



## **Religion & Science Conference**

### ***Consciousness and Artificial Intelligence***

#### **Call for Abstracts**

Cambridge Muslim College is pleased to announce the 2018 Religion & Science conference supported by the John Templeton Foundation. The conference provides an excellent opportunity to present current research and new scientific perspectives, alongside theological and philosophical views on two broadly related areas: the rapidly developing field of Artificial Intelligence, and the physics and science of consciousness.

The conference will be held over two days:

Day one of the conference will focus on Artificial Intelligence. There has recently been a resurgence of interest in AI, yielding notable developments in numerous subfields including machine learning, natural language processing, and machine vision. Papers are invited to explore the connections between new theories of intelligence and cognition with philosophical, theological and religious perspectives. Islamic theological perspectives on the nature, role and function of the human intellect in relation to contemporary models of intelligence being developed through research in Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and cognitive sciences are particularly welcome.

Day two of the conference will focus on the question of consciousness. It is aimed at presenting new emerging concepts from a broad range of sciences on the nature of consciousness and why we have subjective experience and self-awareness. Ideas from physics, including proposals based on quantum theory, as well as Islamic theological and philosophical perspectives on consciousness including scriptural arguments are particularly welcome.

# Overview

## Conference Day I: Intelligence

Modern AI is capable of significantly surpassing human capabilities in narrow domains resulting in accomplishments that have renewed the prospect of developing artificial general intelligence.

This conference will consider issues such as the very idea of general intelligence and the critical role of the intellect according to religious traditions, especially Islam, with reference to recent developments in AI and machine learning.

Amongst widespread academic and public discourse on its impact, relatively little has been written from an Islamic theological perspective, despite the intimate coordination of the intellectual and spiritual life of man in Islam, where sound intellect is a prerequisite for responsibility, belief and ethical conduct.

Conference papers will be presented in one of the four following sessions. Abstract submissions that attempt to address the first two of the below areas will be given preference as well as papers that incorporate scientific and theological aspects.

- Cognitive Theories, Natural and Artificial Intelligence
- AI Perception and Sentience – NLP, Speech, Vision, Sensation
- AI Ethics and Safety
- AI and Metaphysics – Transhumanism and the Singularity

## Conference Day II: Consciousness

There has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in the field of consciousness across multiple disciplines. A multitude of scientific approaches have been proposed but have we really achieved a working scientific explanation of the human mind? It appears the goal is still distant despite scientific advancement.

More recently a significant number of theoretical physicists have also turned their attention to this challenging field. Following the seminal paper by John Bell in 1964, overwhelming experimental evidence has now emerged that before any '*observed measurement*' is made, there are doubts as to how to precisely ascribe any complete sense of '*reality*' to physical objects such as particles.

It is striking that to this day there exists no universally accepted definition or scientific explanation of '*consciousness*'. Yet these issues are amongst the most strongly debated in Physics, Neuroscience, Philosophy and other disciplines.

Is consciousness a fundamental aspect of physical reality? Does it have a physical explanation? John Bell, in his essay on 'Six possible worlds of quantum mechanics', wrote '*As regards mind, I am fully convinced that it has a central place in the ultimate nature of reality...*'

## Conference Day I: Artificial Intelligence

- *What processes are involved in learning, thinking and mental representation?*
- *On the nature and role of imagination and creativity in human intelligence.*
- *Where is the locus of the intellect? An immaterial soul, the physical matter of the brain, or a combination?*
- *The faculties of human intelligence and the nature of reason, rationality and understanding.*
- *What is the link between the intellect and language?*
- *How has the intellect been discussed in the Islamic scholarly tradition?*

## Conference Day II: Consciousness

- *What are the defining features of 'consciousness'? Is it a real phenomenon?*
- *Is brain activity alone sufficient for conscious perception?*
- *Can science alone explain the mind?*
- *Is the nature of the self and soul in theology consistent with a scientific perspective?*
- *Can we construct a testable Quantum Field model for consciousness?*
- *Can non-biological objects acquire conscious awareness?*
- *Is consciousness part of a universal phenomenon or an intrinsic aspect of a fundamental field?*

## Conference Details

### Venue:

The conference will be held at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and will be hosted by Cambridge Muslim College.

### Date:

**15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018** from 10am to 6pm and will include lunch and refreshments provided by the College.

### Format:

Presentations of up to 30 minutes, open panel discussions together with plenary sessions. The format may be subject to variation and may include breakout sessions.

### Submission of Abstracts:

Please submit a title and **abstract of no more than 500 words** outlining your presentation to: [research@cambridgemuslimcollege.ac.uk](mailto:research@cambridgemuslimcollege.ac.uk) as a **word or pdf document**.

Please ensure that you include your full contact details including name, current position and research establishment with postal address, as well as to which one of the two areas, or both, the paper relates.

**Deadline for submission of abstracts: Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018.** Successful applicants will be notified by Monday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

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