

# Syed AbuMusab

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**AOS:** Philosophy and Ethics of Technology and Artificial Intelligence, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Science.

**AOC:** Agency and Action, Computer Science, Feminist Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion (esp. Islamic Philosophy).

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## Education

2024 Spring

**Ph.D.** - Philosophy  
University of Kansas

Dissertation: "Large Language Models and Chatbots: Social Agency, Companionship, and the Morally Salient Aspects of their Use."

Committee: John Symons (Advisor), Sarah Robins (Purdue University), Brad Cokelet, Jason Raibley, Omri Gillath (outside Member – Psychology).

**M.A.** – Philosophy  
University of Kansas

Thesis – "The Ontological Vagueness of Descriptivism as Computational Theory of Implementation."

Committee: John Symons (Chair), Corey Maley, Sarah Robins

2018 Fall

**M.A.** – Philosophy  
Oklahoma State University

Thesis – "The Unit of Selection: Richard Dawkins and the Flaw of the Genetic View."

Committee – Doren Recker (chair), Shannon Spaulding, Justin Horn

2015 Spring

**B.A.** – Philosophy  
University of Central Oklahoma

## Publications

### Peer Reviewed

1. "LLMs Belong in Our Social Ontology." In *How to Live With Smart Machines*, edited by Anna Strasser, Xenomoi Verlag, Berlin. **(In Print)**.
2. "Social Agency for Artifacts: Chatbots and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence" (January 2024) *Digital Society*.
3. "Generative AI and Human Labor: Who is Replaceable?" *AI and Society* (2023).
4. "How Deep is AI's Love? Understanding Relational AI." *Brain Behavioral Science*. 46, E33 (2023). doi:10.1017/S0140525X22001704 (with Gillath, Omri; Ai, Ting; Branicky, Michael; Davison, Rob; Maxwell, Rulo; Symons, John; and Thomas, Gregory).
5. "Implementing a Computing System: A Pluralistic Approach," in *Global Philosophy*. 33, no. 1 (2023): 1-19. <https://philpapers.org/rec/ABUIACBJPS>.

### Book Reviews

"Review of *The Foundation of Computing* by Giuseppe Primiero." *The British Journal of Philosophy Science*. Fall 2021. <[www.thebsps.org/reviewofbooks/symons-abumusab-on-primiero/](http://www.thebsps.org/reviewofbooks/symons-abumusab-on-primiero/)> (With John Symons)

### Journal Special Issue Guest Editor

"Evaluating the effects of Large Language Models in writing-intensive courses"  
Guest Editor for the special issue of *Teaching Philosophy* **(In Print)**.  
<https://www.pdcnet.org/teachphil/Calls-for-Submissions>

### Under Preparation or Review

1. "Chatbots as Socio-Functional Companions for Lonely Older Adults." **(Under Review)**
2. "Scanlon and What We Owe to Each Other." with Brad Cokelet.
3. "Digital Alienation: An Epistemic Argument," with Damian Fisher.
4. "Trust and ML in bail hearings," with David Tamez.
5. "Sexual Autonomy for Women in Islam."
6. "A Critique of Rescorla's Descriptive Theory of Implementation."

## Talks and Presentations

July 2024	(Upcoming) "LLMs Belong in Our Social Ontology." ISOS 2024. Duke University.
June 2024	(Upcoming) "An Extended Mind, but a Deficient Brain: Remembering Information with LLMs." IPM4. Geneva, Switzerland.
Mar 2024	"What is Digital Alienation?" AI and Ethics Conference. Graz University. Graz, Austria.
Nov 2023	"ML Assistance, Epistemic Virtues, and Judicial Decision-Making" – Presentation at 2 <sup>nd</sup> International Conference on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2ICEAI). Porto, Portugal.
July 2023	"Trust and ML" – Presentation to the Summer School 2023 by Philosophy of Computational Sciences Group at The High-Performance Computing Center (HLRS) - Stuttgart, Germany.
June 2023	FACCT Doctoral Colloquium Presentation. ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FACCT), Chicago, IL.
May 2023	"The Digital Alienation from the Self: An Epistemic Argument." Talk at Computer Ethics and Philosophical Enquiry (CEPE), Chicago, IL (with Damian Fisher)
May 2023	"Agency before Sociality for Chatbots." Computer Ethics and Philosophical Enquiry (CEPE), Chicago, IL.
April 2023	"Technology and Public Health." Panel Member for CEAS Public Health Symposium. The Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas.
Jan 2023	"Social Agency for LLMs as Chatbots." Talk at PAIS 2023. Stanford University.
Nov 2022	"The Ontological Vagueness of Descriptivism as a Theory of Implementation," Poster Presented at Philosophy of Science Association.
Oct 2022	How Deep is AI's love." Southwestern College. (With John Symons)
Oct 2022	"Ethics of Emerging Technologies in Health Care." Symposium with Dr. Brad Cokelet on Public Health with East Asian Studies.
July 2022	"The use of Chatbots/LLMs as nostalgia Bots for alleviating loneliness in the Elderly." Presented at IPM 3 (Issues in Philosophy of Memory), Duke University.

April 2022	"The Puzzle of Joint Attention." Comments at SSPP in response to Bryan Chambliss.
Mar 2021	"Blockchain: Crypto and Trust." The University of Kansas Blockchain Institute.
Feb 2017	"Divine Hiddenness and Islam." The Workshop on Divine Hiddenness, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

## Teaching and Research Positions

2019 - Current	<b>Graduate Research Assistant</b> to John Symons University of Kansas Research: Computation, AI, LLMs, Data Privacy, Technology Ethics
Spring 2020	<b>Graduate Teaching Assistant</b> University of Kansas Course: Ethics of Emerging Technologies, Moral Issues of Computing Technologies.
2018 - 2019	<b>Adjunct Faculty</b> Courses: Contemporary Morla Problems, Introduction to Philosophy
2016 - 2018	<b>Graduate Teaching Assistant</b> Oklahoma State University Courses: Logic and Critical Thinking (Honors), Logic and Critical Thinking, Philosophies of Life, and Introduction to Philosophy

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## Services

2024	Program Committee Member for FAccT 2024. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2019 - 2020	Served on the Minorities and Philosophy Committee
2022 - 2023	Secretary for the Graduate Association of Philosophy Students
2018	Judge for a High School Ethics Bowl Tournament, Oklahoma City, OK.

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## Awards and Grants

2023	Research Team for the project "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself." Led by Nancy Snow and Funded by Research Go KU.
2023	Genova Award – Exceptional Progress as Graduate Student
2022 and 2023	Richard De George Award - Competitive Travel Funding

## References

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Brad Cokelet  
University of Kansas  
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Corey Maley  
Purdue University  
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## Dissertation Abstract

The dissertation is structured into three papers. The first paper argues that Large Language Models, when utilized as chatbots, can be considered agents, specifically social agents if we understand agency multidimensionally. This challenges the conventional notions, which I refer to as "threshold accounts," which outline a specific set of prerequisites for agency. Typically, these threshold accounts require individuals to possess human-like capabilities across cognition, language, and physicality to qualify as agents. The multidimensional approach, on the other hand, embraces the idea that agency exists across various dimensions. In this context, the first chapter contends that because chatbots exhibit linguistic proficiency, complex reasoning, and the ability to engage in conversations, they possess a dimension of agency, namely social agency. Many scholars, like Barandarian et al., Burge, and Fulda, have argued that even Bacterium are minimal agents. I make a similar claim for chatbots. In line with Nylhom, Strasser, Floridi, and Sanders, I also argue that we require a gradated or multidimensional approach to better capture AI agency. By incorporating insights from systems theory and the Level of Abstraction concept by Floridi, I argue that chatbots qualify as social agents.

In the second paper, I examine how to model social robots and robot companionship, specifically focusing on human-robot relationships (HRRs) for geriatric users. I offer a novel

model for understanding social robots and HRRs, termed Socio-Functional Conversationalist Companions (SFCC). I argue that the chatbots' socio-functional role determines their ontological status and the nature of HRRs. Two main perspectives dominate current discussions on HRRs: the anti-anthropomorphic model, which opposes assigning human-like qualities to robots, and the anthropomorphic apologist model, which supports framing social robots and HRRs as human-like. The former warns against potential societal harm and undermining the concept of friendship itself, while the latter dismisses these worries. I argue that both models are mistaken. Moreover, the dichotomous framing of the debate is unnecessary. For example, against the pro-anthropomorphic model, I argue that completely disregarding HRRs may marginalize those who benefit from HRRs. However, equating and presenting social robots like human-human relationships can set unrealistic expectations for geriatric users. Drawing on empirical data, I argue that the pro-anthropomorphic model risks priming older adults (and other users) with false expectations about social chatbots' nature and capabilities. For example, AI systems, as they currently stand, lack the capacity for mutual care. Mutual care, even minimal, is necessary for human friendships. Thus, it is best to understand HRRs as fulfilling a social function for older adults. They offer older adults an avenue to exercise their social capacity of conversations, fulfilling an important social need.

In the third paper, I switch gears. I argue that focusing AI ethics on Western perspectives and cultures risks obscuring valuable prospects emerging from other cultures, particularly the Global South. Thus, contrary to much cautionary take on AI systems in care settings (anti-camp), I argue that carebots are ideal candidates for some caretaking tasks within the Islamic context. Unlike most Americans, Muslims do not use senior-care homes for aging parents because of religious motivations. One religious doctrine relevant here is a type of relationship called mahram. It refers to a relationship that renders certain people unmarriageable to any person X who is a mahram. This includes relationships like siblings, parents, parents' siblings, grandparents, nieces, and nephews, and what is referred to as milk mothers. For pious Muslims, these are the only people permitted for proximity and intimate care, like changing, bathing, helping with mobility, etc. American or Western care facilities for older adults are usually out of the question or a last resort. Therefore, although caution is required, carebots, being non-human, might be ideal caregivers for geriatric care for Muslims. Moreover, the Islamic perspective underscores the need for AI ethics to include multicultural perspectives.