

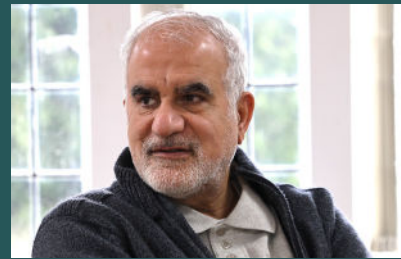
Extension of Scriptural Injunctions to Virtual Reality

Muslim jurists infer, or justify, knowledge of Sharia regulations by primarily taking recourse to the apparent linguistic indication (*ẓāhir*) of the scriptural sources of the Quran and hadith corpora. These scriptural injunctions of Sharia are regarded as being based on values, with adherence to them considered beneficial to humanity and capable of mitigating harm. While Sharia's scriptural injunctions originated in the context of physical reality, contemporary society is increasingly becoming familiar with virtual environments, including virtual reality, augmented reality, video games and virtual worlds, broadly referred to as the Metaverse. As virtual reality unfolds as a multifaceted digital environment with interactive capabilities akin to the physical world, and with new user interfaces and more realistic graphics, it inevitably introduces new dimensions of ethical and religious inquiry, intersecting with technology, ethics, and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). For instance, Sharia has plentiful injunctions relating to actual reality including injunctions concerning sexuality, violence, deception, economics/trade, unlawful social interaction etc; however, the question that arises is whether these injunctions are also applicable and extendable to human actions in virtual reality?

In navigating this uncharted terrain, Muslim jurists and theologians must grapple with a spectrum of normative dilemmas pertaining to both deontological Sharia regulations (*al-aḥkām al-taklīfiyya*) and situational Sharia regulations (*al-aḥkām al-waḍ'īyya*). As such, they must meticulously scrutinise semantic and interpretative methodologies to discern the applicability of Sharia injunctions to the complexities of virtual reality. The paper will explore the applicability and extension of scriptural injunctions to the following areas:

1. Individuals' interaction with virtual objects and the virtual economy.
2. Individuals' interaction with virtual characters, known as NPCs (non-playable characters), or AI avatars.
3. Individuals' interaction with another real person's avatar

This paper embarks on a thought-provoking inquiry: to what extent can scriptural injunctions of Sharia be extended from their original context to the domain of virtual reality? If such extension is deemed plausible, what implications arise regarding the applicability of these injunctions in assessing an individual's actions, interactions, and behaviours within virtual environments? Specifically, our analysis will focus on the relevance of technical *Uṣūlī* hermeneutical concepts, notably exploring linguistic principles such as the primacy of unrestricted meaning (*aṣālat al-iṭlāq*) and the primacy of generality (*aṣālat al-'umūm*) of scripture. We seek to determine whether these linguistic principles, traditionally applied in physical reality, retain their validity within virtual reality contexts. This examination encompasses existing virtual environments as well as potential future technologies, such as brain-computer interfaces or haptic suits, which augment users' sensory experiences within the virtual realm.



Professor Seyed Mohammad Fatemi
Al-Mahdi Institute and Shahid Beheshti University

Seyed Mohammad Ghari Seyed Fatemi is a Professor of Comparative Law and Islamic Hermeneutics in the Faculty of Law at Shahid Beheshti University. He has been a Senior Lecturer at Al-Mahdi Institute since 1995. Seyed Fatemi is also a member of the Academy of Sciences of Iran and a member of the Department of Biomedical Ethics at the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences. He has numerous publications to his name in Persian and English and has organised and presented at dozens of conferences in the fields of law, Islamic studies, and bioethics.



Rizwan Virk
Arizona State University



Dr Hashim Bata
Al-Mahdi Institute

Hashim Bata completed his seminary education at Al-Mahdi Institute in 2008 whilst simultaneously completing a BA (Hons) in Islamic Studies at The Islamic College and Middlesex University. Following an MA in Islam in Contemporary Societies at the University of Warwick, he completed a PhD in Law in 2013, also at the University of Warwick. Dr Bata is the Managing Director of AMI, the Head of the Department of Islamic Legal Studies, and a Lecturer in Islamic Legal Studies. He is also an Associate Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham.

A graduate of MIT and Stanford, Rizwan Virk is an entrepreneur, video game pioneer, film producer, venture capitalist and computer scientist. He was the founder of Play Labs @ MIT, and is currently a doctoral student and a faculty associate at both the College of Global Futures and the Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University. His research includes technological innovation in the real and virtual worlds/metaverse, as well as boundary work and stigma in science dealing with unexplained phenomena.