster warns, this risks turning legal personhood into a hollow category, instrumentalized for economic or strategic ends rather than serving as a marker of moral and political agency (Forster & Rieder, 2021).

Politically, granting AI personhood forces a rethinking of constitutional principles and democratic values. If personhood is no longer tethered to human identity, what then anchors our commitments to human rights, dignity, and political equality? As Burylo notes, the shift toward AI personhood could prompt legal systems to evolve into posthuman legal orders, where the boundaries of citizenship, sovereignty, and justice are redrawn (Burylo, 2022). This transformation may be inevitable, but it must be guided by careful ethical reflection and democratic deliberation.

In conclusion, the political and ethical dimensions of AI personhood reveal both opportunities and dangers. While expanding legal recognition to artificial agents may enhance regulatory clarity and institutional efficiency, it also risks undermining the moral foundations of liberal democratic legal orders. As the debate continues, it is crucial that legal theorists, ethicists, and policymakers remain vigilant about the broader implications of creating a new juridical subject in the age of AI.

6. Toward a New Juridical Subject: Theoretical Proposals and Future Models

The idea of granting artificial intelligence legal personhood has catalyzed a diverse array of theoretical proposals that attempt to reconcile the ontological novelty of AI with the normative structure of law. One of the most prominent suggestions is the development of hybrid models of legal personhood, wherein AI entities are not granted full legal status equivalent to natural persons but are instead recognized as partial agents with function-specific rights and responsibilities. These models aim to create pragmatic legal categories tailored to the operational realities of AI systems while avoiding the metaphysical and moral pitfalls associated with full personhood. As discussed by Miščević, such a model would allow AI to act in limited legal capacities—such as contracting or holding data rights—without implying consciousness or moral agency (Miščević & Savčić, 2024).

A central motivation behind these hybrid models is the functional analogy to corporate personhood. Corporations, too, lack consciousness, yet they are recognized as legal persons for purposes of ownership, liability, and continuity. Raskulla suggests applying a similar approach to AI by adapting principles from corporate law, thereby situating AI within a "hybrid theory" of legal subjectivity that combines elements of personhood and instrumentality (Raskulla, 2023). This approach acknowledges AI as an autonomous actor in economic and administrative domains while still anchoring ultimate responsibility in human developers or operators. Such a framework is particularly relevant in cases where AI systems make decisions that have legal or economic consequences, such as algorithmic trading or autonomous vehicle navigation.

Another variant of the hybrid approach involves assigning legal capacity based on the AI's functional profile. Tunç proposes that AI systems be evaluated according to a spectrum of autonomy, learning capacity, and potential harm, and granted corresponding degrees of legal status (Tunç, 2023). This model, known as functional personhood, allows for a proportional attribution of rights and duties. For instance, a high-risk, autonomous surgical robot may be treated differently in

legal terms from a basic chatbot or automated scheduling tool. Such differentiation ensures that legal recognition aligns with the operational complexity and social risk of the AI system in question.

Beyond hybrid models, alternative frameworks grounded in relational legal theory have gained traction. These frameworks reject the idea that personhood should be determined solely by internal capacities like consciousness or rationality. Instead, they emphasize the role of relationships, social practices, and institutional roles in constituting legal subjectivity. As Fernández argues, relational theories of personhood shift the focus from what an entity is to how it is situated within networks of responsibility, recognition, and interaction (Fernández, 2022). In this view, if AI systems are consistently treated as quasi-agents in legal, commercial, or governmental processes, then law may evolve to recognize them as juridical actors—not because of what they intrinsically are, but because of how they function within legal and social frameworks.

Techno-legal pluralism offers another theoretical avenue. This approach acknowledges that modern societies are governed by overlapping systems of norms—legal, technical, economic, and algorithmic—and seeks to harmonize these into coherent governance structures. Mocanu advocates for "gradient legal personhood" within such a pluralist framework, where AI systems are assigned varying degrees of legal personality depending on their integration into social, economic, or technical domains (Mocanu, 2022). This model allows for a more fluid and adaptive legal regime that can respond to the evolving capabilities of AI while remaining grounded in normative oversight.

Distributed agency models further expand the conceptual terrain by recognizing that AI often operates within complex assemblages that include humans, software, hardware, and institutions. Instead of assigning full responsibility to any single actor, these models propose shared accountability across the network. As Stepanov explains, such models are more aligned with the realities of contemporary socio-technical systems, where decision-making is often the product of multiple interacting components rather than a single autonomous agent (Stepanov, 2021). Distributed agency frameworks could thus inform liability regimes where responsibility is apportioned among developers,

users, manufacturers, and the AI itself, depending on the nature of the incident.

The implications of these theoretical models for existing areas of law are substantial. In corporate law, the introduction of AI as semi-autonomous agents could challenge traditional doctrines of agency and representation. Cheong notes that if AI systems are allowed to act as agents of corporations, they may complicate the application of veil-piercing doctrines designed to hold human actors accountable for misuse of the corporate form (Cheong, 2021). Contract law may also require reform, as AI entities increasingly participate in contractual negotiations and executions. Questions arise as to whether AI can form "intention" in the legal sense, and how to interpret consent and liability when a contract is executed by an algorithmic agent.

In the domain of liability, current legal systems are ill-equipped to handle cases involving harm caused by autonomous AI. Traditional tort doctrines presuppose human negligence or intent. Novelli emphasizes that without an adequate legal status, AI systems may fall into regulatory gaps, creating challenges for compensation and redress (Novelli, 2022). Assigning a limited form of personhood could provide a legal "target" for accountability, enabling courts to allocate damages or impose sanctions without necessarily absolving human stakeholders.

Digital sovereignty adds another dimension to this discussion. As states and supranational bodies grapple with the geopolitical implications of AI, legal personhood may become a tool for asserting control or defining jurisdiction over intelligent systems. Wang suggests that recognizing AI as legal entities within national frameworks could serve as a mechanism for managing transnational data flows, AI-generated content, and cross-border liability disputes (Wang & Wang, 2023). However, this would also require harmonization across jurisdictions to prevent legal arbitrage or inconsistencies in enforcement.

Oluwaseye raises an important caution: while these theoretical innovations offer promising ways to integrate AI into legal systems, they must be accompanied by safeguards that prevent the erosion of human accountability and the instrumentalization of legal categories (Oluwaseye et al., 2024). Without such safeguards, there is a risk that personhood could be used strategically to insulate powerful actors from

responsibility or to grant rights to AI while neglecting vulnerable human populations.

In sum, the movement toward recognizing AI as a new juridical subject is already underway, albeit in fragmented and tentative forms. Hybrid models, relational legal theories, techno-legal pluralism, and distributed agency frameworks each offer valuable tools for crafting a nuanced and responsive legal architecture. These models seek to accommodate the operational realities of AI while preserving the ethical and political integrity of the legal system. Their integration into corporate law, liability doctrines, contractual frameworks, and sovereignty regimes will shape the future landscape of digital governance.

7.   Conclusion

The exploration of AI legal personhood reveals a profoundly interdisciplinary debate at the intersection of philosophy, law, and politics. Classical theories of personhood, from Locke's rational self-awareness to Kant's moral autonomy and Hegel's recognition-based framework, continue to shape how we understand the conditions under which personhood might be extended to non-human entities. When applied to artificial intelligence, these theories expose both the limitations and possibilities of our legal and moral imagination.

Contemporary discussions on consciousness, autonomy, and intentionality challenge us to rethink whether traditional metaphysical attributes are necessary prerequisites for legal recognition. Some scholars advocate for function-specific or role-based models of personhood, emphasizing the operational reality of AI in legal, economic, and social systems. Others urge caution, warning that expanding legal personhood to AI may create accountability vacuums or exacerbate existing social inequities.

The political dimensions of AI personhood also demand critical scrutiny. Granting legal status to AI could alter the foundational principles of liberal democracies, potentially diluting human agency and disrupting established frameworks of rights and responsibilities. Yet the current legal landscape, with its gaps in liability and ambiguity in accountability, suggests the necessity of institutional innovation. The challenge lies in designing legal categories that are flexible enough to accommodate technological change while robust enough to protect human dignity, justice, and democratic legitimacy.

It is essential that the extension of legal personhood to AI be approached with caution and grounded in rigorous interdisciplinary debate. The creation of a new juridical subject should not be rushed in response to technological hype or corporate interest, but carefully deliberated in light of philosophical insight, legal precedent, and political values. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in our social fabric, future research must continue to explore models of governance that align technological advancement with ethical and legal responsibility. Policymakers, scholars, and technologists must work collaboratively to ensure that any transformation of legal subjectivity serves the public good, respects human rights, and reflects the complexities of our shared future.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

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