

Artificial Intelligence: Where are we up to and what are the main issues for Quakers?

Aotearoa NZ Quaker Webinar: 30 July 2026

Moral issues, electricity use, water use, job loss, growing inequality, totalitarian control, climate change, privacy, hate speech, pornography, objective truth, and governance are just some of the issues Friends have raised about artificial intelligence (AI).

Melissa Clark Reynolds, an epidemiologist-turned-futurist from Wellington joined around 20 Friends online to examine AI and issues for Quakers. Her presentation slides accompany this report, as does a list of resources for those wanting to learn more.

Melissa explained how the large language models (LLMs) of AI work like large predictive text. But they have to be trained, and this happens by scouring everything which is already on the internet. What already exists in cyberspace provides AI with its lessons. Images, writing, music, analysis etc beyond an Anglo-centric world are either under-represented or missing. Not only that, but people from low-income non-Anglo-centric countries are being paid very low wages to moderate the content; training it to recognise what is graphic, violent, or sexually explicit (see Hao's work below).

One Friend (who does translation work) commented *another concern in my world is that the past (already published) work of so many translators, editors, designers, writers, etc. has been used to train AI, without their permission or knowledge, and with no royalties or other payments made. There have been some court cases about this issue; as I understand it, some were won by the plaintiffs (translators, etc.).*

Someone else later summarised in the feedback: *The way the 'development and teaching' of AI was explained to us, it quite clearly serves to further disadvantage and make invisible the Global South (or the Majority World as some call it). Because both the societies and the individuals in the Global South have a much smaller online presence than the countries and affluent minorities in the Global North, and the way AI 'learns' means that the Global South will become even less visible than it is now... AI as it is currently being developed will continue to further expand the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.*

Melissa explained that there is nothing in AI that is conscious or sentient, and that is not likely to happen any time soon. [See Waymark below for how AI extends far beyond large language models and written material].

Discussion issues

Jobs – Will AI take or create jobs? Melissa quoted the World Economic Forum's forecast of 170 million new jobs and 92 million lost jobs by 2030 associated with AI

technology. First time job seekers are deleteriously affected more than other groups. *There is no evidence co-pilot is increasing productivity* (Melissa).

One friend commented that *[t]he difference with the impact on jobs today is the pace of change. [It is m]uch harder for people to adjust and retrain.* Melissa disagreed explaining training was cheaply available electronically.

Water- the Makarewa datagrid in Southland is consented to draw 600,000 litres of groundwater per day.

True sovereignty - is difficult for NZ to achieve. *Data storage and computer power is one element, but the development of AI models, OS and underlying software, chips and hardware are much harder to address* - Friend.

Te ao Māori / sovereignty/ personal images – Māori have raised concern about collection of biometric data at US borders. Te Hiku Media is using AI to help preserve te reo Māori, but will dialects within te reo be lost? Denmark is considering people having a property right to their own faces.

Do we control AI or does AI control us? One Friend alluded to reports about SpaceX's Elon Musk's recent comments about either an age of abundance or a horrific alternative <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuoqKYxDHVc&t=36s>

Resist! declared one Friend in the Chat.

Who is making the rules now? One Friend summarised: *AI is being developed by large corporations in the US or government in China. We are handing over control either to US multinationals or the Chinese government.* Another Friend commented *[t]here are different rules in the US in contrast to the EU – [see <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=4be3d3db-3ed7-490e-a176-8cd53e986b23>].*

How will rules be enforced? Many leaders do not understand AI (Melissa). *Not just leaders, most people don't understand it* (Friend)

Literature, language and creative work – appropriately, there was a largely written discussion being carried out in the Chat about AI, dumbing down language, use of writers and translators' work without permission, [See <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/business/580661/nz-authors-among-global-payout-out-after-ai-chatbot-trained-on-pirated-books>].

Scientific knowledge - A recent editorial in Science drew attention to the manner in which use of AI is both corrupting papers submitted for publications and creating problems for referees- Friend [see <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aee8267>]

Education - *If used well, AI has amazing potential for education - individualised learning modalities etc* (Friend). *There is a university in Texas that has forbidden the use of AI by students (for the reasons I mentioned earlier - i.e., to get them to study,*

read, write, and research for themselves) - it seems to be working well. I do not think that we necessarily have to accept the use of AI as "inevitable"... (another Friend)

Weaponry: *Extremely powerful people are developing extremely powerful weapons – Friend. AI further distances the killers from those they kill and AI guided weapons have no humanity.*

How do we live as Quakers in a world facing terrible consequences from AI?

When talking about AI limitations, we should keep in mind that it's changing rapidly. How will whakapapa be protected? What about cultural knowledge?

AI is already influencing both what we think about and how we think about it. Given our belief 'that there is that of God in everyone' does this cross a Quaker line because it lessens the 'human' in what and how we think? If it does, what are the ramifications for us? (Friend feedback)

Output from AI becomes a self-fulfilling loop of untrustworthy information. (There is a word for this - enslopification or homogenising everything down to an average - Melissa). We do all tend to believe what we hear. *Where is the truth-telling coming from? AI is the internet on steroids – Friend.*

What can be done?



Design schools for the information era rather than the industrial age - Melissa



Train people to think critically - Melissa



Question the source - Melissa



Maintain a culture of suspicion - Friend



Learn more: Afterwards I noted an article on sextortion and how perpetrators can use AI to turn innocent personal images into something else so I would have been interested to discuss how to prevent this. - Friend



Look at how we can use AI to reinforce our humanity - Melissa



Look at how we can use AI to be better writers – Melissa



AI responsibly developed could be a force for good: helping improve equality and social well-being at both the global and within country levels; and being a force for peace and social justice - Friend feedback



Advocate for the governance and management of AI to be placed under international democratically accountable global control so as to ensure that it is used for the good of humanity and not for negative and unjust purposes, e.g. ... we should have learnt from the negative impacts of not managing other major technological developments. There wouldn't be a

climate crisis if the world didn't have 1.7 billion motor vehicles for the benefit of the rich 20% of the world – Friend feedback.



Please at least consider NOT using AI sometimes! - Friend

Resources recommended by Melissa and Friends are here (I have not checked the content of most of these – Philippa, Climate Emergency Correspondent)

Article

Waymark, Ben, (2026) *Model behaviour: Ben Waymark seeks a Quakerly approach to artificial intelligence* in The Friend (July 2026) – thank you Anne-Marie

Books

Adams, Rachel (2024) *The New Empire of AI: the future of global inequality*- thank you Jonathan

Christian, Brian (2021) *The Alignment Problem: Machine Learning and Human Values*

Hao, Karen (2025) *Empire of AI* (big read – but Adrian S is writing a book review)

Kapoor Sayash - *AI Snake Oil* (2024) - The first chapter of "AI Snake Oil — What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference" is available online – see <https://www.normaltech.ai/> where updates are also posted – thank you John M.

Pope Leo XIV, (2026) *MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS Encyclical letter on safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence* at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>

Reports

1 News (March 2026) *Fears for Māori DNA in border control requests for personal data*, <https://www.1news.co.nz/2026/03/25/fears-for-maori-dna-in-border-control-requests-for-personal-data/>

Interviews

Hao, Karen (2026) *Has AI Been Overhyped?* | 30 with Guyon Espiner S5 Ep5 | RNZ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQVV0LTUy7w> podcast

Klein, Ezra and Jasmine Sun (2026), *The A.I. Revolt Is Here* | The Ezra Klein Show, 5 August, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbgvTlt1VB8> – thank you Marvin

Podcasts

Jackson, Zach (2026) *Quakers and AI* (podcast from USA) <https://quakerpodcast.com/quakers-and-ai/>

Manson, Katrina (2026) *Project Maven, the Dawn of AI Warfare* Katrina Manson, Bloomberg News Podcast at <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/project-maven-the-dawn-of-ai-warfare/id393107187?i=1000758204743>

Other

UNDERMIND – tool recommended by Melissa <https://www.undermind.ai/>

I have not checked this out.