RELIGION PARADIGM OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have recently been applied in many fields. In many sectors, such as medicine, transportation, automotive, education, construction, furniture, and e-commerce, robotic experiments with AI are being carried out. These new developments in AI robot technologies, such as autonomous driving vehicles, robotic surgeries, smart education, home, and transportation, indicate that the need for a human labor force will be greatly reduced in the future. The issue of how AI robots, which are developed instead of humans in many jobs and processes to facilitate individual and social life, will continue to evolve and spur many discussions. Among these debates, our study focuses on the religious paradigm of AI. This study aims to understand, make sense of, and analyze the problem of the AI religion paradigm. In this context, various dimensions, such as AI's conception of God, its religious foundations, how it shapes religious

life, and whether it has an apocalyptic background that could bring about the end of humanity, are examined. In addition, the study discusses whether AI will bring good or evil to humanity in the religious dimension, what it promises or contains in the religious sense, and its opportunities, risks, or threats. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the gap in the relevant literature on the paradigms of AI and religion. In this respect, the originality of the study and its contribution to the literature is important. This study adopts a qualitative method and in-depth analysis of documents as a task.

Key Words: Sociology of religion, artificial intelligence, religion, society, technology

Introduction

Technological developments are increasing in their impact and intensity every day. There is almost no area where technology or digitalization has not touched. In the 21st century, AI technologies and robots, which are frequently discussed, serve as a bridge between the age of technology and humanity. The structure, functions, and capability of the human brain, which has incredible equipment and unique features, has been a source of inspiration with its emergence. The unique and marvelous design of the human brain, together with the rapid development of technology, has led us to question the possibilities of AI. In this context, the desire to access a similar copy of the human brain with AI technologies has started to be voiced, especially in the Western world. With the integration of technologies such as ChatGPT, this desire has made significant progress in terms of maneuverability. Indeed, ChatGPT technology plays a functional and pioneering role in certain areas with features such as chatting, facilitating individual and social life, taking part in robotic surgery operations in medicine, autonomous driving in automotive parts manufacturing and assembly, learning different languages in education, deep learning, and rapid analysis. However, AI is positioned as an entity rivaling humans in terms of capability and hardware in the future. For this reason, it is necessary to consider AI in a multidimensional way without fitting it into a "box" of only a few functions and equipment. At this point, the questions of where AI will

evolve in the future and what it can and cannot do are of vital importance.

Today, AI technologies are encountered in many individual and social fields, such as medicine, education, transportation, media, industry, e-commerce, furniture, and construction. However, the religious dimension of AI is at the center of intellectual and academic debates. Within the framework of the religious dimension of AI, research and analysis of its theological foundations, relationship with God, and possible equipment/structure in terms of spirituality, worship, and belief are essential. The religious dimension of AI has been sufficiently researched at either the global or the national scale. Research, discussions, and analyses on AI and religion have recently attracted attention. The increasing number of academic publications on this subject indicates a growing interest in exploring the complex relationship between AI and religion. In this context, there has been a significant growing interest in the study of religion on a global scale in recent years. A search using the Scopus database in 2023 identified 287 articles titled "AI and religion" from 1988 to 2022.[1] However, the number of articles is insufficient when we look at religious studies on AI, especially in Turkey.[2] This shows a significant gap in the literature for studies on the religious dimension of AI.

The development of AI and its relationship with religion can be considered parallel to the development of science and technology with religion. Therefore, expanding the academic literature on the dynamic relationship between AI and religion is essential. In the literature, it is clear that there is a need for this, especially in the sociology of religion studies. There is an increasing number of AI studies in social fields at

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[1] See Yuli Andriansyah, "The Current Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Religious Studies: Some Reflections Based on ChatGPT", *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22/1 (February 2023), xi-xii.

[2] See DergiPark Akademik (DP) (accessed September 2, 2023). One of the most important contributions to the studies on artificial intelligence and religion in Turkey is the "Workshop on Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanism, and Religion" held by Atatürk University Faculty of Theology in 2021 and the "International Symposium on Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanism, Posthumanism, and Religion" organized by the same University and Faculty in 2021. The papers presented at the workshop were published as a book titled "Artificial Intelligence, Transhumanism, and Religion" by the Publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and the papers presented at the symposium were published as an e-book by Atatürk University Publications. Nearly 50 papers were presented and published in both meetings.

both national and global scales. Considering the sociological dimension, this makes it necessary to discuss and make sense of AI from a multidimensional perspective. In this sense, the claim that AI will encompass social fields, especially religion, in the future constitutes the focal point of an important discussion, especially in the field of sociology of religion. This study, which addresses the religion paradigm of AI using a qualitative approach involving an in-depth analysis of documents, hopes to make a modest contribution to the relevant literature by attempting to understand, make sense of, and examine this focal point. In this context, this study, which focuses on the religion paradigm of AI, includes some discussions on the observed religious perspective of AI, how it affects social areas, what kind of changes it can lead to in religious life, and what kind of religious and sociological opportunities, risks, and threats it poses.

1. Religious/Theological Origins of Artificial Intelligence

AI emerged as a specialized field of research in the mid-20th century with the digital transformation of computers.[3] In the following period, AI and robotics gained ground in the West under the influence of names such as Australian Hans Moravec and American Ray Kurzweil. Moravec and Kurzweil's works[4] have been influential in changing the West's cultural perception of AI technologies. Popular science books written by these scientists are based on religious foundations that advance Judeo-Christian (apocalyptic) beliefs, such as the resurrection of the dead and the attainment of eternal salvation through freedom from earthly obstacles or constraints.[5] Early Judeo-Christian apocalyptic belief was characterized by three main factors: "the

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[3] For a historical overview of AI, see George M. Coghill, "Artificial Intelligence (and Christianity): Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36/3 (May 2023), 604-619.

[4] See Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (NewYork: Viking, 1999); id., "The Coming Merging of Mind and Machine", *Scientific American* (accessed September 3, 2023); id., *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005); id., "Expect Exponential Progress", *The Christian Science Monitor* (accessed September 3, 2023); Hans Moravec, "Today's Computers, Intelligent Machines and Our Future", *Analog* 99/2 (February 1979), 59-84; id., *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); id., *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[5] Robert M. Geraci, "The Popular Appeal of Apocalyptic AI", *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 45/4 (December 2010), 1003-1004.

transformation of human beings so that they can live in this world in purified bodies, the desire to build a new heavenly world, and alienation within the World".[6] According to this belief, the AI-oriented technological revolution that arises with the uploading of human minds into machines will inevitably take place. Due to this revolution, robots with superior intelligence will take over the universe and build a world in which they will live forever. In the formation of the perception of apocalyptic Judeo-Christian beliefs about AI (whether rational or not), it is crucial to foster public opinion and at least keep it on the agenda by ensuring that it is discussed. The construction and direction of public discourse, social perspective, and even expert opinions on AI are also shaped within the framework of this perception.

In the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic-based theological perspective, it is argued that AI corresponds to "a spiritual quest"[7] and "the need for a new religion".[8] Analyses and interpretations of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic theologies can be read as an effort to fit into a perceptual perspective that seeks to establish and enhance the legitimacy ground of the fictionally designed AI. This can be seen as another way to strengthen the religion-science relationship because of the sacred position assigned to AI. On the other hand, the association of AI with apocalyptic theology on religious grounds in popular science books reveals the power of religion over technology.[9] At this point, AI, which is built on an apocalyptic theology and constructed/designed with religious background perspectives, is presented as a utopia of salvation for humanity and marketed as a tool that advocates the discourse/approach of "perfection", "immortality", and "resurrection of the dead". In this sense, it is understood that AI follows a parallel course with transhumanist approaches as well as its apocalyptic origin.

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[6] Robert M. Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI: Religion and the Promise of Artificial Intelligence", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76/1 (March 2008), 138.

[7] Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, 185.

[8] Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near,* 374; see also Hugo de Garis, *The Artilect War: Cosmists vs. Terrans: A Bitter Controversy Considering Whether Humanity Should Build Godlike Massively Intelligent Machines* (Palm Springs, California: ETC Publications, 2005), 1004-1005.

[9] Geraci, "The Popular Appeal of Apocalyptic AI", 1004.

AI can be positioned as a counterpart to traditional Japanese religious beliefs as an alternative to the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic foundation. In particular, the presence of the technological ideas of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs in public perception and the existence of popular science books on AI and robotic technologies reveal this relationship. The animist belief of "kami", which corresponds to an important spiritual power in the Shinto faith and refers to worshipped spirits (gods) distributed through nature and supernatural beings, has had an impact on the development and use of robotic technologies in Japan.[10] According to this animist belief, it is natural for robots to have a (spiritual) spirit or power, just like anything else in nature. Therefore, in Japan, a robot with AI can be seen as a friend or partner rather than a machine made of metal.[11] In this respect, traditional Japanese religions allow for "technological sacraments".[12] The Japanese press often emphasizes that AI robots have the potential to become Buddhas, and for some Buddhists, AI robots are part of Buddhism's cosmic history of salvation.[13] Buddhism also believes humans are created from an immaterial entity called "citta", the "mind".[14] The sanctity that Buddhists ascribe to AI is directly related to the meaning they attribute to the conception of God (i.e., the mind).

The sacred status that people ascribe to AI robots or machines (i.e., machine deification) is based on a sense of awe mixed with fear of the (mysterious savior) representations portrayed in science fiction books and movies.[15] This has been interpreted as reflecting German

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[10]   Geraci, "The Popular Appeal of Apocalyptic AI", 1007-1008.

[11]   Timothy N. Hornyak, *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots* (New York: Kodansha International, 2006), 132.

[12]   For technological sanctities in different regions in Japan, see Ian Reader - George J. Tanabe, *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 46; see also Robert M. Geraci, "Spiritual Robots: Religion and Our Scientific View of the Natural World", *Theology and Science* 4/3 (November 2006), 235-240.

[13]   Masahiro Mori, *The Buddha in the Robot: A Robot Engineer's Thoughts on Science and Religion*, trans. Charles S. Terry (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1981), 13.

[14]   Somparn Promta - Kenneth Einar Himma, "Artificial Intelligence in Buddhist Perspective", *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society* 6/2 (June 2008), 176.

[15]   Anne Foerst, "Cog, a Humanoid Robot, and the Question of the Image of God", *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 33/1 (March 1998), 91-111.

theologian Rudolf Otto's definition[16] of the human encounter with the divine.[17] Despite the limited empirical data, the human relationship with AI robots or machines can be seen as the human experience of the divine.[18] It can be inferred, then, that there is considerable similarity between the theology on which science fiction books and movies are based or associated and the religious origins of AI.

2. Artificial Intelligence Paradigm of Religion

In the 21st century, significant progress has been made in the development of AI-oriented technologies. ChatGPT achieved an impressive milestone of 100 million monthly active users shortly after its launch, making it the fastest-growing consumer application to date.[19] Experts estimate that 50% of businesses will be significantly impacted in the next five years as ChatGPT is integrated into technologies. As it continues to be developed in this context, AI is potentially promising in many social fields, especially in the field of medicine.[20] However, it remains unclear how AI will proceed in the dimension of religion.

When AI or robots with AI are designed, the software is first loaded with a background perspective based on purely mechanical work and operations. At the current stage, in addition to a fully autonomous or semi-autonomous structure independent of humans, a mental process capacity that exceeds the limits of human intelligence is also expected from AI. However, human intellectual capacity has not changed for centuries. Therefore, what (exactly) does AI aim or attempt to do? Is it only the capacity of human beings to transcend themselves? Or is it for man to create his god? Or is it the desire to reduce and ultimately end the human need for God? When the transcendent dimension of the human being is erased by AI, or when this dimension is not considered

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[16] For Otto, religion is the experience of the sacred. The sacred can be expressed in terms of mysterium tremendum and mysterium fascinans. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 50-65.

[17] Robert M. Geraci, "Robot and the Sacred in Science and Science Fiction: Theological Implications of Artificial Intelligence", *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 42/4 (December 2007), 961-962.

[18] See Foerst, "Cog, a Humanoid Robot, and the Question of the Image of God", 91-111; id., *God in the Machine: What Robots Teach Us about Humanity and God* (New York: Dutton, 2004), 47.

[19] Andriansyah, "The Current Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Religious Studies", ix.

[20] Andriansyah, "The Current Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Religious Studies", ix.

in the integration, the possibility and difficulty of the purely mechanical cyborg human being to survive in its new format gives rise to a few debates. These debates include whether the idea of cloning (copying) or coding human beings is compatible with reality, whether it is possible to transition from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo Deus* with the help of technology, whether human beings will transcend everything as intended if this happens, whether it is possible to prevent aging and death, which are seen as barriers to human transcendence, and to what extent these thoughts affect the view of God's ability to create. AI and the dimension of religion are among the important topics of intellectual and academic discussions, especially in the recent period.

According to Soysal, transhumanism's policy of human reproduction is inconsistent. The transhumanist approach underestimates the consequences of reproduction for women, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing, which are seen as sources of pain at every stage. In addition, it prioritizes the development of adults in the quest for immortality and, therefore, ignores the production of new life. On the other hand, the movement utilizes new reproductive technologies to develop human beings, thus promising and ensuring unlimited individual reproductive freedom in various contexts.[21]

According to Dağ, on the one hand, the development of the limits of the concepts of freedom with artificial intelligence, digitalization, and robotics (AIDR) has increased; on the other hand, it has created the problem of violation of personal rights, such as privacy, confidentiality, and security, which are the most basic concepts of humans and society. When the Metaverse, i.e., the Web 3.0 process, is added to this phenomenon, the concept of freedom will develop further by transcending time and space. Nevertheless, violations of personal rights, more opportunities to commit crimes, and new types of crimes will emerge. The further development and increased visibility of AIDR require the ancient issue of freedom to be reconsidered in the context of "freedom and responsibility".[22]

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[21] Esra Kartal Soysal, "The Production of Human Reproduction: Impacts of Transhumanism's Inconsistent Reproductive Policy on Classical Ethical Principles", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 9-11.

[22] Ahmet Dağ, "Freedom as an Issue in the Context of Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence, Digitalization, and Robotics (AIDR)", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 51-52.

According to Can, transhumanism sets the goal of reaching the transhuman stage first and then the posthuman stage, which represents the maximum cognitive, emotional, and psychological empowerment of human beings. At this point, this movement, which is accepted as a continuation of humanism, is criticized within the framework of Islam's understanding of human beings as an object in achieving this goal, despite its goal of developing human beings physically, cognitively, and emotionally.[23] In this sense, revising transhumanist goals and harmonizing them with the principles of Society 5.0 will be more than necessary, as neglecting the spiritual welfare of society may negatively affect the achievement of the desired goals and trigger social crises.[24] In fact, one of the most fundamental factors that make human beings understand and give them meaning is spiritual and cultural codes.

Doko argues that a Muslim who accepts classical theism should be open to the possibility of an AI with real mental states.[25] Accordingly, the development of triune AI would not be surprising from an Islamic perspective, and its creation may even provide confirmatory evidence for classical theism. This provides a philosophical basis for the existence of conscious and intelligent machines and their potential compatibility with Islamic beliefs.

According to Yılmaz, in the face of posthumanism, transhumanism, and new materialism, now is the most critical time to protect human beings and the values of humanity. However, if this is not realized, then people may lose their most precious memories and personal self-consciousness, their comprehension may be manipulated, their perceptions may change, they may not know who they are or what they want while they are alive, humanity may be destroyed with a single click of a button with the desire for immortality; furthermore, it may be easier to believe that God does not exist at all, despair,

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[23] Seyithan Can, "Critique of Transhumanism's Concept of Humans from the Perspective of Islamic Thought", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 107-108.

[24] Abdulkadir Büyükbingöl - Taylan Maral, "A Criticism of Transhumanism from the Society 5.0 Perspective in the Context of Social Values", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 170.

[25] Enis Doko, "Islamic Classical Theism and the Prospect of Strong Artificial Intelligence", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 85-86.

rebellion, and chaos may arise in a world where "cyborgs people"[26] exist, and thus death may be the only way out.[27]

Regarding the physical and psychological capacities of robots developed with high technology through GPT-3 and GPT-4 software languages such as Ameca, Mika, Sophia, and Marbot with AI with the latest technological developments, humanity faces many religious, sociological, psychological, philosophical, and biological problems.

The intersection or dimension of religion and science in general and AI technologies and religion, in particular, seems to have gained vital importance in the modern era. For this reason, AI technologies and religion are among the important issues emphasized/discussed by philosophers, theologians, and scientists, especially in recent years. Indeed, religion has a strong role in the formation of scientific theories.[28] Therefore, the scientific basis, aspects, and dimensions of AI cannot be considered independent of religion. There is necessarily a human factor at the intersection of AI and religion. In this sense, just as there cannot be an individual or society independent of religion or belief, it does not seem possible to think of AI, one of the most important discoveries that concerns humanity, as completely independent of religion. Moreover, it has already been stated that apocalyptic Judeo-Christian beliefs are effective in the religious foundations of AI. However, the conception of religion, the individual, and society of a technology that is integrated with digital structures and software such as AI and the Metaverse is not only utopian but also dominated by secular, materialist, and positivist ideologies.[29]

The Judeo-Christian utopia of salvation "shares the basic understanding that God intends to soon eliminate or defeat the evil forces that cause good people to suffer. This will end with God establishing a new transcendent kingdom purged of all evil, and humans, tainted by sin, will receive glorified angelic bodies to live in

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[26] Muhammed Yamaç, "Transhümanizm Bağlamında Siborgist İnsan Tasavvuru ve Din", *Yapay Zekâ, Transhümanizm, Posthümanizm ve Din Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildiri Özet ve Tam Metin Kitabı*, ed. Muhammed Kızılgeçit et al. (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2021), 210-229.

[27] Sait Yılmaz, "The New Materialism and Post-Humanist Studies", *Ilahiyat Studies* 14/1 (July 2023), 226-228.

[28] Geraci, "Spiritual Robots", 229.

[29] For manifestations of the Metaverse in religion and society see Muhammed Yamaç, "Metaverse'te Dinî ve Toplumsal Tezahürler", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 23/1 (March 2023), 29-57.

this kingdom for eternity. Such changes in the world are predestined as part of God's divine plan".[30] This theological understanding reduces the future of humanity to Judeo-Christian apocalypticism and argues that it will follow an entirely parallel course. In this context, Yeşilyurt questions the possibility of reconciling the *Imago Dei* doctrine of Christianity with transhumanism and states that this will not be possible based on the data. Accordingly, it is understood that there is a fundamental incompatibility between Christianity, which sees man as a mortal being created in the image and likeness of God, and transhumanism, which does not see creation and mortality, illness, old age, and similar conditions that this creation brings about in man as the unchangeable destiny of man.[31]

Moravec and Kurzweil argued that human beings are slow to learn and quick to forget but that they will soon become freer and more independent by overcoming the bodily limitations that alienate them through technologies such as AI and that a new technological evolution will lead to the establishment of a cyber world surrounded by highly equipped AI robots.[32] Accordingly, AI robots will be freed from bodily limitations and become more independent in a superhuman position. However, there is a large gap as to how human beings will change spiritually and religiously. Thus, the issue of how AI robots will establish a relationship with God cannot be made sense of, and the transcendental dimension of the cyborg man remains unclear. The religious paradigm of AI technologies, grounded in apocalyptic understanding, is based on a dualistic belief based on the distinction between the (valuable) mind and the (hindering) body. According to this understanding, it is thought that the human body limits learning both physically and in terms of memory; therefore, the dissolution of the human mind from its usual patterns and the transformation of "protein-based" bodies into immortal machines is a requirement of inevitable technological progress. In this way, by transferring the human mind to AI technologies, the body will be able

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[30] Geraci, "The Popular Appeal of Apocalyptic AI", 1005.
[31] Muhammet Yeşilyurt, "Hıristiyanlığın 'Imago Dei' Öğretisinin Transhümanizmle Uzlaştırılmasının İmkânı", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 9/5 (December 2020), 3645.
[32] See Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI", 138-166; id., *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87.

to learn everything that it wants to learn easily and instantaneously, and thanks to its "replicability", it will be able to resolve the alienation arising from the dualism it is in by achieving immortality. Within this framework of understanding, a techno-mechanical conception of life is advocated in which virtual bodies (which can change according to the situation and function) will be sufficient instead of a physical body.[33] Thus, the promise of perfection and the alluring vision of an unlimited life in the future, such as immortality, keeps the apocalyptic belief utopian and dynamic. However, the proponents of this belief fail to consider that the environment that will be created in the future with the proliferation of AI robots in all areas of life points to a possible conflict between humans and robots. Since the unpredictable religious dimension of the transcendent human being is not included in this intricate utopian belief construct or is not seen as an area worth considering, transcendence is not considered a need within the boundaries of the AI apocalyptic imagination.

The claim or perception that AI robots correspond to something sacred, as in Western-indexed science fiction books or movies, offers insight into how religion is understood or portrayed in the modern era. In this framework, there is a significant correlation between AI technologies and the Western perception or perspective of sacredness.[34] In this sense, the relationship or intersection of AI technologies and religion is understood to be reduced to a utopian world perception in the West. When we go to the source of this concern, it is seen that the door is opened to a graver theological error. Foerst's claim[35] that man created the AI robot as God created man is logically a striking example of this theological fallacy. According to Geraci, this theological logic leads to the analogy that "man is to God what AI is to man".[36] In theological terms, this logic implies a situation that is completely outside the learned or known logical patterns in the God-human relationship, namely, the deification of man. In a sense, this analogy is also a manifestation of a virtual kingdom. This virtual kingdom, which is reduced to the digital, rejects traditional religion, on

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[33] See Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, 142.
[34] Geraci, "Robot and the Sacred in Science and Science Fiction", 977.
[35] See Foerst, "Cog, a Humanoid Robot, and the Question of the Image of God", 91-111.
[36] Geraci, "Robot and the Sacred in Science and Science Fiction", 977.

the one hand, and the traditional human model, on the other hand, favors the purely mechanical life of a body that is emptied of emotions and thus liberated.[37] Indeed, this idea was expressed in Christian theology in the 20th century with the concept of a "created co-creator", and it has been made to play a highly functional role in the establishment of the religion-technology relationship through the Christian *Imago Dei* doctrine as an intermediary.[38] When we look at the relevant literature, there are different approaches to AI technologies, which are expressed as dystopia and digitopia, corresponding with positive or negative interpretations.[39] Reed states that AI experiments can contribute to the religious field by helping develop new understandings of religious beliefs, texts, or practices.[40] Singler, on the other hand, argues that the discourse that AI refers to a field that is not generally perceived as religious and is considered rational, secular, and modern is blind but rather a strong indicator of new manifestations of religion.[41] In this sense, it is argued that AI has the potential to provide impetus to new religious movements (as in the case of the Turing Church).[42] In this framework, Singler's field study found that AI fits into the "God field" in new religious movements and transhumanist imagination.[43] Geraci, on the other hand, argues that AI can play the same role as a singular theistic God in Christian apocalyptic visions.[44] At this point, AI is understood to express a hopeful recycling of eschatological narratives. In addition, within the scope of religious transhumanist movements, Yeşilyurt's research on Christian

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[37] Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI", 160.

[38] Yeşilyurt, "Hıristiyanlığın 'Imago Dei' Öğretisinin Transhümanizmle Uzlaştırılmasının İmkânı", 3629-3631.

[39] Ali Kemal Acar, "Din ve Teknoloji Etkileşiminde Yapay Zeka ve Transhümanizm'e Yaklaşımlar", *Pamukkale Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10/1 (June 2023), 399.

[40] Randall Reed, "A.I. in Religion, A.I. for Religion, A.I. and Religion: Towards a Theory of Religious Studies and Artificial Intelligence", *Religions* 12/6 (May 2021), 12.

[41] Beth Singler, "The AI Creation Meme: A Case Study of the New Visibility of Religion in Artificial Intelligence Discourse", *Religions* 11/5 (May 2020), 15.

[42] The Church of Turing, a transhumanist new religious movement, deifies AI from a scientific perspective and argues that gods can only be found through technology. For more detailed information please see Beth Singler, "'Blessed by the Algorithm': Theistic Conceptions of Artificial Intelligence in Online Discourse", *AI and Society* 35/4 (April 2020), 952-954.

[43] Singler, "Blessed by the Algorithm", 954.

[44] See Geraci, "Apocalyptic AI".

transhumanism as an example of new approaches emerged from the interaction of religion-technology titled "Christian Transhumanism: A New Techno-Eschatological Interpretation of Christianity" and "Terasem Trans-Religion as an Example of Religious Transhumanism". In the first research in question, it was concluded that Christian transhumanism's attitude toward the religion-technology relationship, which is gradually turning into a theological problem for religions, is in favor of both the "religiousization of technology" and the "technologization of religion", thus preferring the compromise option.[45] Second, the Terasem Trans-Religion Movement, which was established as a religious movement, presents the trans-human (transcendental human) to be achieved through transhumanism as a transcendental religion that is reconciliatory and inclusive with all religions.[46]

According to Kafalı, AI, although it is based on Christian apocalypticism, has revealed a technology-based religion developed to reach God.[47] According to him, some changes in social life can be realized with the development of AI technologies. In this context, AI can trigger possible positive or negative changes in daily life practices focused on communication and interaction, reduce discriminatory behaviors between social classes, remedy global inequality and poverty, lessen gender inequality, prevent violence, reduce social deviations, and facilitate the provision of basic vital services but may lead to asociality, loss of common values, social disharmony, and not learning or accepting norms and values. On the other hand, it is predicted that AI may increase the need for religious environments that serve as a refuge for escape from mechanization. With this, there may be an increase in the quality and intensity of religious life, which may help the ideals of religion, affect the level and dimensions of religiosity, and lead to the formation of new sects, movements, and

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[45] Muhammet Yeşilyurt, "Hıristiyan Transhümanizmi: Hıristiyanlığın Tekno-Eskatolojik Yeni Yorumu", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 21/2 (September 2021), 815-816.

[46] Büşra Yeşilyurt - Muhammet Yeşilyurt, "Dini Transhümanizmin Bir Örneği Olarak Terasem Trans-Dini", *Mîzânü'l- Hak: İslami İlimler Dergisi* 15 (December 2022), 555.

[47] Hasan Kafalı, "Yapay Zekâ, Toplum ve Dinin Geleceği", *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 46 (June 2019), 145-172.

congregations.[48] According to Dağ, AI is a technological system with transhumanist tendencies and promises immortality.[49] According to Berk, deepfake videos designed using AI are a very powerful manipulation tool that is positioned as a new danger in the digital age.[50]

According to Dorobantu, as a theological hope for the future, if AI achieves human intelligence, then it could help expand the understanding of divine revelation by providing a completely new perspective on some of the fundamental principles of religion.[51] According to a study addressing the problem of granting moral and legal status to AI in terms of Islamic morality and law, a human being who is legally competent and liable and morally a voluntary and responsible person due to his soul and consciousness cannot be considered at the same level as a robot devoid of all these.[52] For AI to be supported for the benefit of humanity, the basic criterion that it should not cause any harm in individual, social, or environmental terms has been adopted. However, AI cannot be handled independently of morality, values, and law since it is not the technology itself but its possible consequences that can be evaluated as good or bad.

Byung-Chul Han stated that AI is a calculative tool that can learn but cannot experience.[53] Based on Han's inference, it is understood that even if AI has epistemologically religious thought and content, it does not/will not have any developmental mechanism for religious experience or practice. This leads to a discussion of how AI will encompass the transcendent dimension of human beings. In this case, AI's claim to reach and even surpass human mental, religious, and

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[48] Kafalı, "Yapay Zekâ, Toplum ve Dinin Geleceği", 161-168.

[49] Ahmet Dağ, "Dijitalleşme-Yapay Zekâ-Transhümanizm Bağlamında Din ve Dindar'a Dair", *Yapay Zeka Transhümanizm ve Din,* ed. Muhammed Kızılgeçit et al. (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 175-185.

[50] Mustafa Evren Berk, "Dijital Çağın Yeni Tehlikesi Deepfake", *OPUS Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi* 16/28 (August 2020), 1508-1523.

[51] Marius Dorobantu, "Artificial Intelligence and Religion: Recent Advances and Future Directions", *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 57/4 (December 2022), 987.

[52] See Ülfet Görgülü - Sena Kesgin, "Yapay Zekâ Robotlara Ahlâkî ve Hukukî Statü Tanınması Problematiği – İslam Ahlâkı ve Hukuku Açısından Bir Değerlendirme", *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20 (December 2021), 37-65.

[53] Byung-Chul Han, *The Palliative Society*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 45-55.

spiritual capacity does not seem possible, at least in the current context. Thus, AI robots, which are designed as alternatives to human beings, harbor a great gap, risk, and threat in terms of religion in terms of their current structure and limited capacity. In addition, biomechanical human beings designed with AI technologies face the danger of being commoditized and detached from its meaning and purpose.

In the context of Western dualistic and apocalyptic beliefs, the religious paradigm of AI reflects the impact of transhumanist, secular, and materialist ideologies. Nonetheless, Islam asserts that the human intellect is a sacred endowment, rendering AI incapable of exceeding human capabilities.[54] According to Çevik, the fundamental difference between humans and robots is not developmental or evolutionary but ontological: since robots do not have free will, they cannot believe in or deny God.[55] One of the points neglected by those interested in AI technologies is that they approach the soul, mind, and consciousness from a purely materialist perspective and reduce them to algorithms and mathematical software, seeing them as mere skulls and brains, bypassing the divine.[56] In this sense, human beings are separated from the purpose of their existence and their souls. They are aimed at being reduced to unlimited and infinite pleasure in a commoditized world, away from the sense of psychological and physical pain. The reproduced cyborg causes the human being to be displayed in the network of meta-indices built with algorithmic perceptions in the triangle of pleasure, image, and consumption.

Conclusion

Emerging from the mid-20th century as a specialized research field, AI has entered a rapid development course with the technological developments of the 21st century. In this process, especially because of the integration of the GPT-3 and GPT-4 software languages into AI, the

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54 Mahmoud Dhaouadi, "An Exploration into the Nature of the Making of Human and Artifcial Intelligence and the Qur'anic Persepctive", *American Journal of Islam and Society* 9/4 (January 1992), 465. Artifcial Intelligence and the Qur'anic Persepctive makalenin oriinalinde ve sayfasında yazım bu hatalı şekliyle

55 Mustafa Çevik, "Will It Be Possible for Artificial Intelligence Robots to Acquire Free Will and Believe in God?", *Beytulhikme* 7/2 (December 2017), 86.

56 Samet Yahya Bal - Berat Sarıkaya, "Kelami Açıdan İnsan Fıtratı ve Bilinci Bağlamında Yapay Zekâ ve Transhümanizm", *Mavi Atlas* 10/2 (October 2022), 417.

(relative) improvements in physical and psychological capacity have opened the door to discussions on many religious, sociological, psychological, philosophical, and biological dimensions of AI. While man, who is still an enigma in many aspects, has not been able to fully analyze or comprehend himself, his goal and desire to bring AI, which is quite primitive compared with him, to his standard is quite thought-provoking and problematic. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether human beings will be able to design a corresponding and better equipped one even after they have fully resolved themselves. Even if he can, the discussion of whether this being can be God in the theological context corresponds to a different problem. There is no doubt that evaluating the results or outputs of AI, especially the paradigm of religion, in a collapsed way would be more consistent. First, although the type of relationship that AI establishes with the individual, society, and God is somewhat similar to that of human beings, it is clearly not the same, at least in the current context. From this point of view, the religious paradigm of AI is a critical issue.

Looking at the religious or theological basis of AI, the influence of Western theology is visible. At this point, it can be said that Judeo-Christian apocalyptic and eschatological understandings or strategies have played a leading role in the development of AI technologies. Christian theology's expectations of cosmic purpose and the hope of salvation through supernatural mechanics and the virtual body or mind play a functional role in keeping Western researchers' interest in AI technologies dynamic. In this sense, AI, which draws an appearance based on an apocalyptic religious foundation, is the inheritor of apocalyptic and eschatological religious promises. In this respect, AI is understood as a refuge for the integration of religion and science in the future or a desire for the need to integrate the two. However, debates will continue on many different issues, such as the form and level of relationship that AI robots establish with humans, the direction in which the struggle between value judgments such as good and evil evolves within the framework of apocalyptic dualistic understanding, and the metaphysical dimensions of purified AI beings. However, there is a need for a new perspective and paradigm in this field other than the apocalyptic and eschatological approach of the West. Hence, there is a great need for research based on scientific data that can

contribute to the field of AI, especially within the scope of religious sciences.

There is no doubt that AI technologies have the potential to affect almost every aspect of life. However, it is very difficult to predict the possible situations or changes in many areas of life, especially religion, which are put forward as predictions about AI technologies. It is against the nature of science and academia to put forward ideas that do not go beyond speculation on what kind of consequences a phenomenon or situation may have socially and religiously by the general principle that "sociology studies what is, not what should be". In our opinion, the evaluations on AI and religion made thus far are largely not based on field research and data and are, in a sense, a projection of the historical journey.

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