Islam and AI: Challenges and Opportunities

The 54th Annual Conference of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS), titled "Islam and AI: Challenges and Opportunities," convened virtually on November 20, 2025. This gathering was cosponsored by the Department of Romance and Arabic Languages and Literature at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, and was chaired by Muhammad U. Faruque (University of Cincinnati, OH). The conference sought to interrogate the ontological, theological, legal, and ethical implications of AI technologies within Islamic frameworks. The proceedings were organized into two panel sessions, featuring six presentations ranging from metaphysical inquiries into the nature of the soul to sociological studies on algorithmic bias and user interaction.

Ontology, Theology, and Epistemology

The first panel session, "Ontology, Theology and Epistemology," was moderated by Omar W. Nasim (University of Regensburg, Germany). Establishing the philosophical groundwork for the conference, this panel focused on AI's metaphysical status and its impact on the conception of the divine.

The first panelist, Adnan Bülent Baloğlu (Hacı Bayram University, Turkiye), presented a paper titled "God and AI through the Lens of Post-*Ṣudūr* and Theological Simulations." Baloğlu's co-authors were Tamer Işın and Zişan Cihangir Işın. Baloğlu's presentation offered a critique of the emerging relationship between AI and human spirituality. He utilized a comparative framework that bridged critical insights from classical Islamic philosophy and postmodern theory. Central to his argument was the juxtaposition of Ibn Sīnā's theory of *ṣudūr* (emanation) with Jean Baudrillard's simulacra. Baloğlu argued that "AI does not generate transcendence but imitates it, constructing what is conceptualized as 'post-*sudûr,*' digital orders that replicate the formal surface of the emanation chain without its ontological source."

In the classical understanding of *ṣudūr*, transcendence flows from the Divine Essence to the First Intellect and, subsequently, into material forms, thereby providing ontological guidance. In stark contrast, according to Baloğlu, the AI "chain" is driven by statistical probabilities and algorithmic patterns. He further argued that AI creates a "digital revelation" in which the user's prompt-driven interaction mimics prayer or supplication, even though the response is derived from a closed loop of information objects rather than a transcendent source. Drawing on Luciano Floridi's concept of the "infosphere," Baloğlu warned of a "simulative faith," where the trust traditionally reserved for the divine realm is transferred to the algorithmic realm. He concluded that in a post-theological age, spirituality risks becoming "a functional, experiential digital construct rather than a fixed belief object."

The second panelist, Hasan Shahab (Indonesian Data Science and AI Association, Indonesia), shifted the focus to the definition of intelligence itself with his presentation titled "Islamic Value in the Framework of Ontology, Epistemology and Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Review from Ibn Sīnā's Perspective." Shahab discussed whether AI systems are merely complex arrangements of mechanistic behaviors or have a genuine existence. By deploying Ibn Sīnā's psychology, especially the distinction between material cognitive processes and the immaterial intellect (*'aql*), Shahab argued for a metaphysics that fundamentally separates human cognition from machine processing.

According to Shahab's reading of Ibn Sīnā, human intelligence is an extension of "a non-material soul (*nafs*)," characterized by abstract reasoning and self-consciousness. Shahab drew a contrast between this Islamic conceptualization and AI: "ontologically, AI systems depend on hardware, where AI itself has the status of 'accidental-existence.' Epistemologically, the abstract essence of AI (as an idea, algorithm, and manifestation of 'intelligence') depends on the human mind (reason and abstract thought). Functionally and contextually, AI also depends on the collective consciousness of humans, which provides data, meaning, and direction for its development." Shahab also used the mirror metaphor to describe AI: it reflects and reinforces the cultural presuppositions and moral values of the society. Shahab further claimed that AI cannot possess independent consciousness or metaphysical abstraction. Ending on a cautiously hopeful note, he proposed that a "human-AI synergy" depends on whether humans can protect their ethical, creative, and spiritual capabilities, and whether human values can guide AI development by mitigating existing inequalities.

The final presentation of the first session was delivered by Esra Ukallo (Ibn Haldun University, Turkiye), titled "Can Muslims Delegate Responsibility to Medical AI? A *Fiqh*-Based Assessment of Accountability in Clinical Decision-Making." Moving from the metaphysical to the practical and legal, Ukallo investigated the urgent bioethical question of delegating medical responsibility to AI systems. In her presentation, she outlined a "normative-analytical methodology rooted in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) and *qawāʿid fiqhiyyah* (legal maxims)" to assess whether AI can bear moral weight in a clinical setting.

Ukallo's analysis focused on foundational Islamic legal concepts, including *taklīf* (moral obligation), *ahliyyah* (legal capacity), and *dhimma* (legal personality). She argued that current AI systems, regardless of their diagnostic sophistication, fail to meet the criteria for *ahliyyah*. As non-human agents, they remain *ālāt* (instruments) and cannot possess the intent or consciousness required for accountability. Consequently, a physician cannot transfer their moral or legal liability to an algorithm. Ukallo bolstered her textual analysis with qualitative insights from fieldwork among Muslim physicians and highlighted the ethical tension arising when AI recommendations contradict human clinical judgment. She presented a strong case for "distinguishing between permissible technological delegation and prohibited abdication of moral responsibility, thereby aligning AI integration with the *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* (objectives of Islamic law)." Such a framework, she suggested, can help develop "AI governance models that respect Islamic ethical principles and clinical integrity."

Authority, Values, and Biases

The second panel session, "Authority, Values and Biases," was moderated by panel discussant Ilma Qureshi (University of Virginia,Charlottesville, USA). This session explored how AI reconfigures the structures of Islamic authority, the production of legal knowledge, and the representation of Muslims in the digital sphere.

The session opened with a presentation by Mostafa Amini (Harvard University, MA, USA) co-authored with Anwar Ouassini (Delaware State University, Dover, DE, USA), titled "Beyond the Book: Expanding the Islamic Legal Imagination in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." Their intervention sought to elaborate on conceptual resources needed for rethinking the encounter between Islamic jurisprudence and artificial intelligence.

Amini and Ouassini began by situating contemporary anxieties about AI within a longer genealogy of technological disruption, invoking historical precedents such as the rise of the printing press and the advent of early computing to show that Islamic legal reasoning has repeatedly confronted and productively adopted new technological forms. This historical grounding served a dual purpose: it deflated any sense that AI represents an unprecedented rupture while raising the question of whether certain features of machine intelligence might unsettle foundational assumptions within the tradition in ways previous technologies did not. Thus, instead of an accommodationist approach, they proposed a new area of inquiry, "*fiqh al-khayal al-sinai* (jurisprudence of artificial imagination) to interpret AI not merely as a tool but as an epistemic and ethical provocation." Their discussion of potential Islamic legal categories for AI also placed contemporary debates on automation, personhood, and algorithmic logic in dialogue with classical legal debates involving jinn, angels, and dreams. In doing so, they presented "Islamic law as a dynamic, responsive tradition capable of interrogating AI's moral consequences and computational metaphors, while affirming human interpretive authority and divine ethical anchoring." Their juxtaposition leveraged Islamic thought's long history of grappling with forms of intelligence and agency that exceed or trouble human boundaries.

The second panelist, Yunus Doğan Telliel (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, MA, USA), the author of this report, presented "Automating Authority: AI, Ethics, and the Human Presence." My paper explored how artificial intelligence is transforming the landscape of religious authority and reshaping foundational questions about the transmission of Islamic knowledge. I focused the discussion on three recent developments that have generated scholarly debates with broad ethical implications: the emergence of scripture-trained AI chatbots such as KuranGPT, launched in Turkey in 2024, which simulates human conversation to provide scriptural answers; the integration of AI monitoring into animal slaughter facilities; and the proliferation of algorithmic automation in Islamic finance.

While Muslims' ritualistic acts involve repetition that, to an outside observer, appears mechanical and potentially amenable to automation, they often require the presence of *niyyah* (intention). For instance, an AI system can perform many tasks an imam might perform (e.g., reciting Qur'anic verses with precision, imitating the cadence of a sermon), yet leading prayer requires embodying virtues such as *taqwā* (God-consciousness) and *khushūʿ* (humility), which cannot be programmed into a machine. Similar concerns exist around AI-monitored animal slaughter, where human intentionality remains necessary for halal certification. The halal status of AI-facilitated financial transactions is likewise debated, as without human regulation, AI's systemic biases risk undermining Islamic ethical principles such as justice (*ʿadl*) and public interest (*maṣlaḥah*). I concluded my presentation by noting that the predicament of AI and Islam is tied to the extent to which human spiritual and ethical presence can be embedded in algorithmic technologies.

The conference concluded with a presentation by Hilal Fidan (Nişantaşı University, Türkiye) titled "Islamophobia in Generative AI: A Prompt-Aided, Multicultural Case Study of Cross-Linguistic Discourse." Fidan's coauthors were Adnan Bülent Baloğlu, Beyşan Tarık Işın, Zişan Cihangir Işın, and Tamer Işın. The paper situated questions of algorithmic bias in the dynamics of human-AI interaction itself. Rather than locating bias solely in the training data or model architecture, Fidan argued that the problem of discriminatory language arises from the

communicative encounter between the user and the system. She focused on the pragmatic-linguistic dimension of prompt construction as a site where Islamophobia is actively co-produced.

Working with a research team across three national contexts (Türkiye, the United States, and France), Fidan conducted experimental studies with OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini, eliciting outputs in Turkish, English, and French. To systematically assess the presence and intensity of Islamophobic framing, the team developed a measurement instrument they call the "Islamophobia Framing Index (IFI)." Their findings revealed a striking asymmetry: minimalist prompts, such as "what is jihād?," proved significantly more likely to generate discourse inflected with Islamophobic tropes than information-rich queries, such as "explain the Qur'anic verses defining jihād in Islam." This asymmetry suggests that the epistemic and cultural scaffolding a user brings to the interaction shapes the knowledge that is generated. Building on this analysis, she claimed that "the prejudicial effects of AI systems are not merely a technical issue, but an interactive construct arising from cultural coding and linguistic framing." In her discussion, Fidan demonstrated that, with contextually informed prompting practices, "experienced users can significantly reduce the risk of Islamophobic discourse." By foregrounding AI literacy and user experience as ethical domains, Fidan positioned prompting not merely as a technical skill but as a crucial site of intervention in transnational public discourse on Islam.

Focusing on these three papers, Ilma Qureshi, the panel discussant, highlighted that it is "important to consider the nature and telos of AI's knowledge." Invoking insights from critical scholars such as Emily Bender and Casey Fiesler, Qureshi noted that "AI does not possess the breadth of knowledge, training, ethical grounding, or epistemic humility that Islamic legal scholars possess, jurists who often preface rulings with *wallāhu aʿlam,"* (translated as: *And God knows the best*).

The keynote speaker was Yaqub Chaudhary (University of Cambridge, UK), who delivered a talk titled "Unprogrammed Computational Revelations." Chaudhary situated contemporary artificial intelligence research as fundamentally an epistemological enterprise. He traced this thread from David Silver's 2017 pronouncement that AlphaGo Zero, by eschewing human data entirely, had "removed the constraints of human knowledge" to "create knowledge itself." Chaudhary argued that this perspective has become widespread in the post-LLM era. He noted that new AI models, trained on large datasets and adapted for diverse applications, are now viewed as tools for knowledge discovery across the physical, life, and social sciences. He emphasized that these models are viewed as a new paradigm, not only because of their effectiveness but also because of their purported emerging capabilities (i.e., machine behaviors that are "neither specifically trained for, nor anticipated to arise"). According to Chaudhary, emergence has become the primary lens for interpreting LLM capabilities, with some researchers even suggesting that current systems show "sparks of artificial general intelligence." The enormous investments in AI development are driven by a belief that future models will continue to develop emergent capabilities, eventually understanding the true nature of reality without explicit programming. The latter, he added, is seen as the key to creating the ultimate computational artifact, a metaphysical blueprint for universal mysteries. From this critical perspective, Chaudhary examined the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions underlying modern AI discourse and discussed its potential and limitations in Islamic contexts.

The presentations gathered at this conference reveal a productive tension at the heart of contemporary Islam: the question of what it means to be ontologically, epistemologically, ethically, and spiritually *present* in a world dominated by AI technologies. Across the diverse methodological approaches represented at the conference (from Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics to fieldwork among Muslim physicians, from *uṣūl al-fiqh* to prompt engineering), a common thread was the inadequacy of understanding AI merely as a neutral tool awaiting human direction. What distinguishes these critical inquiries from much of the mainstream AI talk is their insistence on reversing the presuppositions regarding the relationship between technology and ethics. The Western concept of "human in the loop," now ubiquitous in AI governance literature, positions human oversight as a corrective mechanism secondary to technological processes. Indeed, it is nowadays fashionable to talk about and even demand human-centered AI. But which human? And whose AI? The Islamic emphasis on Muslims' ethical and spiritual presence poses a challenge to AI that cannot be addressed through regulatory steps alone.[1] This emphasis raises a larger question about AI's place in Islam as a form of life: what in human life cannot or should not be delegated, simulated, or automated?[2]

The conference presentations also invited reflection on what it means to speak of "being human." In trying to make sense of AI and its capabilities, most public debates presume a definition of human intelligence that is abstracted, disembodied, and commodified.[3] This one dimensional framing devalues the kind of intelligence that operates through relationships extending beyond the individual to encompass communities and traditions, and it overlooks the spiritually grounded intelligence that several presenters identified as irreducible to computational processes. Moreover, the presumption that there is a single way of thinking about humans and AI flattens philosophical differences between various religious and secular epistemic traditions. These questions are especially pressing for contemporary Islam, as there is now significant pressure to integrate AI into various Islamic scholarly activities ranging from *fiqh* to *tafsir*.[4] Failing to recognize that AI integration is itself a form of translation, one that requires careful reflection on what is gained and what is lost in the process, risks reproducing precisely the aspects of AI technologies that will make sustaining a collective ethical life more challenging.

The Islamic traditions engaged throughout this conference offer resources for thinking otherwise. Being human, from the presenters' perspectives, is not merely species membership but a mode of being that manifests itself through moral responsibility, spiritual orientation, or tradition-guided rationality. The human is thus defined not against the machine but in relation to "the Divine." The conference also demonstrated that Islamic thought need not adopt a posture of resistance. For instance, the metaphor of the mirror (AI reflecting the ethical values of its creators) and the concept of *fiqh al-khayāl al-ṣinā ʿī* (jurisprudence of artificial imagination) both offered frameworks for engaging with AI's genuine novelty without sacralizing its epistemic opacity or dismissing its potential benefits to human society at large.[5] The challenge instead lies in maintaining and defending epistemic justice for humans and their rich epistemic traditions against the hype of AI epistemes.

The question of AI "hallucination" (i.e., the confident-sounding yet factually incorrect information generated by AI) warrants particular attention here.[6] Large language models function as culture machines: they are integrated into human procedures and protocols for addressing truth, while masking their probabilistic reasoning and cultivating unquestioned trust. The Islamic juridical tradition has long acknowledged human fallibility. The traditions of *ijtihād*, *ikhtilāf*, and

the multiplication of legal schools all presuppose that humans err. What distinguishes human error from machine error, however, is not simply the degree of accuracy but the nature of accountability. The scholar who issues a *fatwa* bears responsibility before God and the community. By contrast, AI lacks such accountability and cannot acknowledge its limitations through ethical transformation, with values such as humility or repentance, or through a deepened awareness of human finitude. AI does not possess a conception of truth, or falsity, as humans do. Its outputs emerge from probabilistic inference over patterns, not from orientation toward collective life. To focus "AI hallucination" solely on the technical problem of error is to miss what is most significant: this is not simply a problem of inaccuracy but a matter of the relations of trust and accountability that bind readers to scholars, students to teachers, and communities to traditions.

Yunus Doğan Telliel
Assistant professor of anthropology and rhetoric, and
Director of the Great Problems Seminars Program at
Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), Worcester, MA,

Endnotes

[1] Cf. Raquib, Amana, Bilal Channa, Talat Zubair, and Junaid Qadir. "Islamic virtue-based ethics for artificial intelligence." *Discover Artificial Intelligence* 2, no. 1 (2022): 11.
[2] Ghaly, Mohammed. "What Makes Work "Good" in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)? Islamic Perspectives on AI-Mediated Work Ethics." *The Journal of Ethics* 28, no. 3 (2024): 429-453.
[3] Lewis, Jason Edward, Hēmi Whaanga, and Ceyda Yolgörmez. "Abundant intelligences: placing AI within Indigenous knowledge frameworks." *AI & Society* 40, no. 4 (2025): 2141-2157.
[4] E.g., Latifi, H. (2024). Challenges of using Artificial Intelligence in the process of Shi'i Ijtihad. *Religions*, *15*(5), 541.
[5] Cf. Vallor, Shannon. *The AI mirror: How to reclaim our humanity in an age of machine thinking*. Oxford University Press, 2024.
[6] Fredrikzon, Johan. "Rethinking Error: "Hallucinations" and Epistemological Indifference." *Critical AI* 3, no. 1 (2025).