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**ALGORITHMIC JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTIC TREATISE ON
AI IN LEGAL DECISION-MAKING**

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Abstract

Algorithmic systems increasingly influence legal decision-making. Courts, tribunals and administrative agencies now employ them for risk appraisal, sentencing recommendations, case management and other adjudicative functions. Their growing adoption is often justified by promises of efficiency, consistency and procedural uniformity. Yet beneath these practical advantages lies a deeper philosophical question: can law preserve its essential character when judgment is increasingly mediated by computational processes? This study investigates that question by examining the relationship between algorithmic decision-making and the rule of law. It employs phenomenology and hermeneutics and draws insights from Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer to explore the experiential and interpretive dimensions of legal judgment. The analysis further adopts African jurisprudential insights, particularly those that conceive law as a socially embedded and relational practice based on communal values and lived realities. The findings reveal a paradox. While algorithmic systems enhance consistency, predictability and administrative efficiency, they also obscure justification, weaken accountability and diminish the interpretive character of legal reasoning. The study further demonstrates that the reduction of legal judgment to computational outputs sits uneasily with African conceptions of law that emphasize human dignity, communal responsibility and contextual understanding. On this basis, the paper argues that algorithmic justice may satisfy certain formal requirements of the rule of law, but it struggles to uphold its deeper normative and interpretive foundations. Law is more than the application of rules; it is a human practice of understanding, reasoning and responsibility. Consequently, the study concludes that the uncritical expansion of algorithmic

decision-making likely undermines the legitimacy and meaning of legal authority. Therefore, it recommends that algorithmic systems remain subject to meaningful human oversight and that their deployment be guided by principles of transparency, accountability and interpretive responsiveness.

Keywords: Justice, Philosophy, Rule of Law, Hermeneutics, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

A quiet shift is underway in law. Decisions once shaped in open reasoning now pass through lines of code. Courts and agencies rely on algorithmic tools to appraise risk, guide sentencing and sort claims. The change is steady. It is rarely dramatic. Yet it reaches the core of what legal judgment is. The appeal is easy to see. These systems promise order. They reduce delay. They smooth out the unevenness that comes with human discretion. In crowded dockets, consistency carries its own kind of justice. A similar case should yield a similar result. On this view, calculation appears as an ally of fairness. But law is not only a matter of output. It is a practice of giving reasons. A decision must speak. It must show how it was reached. It must answer the person who stands before it. When judgment is routed through a model that few can read, something changes. The language of justification begins to fade. Correlation stands in for explanation. This contention invites a sharper jurisprudential question. Can a system built on statistical inference sustain the demands of the rule of law?

The rule of law sets limits on power. It asks that rules be clear, stable and publicly known. It rejects arbitrariness. It requires that decisions be accountable and open to scrutiny (Uzomah 2022). These demands are often cast in formal terms. They concern the manner in which law operates. In that narrow sense, algorithmic tools seem well suited. They apply rules with regularity. They treat like cases alike. They do not tire or drift. Yet this account is narrow. It misses the work that gives rules their life. Legal judgment is not a simple match between facts and norms. It involves reading, weighing and fitting the general to the particular. It moves within a tradition of meanings. It answers to reasons that others can grasp. This is the interpretive side of law. Without it, legality becomes a shell.

The present study turns to that neglected side. It asks not only what algorithms do, but what they displace. Two lines of inquiry guide the analysis. The first is phenomenological. It attends to the experience of those subject to decision. What is it like to be judged by a system that does not listen, does not respond and does not explain in ordinary terms? The second is hermeneutic. It examines the nature of legal reasoning as an act of interpretation. Law unfolds through understanding. It does not merely compute. These perspectives draw on the work of Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer. From the former comes a focus on lived experience. From the latter, an account of meaning as something achieved in interpretation. Both resist the reduction of judgment to procedure. The argument developed here is direct and clear. Algorithmic decision-making can support certain formal virtues of the rule of law. It can enhance consistency and aid prediction. At the same time, it strains other requirements that are no less central. It obscures reasons. It diffuses responsibility. It displaces interpretation with pattern recognition. These are not minor defects. They touch the legitimacy of law. The issue, then, is not whether such systems should be used at all. It is how far their use can extend without altering the character of legal judgment beyond recognition. There is a limit, even if it is hard to fix. Beyond it, gains in efficiency come at a cost to meaning and accountability.

The discussion proceeds in stages. The next section surveys leading accounts of the rule of law and recent debates on algorithmic decision-making. It then sets out the aims and the interpretive method employed. The central sections develop the contrasts between calculation and judgment. The treatise closes by stating its contribution, drawing the threads together and offering recommendations for the restrained use of these systems. The stakes are practical. As institutions adopt these tools, they reshape

how authority is exercised and received. Law must remain more than a machine that produces answers. It must remain a practice that can be understood.

Literature Review

This section adopts the thematic review approach and its thrust is synthesizing existing literature rather than expository.

Classical Theories of the Rule of Law

The modern discourse on the rule of law is deeply indebted to classical jurisprudence. Among its most influential exponents is Joseph Raz (2009) whose formal conception presents law as a system designed to guide conduct through clarity, stability and predictability. According to Raz (2009) the rule of law is principally concerned with minimizing arbitrariness and ensuring that legal rules are capable of directing human behaviour. A legal order achieves legitimacy, in part, when individuals can reasonably foresee the legal consequences of their actions. A related but distinct position is advanced by Lon L. Fuller. Fuller (1969) argues that legality depends not merely on the existence of rules but on their conformity to certain procedural principles. Laws must be public, coherent, intelligible and consistently applied. His notion of the “inner morality of law” introduces a normative dimension often absent from strictly formal accounts. Legal authority, on this view, lies not only in effectiveness but also in fidelity to standards that make law understandable and practicable.

While these theories remain foundational, subsequent scholars have drawn attention to dimensions of law that extend beyond formal structure. Paul Ricoeur (2007) argues that legal judgment is inseparable from interpretation and narrative understanding. For Ricoeur (2007), legal reasoning involves the mediation of competing narratives through interpretive judgment rather than mechanical rule application. This insight is particularly significant for contemporary debates on legal automation, where the reduction of judgment to computational outputs apparently neglects the narrative character of legal disputes. A similar emphasis on meaning is found in the work of Bernard Jackson. Jackson (1985) conceives law as a semiotic system in which legal meaning emerges through signs, symbols and interpretive practices. Legal texts do not speak for themselves. Their significance depends on processes of interpretation situated within broader cultural and institutional contexts. This perspective raises important questions about whether algorithmic systems, which rely on formalised data structures, can adequately engage with the symbolic dimensions of legal reasoning.

Critical legal scholarship has further complicated the picture. Drucilla Cornell (1992) challenges attempts to reduce law to fixed and determinate meanings. Her philosophy of the limit emphasises openness, ethical responsibility and the irreducibility of legal interpretation. Law remains responsive to what exceeds formal codification. From this standpoint, legal judgment cannot be exhausted by procedural regularity or computational precision.

Generally, these contributions broaden the understanding of legality. They reveal that law is not merely a system of rules but also a practice of interpretation, communication and ethical judgment. This broader conception provides an important foundation for examining the implications of algorithmic decision-making. While automated systems may advance the formal virtues identified by Raz and Fuller, they encounter greater difficulty when measured against interpretive accounts of law developed by Ricoeur, Jackson and Cornell. The contrasts between these perspectives forms an important backdrop to the present inquiry.

Contemporary Debates on Algorithmic Justice

The emergence of algorithmic decision-making has generated one of the most significant debates in contemporary legal philosophy. Early discussions focused largely on efficiency. Algorithmic systems were presented as tools capable of reducing delay, improving consistency and enhancing administrative capacity. Their appeal rested on the assumption that computational processes could

minimise human error and produce more objective outcomes. Supporters of legal automation often emphasize these advantages. Automated systems can process large volumes of information within short periods. They can identify patterns that may escape human observers. In areas such as risk assessment, sentencing recommendations and administrative adjudication. They promise greater uniformity in decision-making. These perceived benefits have encouraged their adoption across a growing range of legal institutions.

Despite these advantages, philosophical concerns have become increasingly prominent. One of the most influential critiques comes from Antoinette Rouvroy (2020) whose concept of algorithmic governmentality examines the growing tendency to govern through data-driven prediction rather than human judgment. According to Rouvroy (2020) algorithmic systems operate by identifying correlations and anticipating behaviour. In doing so, they often bypass traditional processes of interpretation, deliberation and justification. Governance becomes increasingly predictive rather than reflective. This concern is developed further by Mireille Hildebrandt. Hildebrandt (2015) argues that law itself functions as an inferential practice grounded in interpretation and contestation. Legal reasoning involves the continuous construction and reconstruction of meaning. Algorithmic systems, by contrast, operate through computational inference. They generate outputs without participating in the interpretive practices that give legal norms their significance. For Hildebrandt, this distinction exposes a fundamental tension between legal judgment and algorithmic prediction.

Questions of opacity have also become central to the debate. Frank Pasquale (2015) argues that many algorithmic systems function as “black boxes,” producing decisions whose internal logic remains inaccessible to those affected. Such opacity raises concerns about transparency, accountability and procedural fairness. A legal decision that cannot be explained in intelligible terms risks undermining public trust and weakening the legitimacy of legal institutions. These concerns resonate strongly with the jurisprudential insights of Fuller. Fuller (1969) maintains that law must be understandable if it is to guide conduct. The increasing use of opaque algorithmic systems appears difficult to reconcile with this requirement. A decision may be technically accurate yet remain legally problematic if its rationale cannot be adequately communicated. The debate also raises broader questions about the future of legal reasoning. If legal judgment is reduced to statistical prediction, the role of interpretation becomes uncertain. The insights of Ricoeur (2007), Jackson (1985) and Cornell (1992) suggest that law cannot be understood solely in terms of procedural outputs. Legal meaning emerges through narrative, symbolism and ethical engagement. These dimensions are difficult to capture within computational frameworks.

Although the literature on algorithmic justice has grown substantially, much of it remains focused on technical design, regulatory oversight and bias mitigation. Important as these concerns are, they do not fully address the philosophical implications of replacing interpretation with computation. The deeper question concerns the nature of legal judgment itself. It is at this point that the present study intervenes. Unlike many existing accounts, this study brings together phenomenology, hermeneutics, African jurisprudence and contemporary critiques of algorithmic governance. By doing so, it seeks to illuminate dimensions of legal meaning, lived experience and communal legitimacy that remain underexplored in current discussions of algorithmic justice.

Identified Gap in the Literature

The foregoing review reveals a rich and diverse body of scholarship. Classical theorists have articulated the formal requirements of legality. Hermeneutic and semiotic scholars have highlighted the interpretive nature of legal reasoning. Contemporary critics of algorithmic governance have exposed the challenges posed by automation, opacity and predictive decision-making. African jurisprudential scholars have emphasized the communal and experiential foundations of law. Despite these contributions, important gaps remain. These gaps include:

First, much of the literature treats the rule of law and algorithmic decision-making as institutional or regulatory concerns. Scholars such as Pasquale (2015), Rouvroy (2020) and Hildebrandt (2015) have produced important analyses of transparency, algorithmic governance, and computational inference. However, these discussions often focus on the consequences of algorithmic systems rather than the deeper philosophical question of what becomes of legal judgment when interpretation is increasingly displaced by calculation.

Second, scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (2007), Jackson (1985) and Cornell (1992) have developed sophisticated accounts of law as an interpretive, narrative, and semiotic practice. Yet these insights are rarely brought into sustained conversation with debates on algorithmic justice. Consequently, the implications of legal automation for interpretation, meaning and ethical judgment remain insufficiently explored.

Third, the existing discourse is largely dominated by European and North American perspectives. While these traditions have generated valuable insights, they do not exhaust the philosophical possibilities available for understanding law. African jurisprudence offers a distinctive perspective by grounding legality in communal life, social relationships and lived experience. Scholars such as Oritsegbubemi Oyowe (2015) and Thaddeus Metz (2017) have demonstrated that justice cannot be divorced from the relational conditions of human existence. Nevertheless, these perspectives remain largely absent from contemporary discussions of algorithmic decision-making.

A further gap concerns methodology. Existing scholarship often approaches algorithmic justice through doctrinal analysis, regulatory theory, or empirical investigation. While these approaches are valuable, they frequently overlook the experiential and interpretive dimensions of legal life. The perspectives of Edmund Husserl (2012) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) provide conceptual resources for addressing this omission. Their insights direct attention to how legal authority is experienced and how legal meaning is constituted through interpretation.

It is within these intersecting gaps that the present study is situated. The study does not seek merely to evaluate the efficiency or fairness of algorithmic systems. Rather, it investigates a more fundamental question: whether the increasing reliance on algorithmic decision-making alters the interpretive, experiential and normative foundations upon which the rule of law depends. The study seeks to bring together phenomenology, hermeneutics, African jurisprudence and contemporary critiques of algorithmic governance. Hence, it contributes a perspective that remains largely underdeveloped in existing scholarship.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this treatise is to examine whether algorithmic decision-making can be reconciled with the normative and interpretive foundations of the rule of law. It seeks to determine the extent to which such systems preserve or undermine the essential features that give law its authority. Hence, the specific objectives of the study include to:

- i. analyse the philosophical foundations of the rule of law;
- ii. examine the structure and logic of algorithmic decision-making in legal contexts;
- iii. interpret legal judgment as an experiential and hermeneutic practice;
- iv. evaluate the contrasts between algorithmic processes and the demands of the rule of law;
- v. deductively propose normative conditions for the legitimate use of algorithmic systems in law.

Methodology

This study adopts a philosophical method based on phenomenology and hermeneutics. The choice is deliberate. The questions raised in this paper concern meaning, experience and interpretation. They cannot be resolved through empirical measurement or technical analysis alone. What is required is a mode of inquiry that attends to how law is understood and lived.

Phenomenological Orientation: The phenomenological approach, associated with Husserl (2012) begins from lived experience. It seeks to describe phenomena as they appear, without reducing them to external explanations. In the present context, this involves attending to the experience of those subject to legal decision-making. The shift from human adjudication to algorithmic assessment alters this experience in a fundamental way. Legal judgment is no longer encountered as the act of a reasoning subject. It appears instead as the output of a system. The individual is no longer addressed in the same manner. The expectation of explanation, responsiveness and engagement is diminished.

Phenomenology allows this transformation to be examined with precision. It directs attention to the structure of the encounter between law and subject. It reveals how legitimacy is tied not only to outcomes but to the manner in which those outcomes are produced. A decision that cannot be experienced as reasoned may like lose its normative force. This perspective corroborates the insights of Uzomah (2022) who argues that law derives its authority from its responsiveness to lived realities (21). The phenomenological method thus provides a way to appraise whether algorithmic systems preserve or disrupt this responsiveness.

Hermeneutic Orientation: While phenomenology focuses on experience, hermeneutics concerns interpretation. Gadamer (2004) develops a conception of understanding as an historically situated process. In his understanding, meaning does not exist in isolation. It emerges through engagement with texts, traditions and contexts. Law, from this perspective, is an interpretive practice. Legal rules do not apply themselves. They require interpretation in light of particular cases. Judges move between the general and the specific. They bring prior understanding into dialogue with present circumstances. This process cannot be reduced to fixed procedures.

Algorithmic systems operate on a different logic. They rely on predefined models and statistical relationships. Their outputs follow from structured inputs. They do not interpret in the hermeneutic sense. They do not engage with meaning. They process data. The contrast is decisive. It marks a shift from understanding to calculation. Hermeneutics allows this shift to be articulated clearly. It shows that the introduction of algorithmic systems is not merely a change in method. It is a transformation in the nature of legal reasoning.

Methodological Justification

The combined use of phenomenology and hermeneutics provides a suitable framework for the present inquiry. Phenomenology draws attention to the experiential dimension of law. It examines how legal authority is encountered, understood and lived by those subject to it. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, asserts the interpretive character of legal reasoning. It reveals that law is not merely applied but continually understood and re-understood within changing contexts. Collectively, these approaches make it possible to examine algorithmic decision-making beyond questions of technical efficiency or institutional performance. They direct attention to issues of meaning, judgment, legitimacy and human experience that often remain obscured in predominantly technological analyses.

This methodological orientation also conforms with important strands of African jurisprudential thought. Scholars such as Oyowe (2015) and Metz (2017) emphasise the centrality of human relationships, communal belonging, and moral meaning in legal reasoning. Law, from this perspective, is not a neutral mechanism operating independently of society. It is entrenched within the fabric of communal life and derives much of its legitimacy from its responsiveness to human concerns. The application of phenomenology and hermeneutics enables the study to preserve this understanding of law as a fundamentally human and interpretive practice. Such an orientation is indispensable for evaluating whether algorithmic systems can coexist with the normative demands of the rule of law.

At the same time, this methodological framework has limits. It is not designed to measure the statistical accuracy of algorithmic systems, evaluate computational efficiency or provide empirical evidence concerning their practical performance in courts and administrative agencies. Nor does it offer technical solutions to problems of software design, data architecture or machine-learning implementation. Those questions fall more appropriately within the domains of computer science, empirical legal studies and public policy research. The concern of this study is different. It is philosophical rather than empirical. Its purpose is not to determine whether algorithmic systems work efficiently, but to examine what their increasing use means for the nature of legal judgment, the experience of legality and the enduring ideals of the rule of law.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis discloses a divided picture. Algorithmic systems support certain formal features of legality. At the same time, they unsettle elements that give law its depth and authority. The contrast is not accidental. It follows from the difference between calculation and judgment. Specific findings of the study include:

1. Consistency and the Ideal of Formal Legality

Algorithmic decision-making promotes uniformity. Similar inputs yield similar outputs. This feature conforms with a central demand of the rule of law. Raz (2009) argues that law should guide conduct through predictable standards. In this respect, automation appears to strengthen legality. Yet the gain is partial. Consistency achieved through rigid modelling may overlook relevant distinctions. Human judgment allows for adjustment in light of context. It can recognise exceptional circumstances. Algorithmic systems tend to compress such nuance into predefined categories. The result is a form of regularity that conflates indifference with particularity.

2 Opacity and the Erosion of Justification

Legal decisions must be intelligible. They must offer reasons that can be followed and, where necessary, contested. Fuller (1969) insists that law fails where it cannot be understood. Explanation is not an accessory. It is a condition of legality. Algorithmic systems place pressure on this requirement. Many operate through complex models that resist clear articulation. The path from input to output is often hidden. The individual receives a result, but not a reason in a form that can be engaged. This opacity alters the structure of legal communication. The decision no longer speaks in a recognisable voice. It becomes difficult to challenge, not because it is correct, but because it is obscure. The capacity for meaningful review is weakened.

3. Interpretation and Its Displacement

Law is an interpretive practice. Rules acquire meaning through application. Gadamer (2004) describes understanding as a movement between text and context. Judges do not merely apply rules. They interpret them in light of particular situations. Algorithmic systems do not share this structure. They rely on statistical inference. Their outputs follow from patterns in data. They do not engage in interpretation as a human activity. The shift from interpretation to calculation is therefore not a matter of degree. It marks a change in kind. This displacement narrows the space of judgment. It reduces the role of discretion. It also alters the meaning of decision. What was once the result of understanding becomes the product of processing.

4. Lived Experience and Legal Legitimacy

The authority of law depends, in part, on how it is experienced. Husserl (2012) directs attention to lived experience as the ground of meaning. From this standpoint, the mode of judgment matters as much as the outcome. Human adjudication carries an expectation of engagement. The individual is heard, even where the result is adverse. Algorithmic judgment alters this relation. The encounter is with a system, not a person. The sense of being addressed is reduced. This shift has implications for legitimacy. Decisions that cannot be related to human reasoning may appear imposed rather than

justified. The law likely loses its persuasive force. African jurisprudential thought reinforces this concern.

5. Bias and the Reproduction of Inequality

Algorithmic systems do not operate in a social vacuum. Their outputs are shaped by the data on which they are trained. Since most legal datasets are derived from past decisions, institutional records and administrative practices, they inevitably carry traces of the social realities within which those decisions were made. Where those realities include discrimination, exclusion or unequal access to justice, algorithmic systems may absorb and reproduce such patterns. The claim that algorithms are neutral or objective therefore becomes difficult to sustain. What appears to be an impartial computational outcome may, in fact, reflect historical inequalities embedded within the data itself.

The problem is not merely theoretical. A widely discussed example is the use of predictive risk-assessment tools in criminal justice systems. Studies have shown that some of these systems can disproportionately classify individuals from historically disadvantaged communities as presenting higher risks, not because of their individual conduct, but because the data used to train the models reflects patterns of over-policing, unequal surveillance, and socio-economic disadvantage. The algorithm does not create the inequality. Rather, it inherits and reproduces it. In such cases, past injustice acquires a new form of authority through technological mediation. The implications are particularly significant in many African contexts, where legal and administrative institutions continue to grapple with the legacies of colonial governance, socio-economic inequality, and uneven access to justice. In Nigeria, for example, disparities in legal representation, prolonged pre-trial detention, and uneven law-enforcement practices have long been subjects of scholarly and judicial concern. If algorithmic systems were trained on data generated under such conditions, there is a risk that existing disadvantages could be replicated rather than corrected. Historical patterns would become predictive variables, and social inequalities could be transformed into apparently objective legal outcomes.

From the standpoint of African jurisprudence, this development is deeply problematic. Oyowe (2015) argues that justice must contribute to the maintenance of right relationships within the community. Similarly, Metz (2017) grounds morality in the values of dignity, inclusion and social harmony. These perspectives view law not simply as a mechanism for producing decisions but as an institution that helps sustain communal well-being. A legal system that reproduces exclusion, even through technologically sophisticated means, falls short of this responsibility.

The issue therefore extends beyond algorithmic design. It concerns the social conditions under which data is generated and the assumptions that guide its interpretation. Bias is not merely a flaw within a system; it is often a reflection of inequalities already present in society. Technical adjustments may reduce certain distortions, but they cannot by themselves address the deeper structures that produce them. A genuinely just approach requires continuous scrutiny of the relationship between data, social history, and legal authority. Viewed from this perspective, algorithmic bias is not simply a technological problem. It is a jurisprudential and ethical challenge. It raises fundamental questions about whether legal systems are using technology to transform historical injustices or merely to reproduce them in a more efficient and less visible form.

6. Accountability and Responsibility

Legal systems depend on identifiable responsibility. Decisions can be traced to agents. This enables review and correction. Algorithmic decision-making complicates this structure. Responsibility becomes distributed across designers, operators and institutions. The result is a diffusion of accountability. When harm occurs, it becomes difficult to determine who must answer. This weakens one of the central safeguards of the rule of law. Fombad (2017) links the rule of law to effective institutional accountability. Oloka-Onyango (2017) similarly underscores the importance of

responsibility in advancing justice. Algorithmic systems, in their current form strain these requirements.

7. Reconsidering the Rule of Law

The findings point to a dual conclusion. Algorithmic systems support the formal aspects of legality. They enhance consistency and predictability. In this limited sense, they agree with a Razian conception. At the same time, they undermine elements that are no less essential. They obscure reasons. They weaken accountability. They displace interpretation. They alter the experience of judgment. These features correspond to Fuller's concern for intelligibility and to broader interpretive accounts of law (Fuller, 1969; Gadamer, 2004). The implication is clear. Algorithmic decision-making is not neutral in its effects. It reshapes the structure of legal judgment. Its compatibility with the rule of law is therefore partial and conditional. The analysis supports a central claim. Algorithmic justice is formally efficient but interpretively deficient. It can assist legal processes, but it cannot replace the human dimension without loss.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study yields a set of contributions that extend current debates and reconceptualizes the problem of algorithmic justice at a deeper philosophical level. These contributions follow from the analysis and develop its implications in a systematic way.

1. Reframing Algorithmic Justice as a Philosophical Problem

The first contribution lies in the redefinition of algorithmic justice. Much of the literature treats it as a technical or regulatory issue. This study departs from that approach. It presents algorithmic decision-making as a challenge to the nature of legal judgment itself. The treatise demonstrates that law is an interpretive practice rooted in understanding (Gadamer, 2004). Algorithmic systems, by contrast, operate through calculation. The shift from interpretation to computation is therefore not incidental. It alters the structure of legal reasoning. This reframing provides a clearer basis for evaluating the implications of legal automation.

2. Introducing the Phenomenological Dimension of Legal Judgment

A second contribution lies in the introduction of phenomenology into the analysis of law and technology. Existing studies often focus on outputs and performance. They rarely consider how legal decisions are experienced. Drawing on Husserl, the study cascades lived experience as central to legality (Husserl, 2012). It shows that algorithmic decision-making transforms the encounter between law and subject. The individual is no longer addressed by a reasoning agent but by a system. This shift affects the perception of legitimacy. The contribution here is the demonstration that the authority of law depends not only on correctness but on the mode of engagement through which decisions are delivered.

3. Integrating African Jurisprudential Perspectives

The third contribution is the incorporation of African jurisprudence into the discourse on algorithmic justice. Much of the existing debate remains Eurocentric. It relies on formal accounts of legality that overlook social and moral context. This study brings in the perspectives of Oyowe (2015) and Metz (2017), both of whom emphasise the relational and communal dimensions of law. It extends this engagement through Oyowe, O. (2015) whose work highlights the importance of lived reality and interpretive responsiveness. This integration broadens the analytical framework. It shows that law cannot be reduced to formal procedure without neglecting its social root.

4. Distinguishing Formal Legality from Interpretive Legitimacy

A fourth contribution lies in the clarification of a key conceptual distinction. The study differentiates between formal legality and interpretive legitimacy. Algorithmic systems often satisfy the formal criteria associated with Raz (2009) such as consistency and predictability. However, they fall short

of the requirements emphasised by Fuller (1969) particularly intelligibility and accountability. This distinction explains why algorithmic justice appears both promising and problematic. It performs well at the level of form but struggles at the level of meaning. The clarification resolves an altercation that remains implicit in much of the literature.

5. Articulating a Normative Threshold for Legal Automation

The final contribution is normative. The study proposes a threshold for the acceptable use of algorithmic systems in law. It argues that such systems may assist decision-making but must not displace the interpretive and responsible character of judgment. This position draws support from African jurisprudential insights, particularly the emphasis on responsiveness and communal meaning. It also reflects the broader philosophical analysis developed in the paper. The contribution lies in offering a principled framework. It moves beyond general caution and provides a basis for evaluating when and how algorithmic systems may be used without undermining the rule of law.

These contributions collectively advance the discourse on algorithmic justice. They shift attention from technical refinement to philosophical foundations. They also provide a more comprehensive account of what is at stake when law encounters automation.

Synthesis of the Study

The main thrust of this study is to examine whether algorithmic decision-making can be reconciled with the demands of the rule of law. The inquiry moved through a sequence of stages. Each stage clarified a different aspect of the problem. Collectively they yield a coherent account of the place of algorithmic systems within legal practice. The point of departure was conceptual. The rule of law was examined through the formal account of Raz (2009) and the more normative position of Fuller (1969). These perspectives established the basic requirements of legality: clarity, consistency, intelligibility and accountability. At this level, the appeal of algorithmic systems became clear. They promise order and uniformity. The study then broadened its scope through engagement with African jurisprudence. The works of Oyowe (2015) and Metz (2012) introduced a relational understanding of law rooted in community and moral life.

The methodological framework of phenomenology and hermeneutics deepened the analysis. Harnessing insights on Husserl (2012), the study examined the lived experience of legal judgment. It showed that legitimacy depends on how decisions are encountered. Through Gadamer (2004), law was understood as an interpretive activity. Meaning arises through engagement, not mere application. The findings brought these strands into direct confrontation with algorithmic decision-making. On one side, such systems enhance consistency and support formal legality. On the other, they introduce opacity, weaken accountability, and displace interpretation. They also alter the experience of being judged, replacing engagement with output. These effects are not incidental. They follow from the structure of algorithmic systems themselves.

The study also deductively demonstrated that claims of neutrality are difficult to sustain. Algorithmic outputs depend on historical data. Where inequality exists, it is often reproduced. This outcome conflicts with the relational and moral demands of law emphasised in African jurisprudence. From this analysis, a central position emerged. Algorithmic decision-making is not inherently incompatible with the rule of law. However, its compatibility is limited. It agrees with formal aspects of legality but struggles to sustain interpretive meaning and experiential legitimacy.

The synthesis of the study therefore rests on a balanced conclusion. Algorithmic systems may assist legal processes. They can improve efficiency and consistency. Yet they must remain subordinate to human judgment. Law cannot be reduced to calculation without losing its essential character. The study thus brings together formal theory, African jurisprudence and interpretive philosophy to show

that the future of legal systems depends not simply on technological advancement, but on preserving the human conditions under which law retains its meaning and authority.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between algorithmic decision-making and the rule of law through a philosophical lens. It has shown that while algorithmic systems advance formal features such as consistency and predictability, they place strain on equally vital elements of legality. Drawing on the works of Raz and Fuller, the analysis revealed a divergence between formal legality and the deeper requirements of intelligibility and accountability. This contrast becomes more pronounced when viewed through phenomenology and hermeneutics. Insights from Husserl and Gadamer assert that law is not merely applied but experienced and interpreted. Algorithmic systems' displacing of interpretation with calculation likely diminishes the meaning and legitimacy of legal judgment.

The study therefore, concludes that algorithmic justice is only conditionally compatible with the rule of law. It may support legal processes, but it cannot replace the human dimension without loss. African jurisprudential perspectives, particularly those of Oyowe and Metz, reinforce this position by contextualizing law in communal meaning and lived experience. Where these elements are neglected, legality becomes thin. The future of legal systems, therefore, depends not on the uncritical adoption of algorithmic tools, but on preserving the interpretive, accountable and human character of law.

Recommendations

The analysis points to a clear direction. Algorithmic systems may assist legal processes, but their use must be bounded. Specific recommendations include:

1. Need for Structural Adjustment

Human judgment should remain decisive at critical points. Automated outputs may inform decisions, but they should not conclude them. This preserves responsibility and keeps legal authority traceable. It also conforms to the demand for accountability emphasised in the rule-of-law tradition (Raz, 2009; Fuller, 1969).

2. Intelligibility

A second requirement concerns intelligibility. Legal decisions must be explainable in terms that those affected can grasp. Systems that cannot provide reasons in an accessible form should not be used in adjudicative contexts. Explanation is not a technical luxury. It is a condition of legality. Without it, the right to challenge a decision loses force.

3. Strengthening of Institutional Safeguards

There is need for strengthened institutional safeguards. Independent oversight bodies should audit algorithmic tools for bias and reliability. Clear lines of responsibility must be defined. Where harm occurs, there should be no uncertainty about who answers for it. This responds to concerns about the diffusion of responsibility identified in the analysis.

4. Legal Systems Must Remain Attentive to Social Context

Data used in algorithmic models should be critically examined. Historical patterns of inequality must not be reproduced under the guise of neutrality. This is especially important in light of the relational conception of justice advanced by Oyowe (2015) and the emphasis on dignity in Metz (2012).

5. Interpretive Judgment Should Be Preserved as a Core Legal Function

Training and institutional design should reinforce the role of judges and legal officers as interpreters, not mere operators of systems. This reflects the hermeneutic insight that law unfolds through understanding rather than mechanical application, as developed by Gadamer (2004).

These recommendations do not reject technological innovation. They seek to situate it within the boundaries of legality. The task is not to abandon algorithmic systems, but to ensure that their use does not erode the foundations upon which law depends.

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