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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue

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This issue is born out of a pressing realization: we are no longer on the brink of a transhumanist future – we are already living in it. Our contemporary epoch is characterized by rapid technological innovation and global interconnectedness, realities that are inseparable from the very fabric of modern society. In this context, transhumanist ideas have moved from the realm of speculative philosophy to a lived experience – a force that reshapes not only our technological landscape but also our cultural, ethical, and religious paradigms. The advancements in biotechnology, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and cognitive enhancement have ushered humanity into an era where the boundaries of what it means to be human are being redrawn.

For Muslim societies, particularly those at the forefront of technological and industrial innovation, this reality is impossible to ignore. The lifeworlds of Muslims – whether in the bustling metropolises of the Gulf, the tech hubs of Southeast Asia, or the diasporic communities of the West – are increasingly shaped by the promises and perils of transhumanism. Initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030 – a government program launched in 2016 to diversify economic, social, and cultural structures in line with modern technological imperatives – underscore the dynamic transformation in many Muslim societies. This ambitious program, aimed at reducing oil dependency while propelling innovation, exemplifies how strategic modernization efforts resonate with the transhumanist impulse in contexts deeply rooted in Islamic heritage.

At the heart of this special issue is the recognition that debates surrounding transhumanism in Muslim contexts have evolved rapidly. This issue represents a milestone in the unfolding controversy between transhumanism and Islam, capturing a snapshot of the current state of this dynamic, multifaceted debate while marking a juncture in its development. Muslim intellectual engagement with transhumanism is, as of now, largely shaped by perspectives that align with critical posthumanist approaches, emphasizing the potential dangers of dehumanization and the erosion of spiritual values. This stance is supported by a range of perspectives. One strand argues that human imperfection is divinely ordained and essential for moral growth, critiquing the transhumanist vision of creating invulnerable beings as fundamentally incompatible with Islamic ethics. Another perspective underscores the dual nature of humans as both divine spirit and earthly clay, warning that life extension could lead to spiritual heedlessness (*ghaflah*) and undermine moral accountability. Overall, the rejection of the individualistic and materialistic foundations of transhumanism seems to be a common denominator of the critiques, highlighting the communal and spiritual dimensions of human identity that are central to Muslim thought (Kam, 2023).

The first monograph ever dedicated to the issue of the relationship between transhumanism and Islam was Muslim and Supermuslim by Roy Jackson. Notably, the first scholar to engage in this debate proposed a narrative of compatibility between transhumanist ideas and Islamic tenets. He argues that the emphasis on renewal (tajdīd) and revival (iḥyā) in Muslim intellectual history can align with transhumanist aspirations to transcend human limitations, provided such efforts are guided by moral and spiritual principles. Jackson even suggests four principles for the affirmation of a future Muslim Transhumanist Association, culminating in the idea that "the intentional use of technology will empower us to transcend our current state and move towards perfectibility, guided by the example of the Prophet Muhammad as the Perfect Human (*insan al-Kamil*)" (Jackson, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, there has been no enthusiastic reception of his proposal; in fact, he stands alone with this vision, as most scholars remain cautious or critical of the alignment between transhumanism and Islamic thought. Scholars warn against conflating technological progress with divinity, stressing that improvements to the human condition must align with divine laws and ethical principles. Seyithan Can, for instance, critiques the transhumanist pursuit of physical enhancement, asserting that Islam prioritizes moral and spiritual evolution over technological perfection (Can, 2023). This is in line with the general assessment that the pursuit of spiritual perfection (*insān al-kāmil*) with the focus on technological enhancement, neglects the deeper spiritual

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and moral dimensions of human existence. Most scholars contend that transhumanism's materialistic and utilitarian foundations clash with Islamic principles (Kam, 2023).

However, we can also observe the emergence of more nuanced voices in Muslim scholarship that advocate for compatibility between Islamic thought and transhumanist ideas, arguing that such technologies should not be prematurely rejected. For instance, Enis Doko's concept of "theistic functionalism" suggests that mental states can emerge in both material and nonmaterial entities, thereby challenging the traditional mind-body dualism that has long defined human identity Mind-body dualism is central to this debate because it underpins our understanding of what it means to be human, influencing notions of agency, moral responsibility, and the ethical limits of technological enhancement. By reconceptualizing human consciousness in functional rather than purely material terms, Doko opens up the possibility that strong AI and other transhumanist advancements might be integrated with Islamic classical theism (Doko, 2023). This shift from dualism to a more functionalist or monist approach is crucial for reconciling Islamic ethics with transhumanist aspirations, as it redefines the boundaries of human identity in a way that embraces both spiritual and technological dimensions. Ali Ghandour's work, featured in this issue, takes this even further, asserting that transhumanism is not only compatible with Islamic creeds but also resonates with their core principles.

Yet, these are minority positions, and the alliance between transhumanist thought and Muslim theology is far from a match made in heaven, with significant challenges remaining. The transhumanist movement, as it stands today, is deeply rooted in Enlightenment ideals that prioritize individualism, materialism, and technological progress—values that often stand in tension with the communal, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of Islamic thought. Moreover, the Enlightenment legacy is not without its downsides; its historical entanglement with colonialist pursuits and the enabling of racist ideologies raises critical questions about the ethical foundations of transhumanism. Navigating these tensions requires a critical engagement with both traditions to lay the theoretical groundwork for addressing the pressing ethical and theological questions raised by emerging technologies. Ultimately, the aim is to stimulate an enriching and enabling discourse that deepens our understanding of what it means to be human in an era of rapid technological change.

This special issue builds on and expands the scope of recent scholarly works that have begun to explore the intersection of Islam, science, and emerging technologies. For instance, the Special Issue on Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence published in *Ilahiyat Studies: A Journal on Islamic and Religious Studies* (Volume 14, Number 1, Winter/Spring 2023) examines transhumanist themes, offering a collection of journal articles that delve into the ethical and theological implications of AI. Similarly, *Islam and Science: Past, Present, and Future Debates* by Guessoum and Bigliardi (2023, Cambridge University Press) provides a broad historical and contemporary overview of the relationship between Islam and science, mapping out new and emerging topics that are beginning to reignite the debates while highlighting key moments of interaction and dialogue. Ghaly's *Islamic Ethics and the Genome Question* (2019, Brill) offers a focused exploration of the ethical dilemmas surrounding genetic technologies, contributing to the broader discourse on bioethics in Islam. Furthermore, Determann and Malik's edited volume, *Islamic Theology and Extraterrestrial Life: New Frontiers in Science and Religion* (2024, Bloomsbury), examines the theological implications of space travel and extraterrestrial life, offering a unique perspective on how Islamic thought engages with scientific and existential questions. These contributions – along with numerous articles published in the field that are not mentioned here – collectively highlight the growing interest in the intersection of Islamic thought and emerging technologies, offering valuable insights and laying the groundwork for further exploration.

This special issue is organized into three thematic sections, each probing different dimensions of the intersection between transhumanism and Islam.

I. Philosophical Theology and Ethics

The first section explores foundational theological questions and ethical reflections triggered by transhumanist discourses, particularly regarding human enhancement and technological progress. In his contribution "Beyond Muslim Concerns About Transhumanism: Challenging Muslim Skepticism and Advocating a Pro-Transhumanism Perspective," Ali Ghandour critically examines the widespread skepticism within Muslim scholarly discourse towards transhumanism. He challenges static and essentialist interpretations of Islamic theology, arguing instead for a dynamic, pluralistic understanding of Muslim thought. Ghandour demonstrates that transhumanist

aspirations—such as overcoming disease, enhancing human capacities, or even pursuing extended longevity—can, in principle, be reconciled with a reinterpretation of religious texts beyond conventional reductionist frameworks. His approach advocates a constructive dialogue that seeks to embrace technological innovation without compromising core spiritual values.

Complementing this perspective, in "Navigating the Anthropocene: Responsibility Ethics as a Necessary Moral Orientation in a Transhumanist World," I am addressing the limitations of traditional Islamic ethical frameworks in the face of emerging technological realities and environmental crises in the Anthropocene. Critically assessing classical ethical paradigms such as deontological, intentional, and virtue ethics, I argue for integrating a robust responsibility ethics into Islamic moral thought. Drawing on classical theological insights, particularly those of al-Māturīdī, I propose a moral orientation grounded in accountability, autonomy, and consideration of long-term consequences.

II. Religious Law and Ethics

The second section, comprising the work of Kurnaz alongside Balistreri and Ventura, shifts our focus to the realm of religious law. In his paper, “Transhumanism as a Challenge for Islamic Law”, Serdar Kurnaz examines the impact of transhumanist enhancements on the foundational structures of Islamic law. Kurnaz outlines how traditional Islamic legal principles – rooted in the Quran, Sunna, consensus, and legal analogy – establish normative categories for classifying actions as obligatory, permissible, or forbidden. He argues that emerging technologies, by challenging the very nature of human physicality and altering bodily integrity, question the established criteria of legal responsibility and ritual practice. Through the discussion Kurnaz illustrates that Islamic law is dynamic and capable of interdisciplinary evaluation.

Similarly, Lorella Ventura and Maurizio Balistreri’s paper, “Space Travelling and its Challenges: A New Scenario for Islamic Ethics?,” addresses the ethical and legal implications of space exploration within an Islamic framework. Their work highlights that the increasing involvement of Muslim-majority countries in space projects has introduced new questions regarding the adaptation of Islamic practices in extraterrestrial environments. The authors discuss the issuance of fatwas that provide guidelines for performing Islamic rites in space, and they critically analyze the challenges posed by space travel – such as the potential need for genetic modifications for astronaut survival and the transformation of human reproduction in space. They argue that while Islamic law has historically been flexible enough to accommodate technological and societal changes, the novel context of space exploration necessitates further ethical and legal reflection.

III. Bioethics

The final section confronts the bioethical dimensions of transhumanism, a domain where theoretical debates meet pressing practical challenges. In “Can We Live Longer and Should We? Radical Life Extension, Biomedicine, and Islamic Bioethics,” Aasim Padela and Raudah Yunus explore the ethical implications of radical life extension within the framework of Islamic bioethics. The paper interrogates whether the biomedical pursuit of extending human life – through interventions that frame aging as a disease to be overcome – aligns with, or contradicts, Islamic scriptural teachings. It critically juxtaposes scientific evidence regarding increased human longevity with Quranic perspectives on the natural limits of life. By questioning whether the transformation of natural aging processes is morally justifiable, the authors highlight the tension between transhumanist aspirations and the Islamic emphasis on the quality of life and moral accountability. This discussion lays the theoretical groundwork for assessing how far medical enhancements should go and whether extending human life beyond conventional limits is desirable or even permissible from an Islamic perspective.

Similarly, in “Ethical Challenges of Deep Brain Stimulation: An Islamic Perspective,” Hadil Lababidi, Toqqa Kafafy, and Mariam Gamaleldin delve into the ethical and legal dilemmas posed by deep brain stimulation (DBS) technologies, particularly when used for cognitive enhancement. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of DBS as a neurotechnological intervention that, while offering therapeutic benefits for conditions such as Parkinson’s disease and epilepsy, also raises concerns about potential personality changes and the alteration of personal identity. By examining DBS through the lens of key Islamic ethical concepts – such as *taklīf* (moral responsibility before God) and *ḍarūra* (necessity) – the paper scrutinizes whether using DBS for enhancement

purposes undermines an individual's capacity for moral accountability and adherence to religious duties.

All contributions in this issue stand as a testament to the need for creative and critical engagement with the rapidly shifting landscape of human existence. By scrutinizing the nexus of transhumanism and Muslim thought, we encourage a dialogue that reexamines historical perspectives while charting bold new paths forward. We welcome you to join this conversation and reflect on the transformative potential of merging ancient wisdom with modern innovation.

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