

WEBINAR SERIES

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND RELIGION | AIR2020/21

SEPTEMBER 2020-APRIL 2021

CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES | FONDAZIONE BRUNO KESSLER | TRENTO

Predicting and Preventing Religious Conflict Using Multi-Agent Artificial Intelligence

LeRon Shults (University of Agder)

Developing the capacity to predict and prevent religious conflict and violent extremism is a high priority for a variety of stakeholders, including local and state governments, law enforcement institutions, NGOs, national and international security organizations, and concerned citizens everywhere. Policy-makers wonder what policies can help mitigate the causes and effects of forms of conflict and radicalization that are motivated – or at least justified – by religion. Scientists and subject-matter experts wonder what role religion plays in processes of intergroup conflict.

Answering such questions requires insight into micro-level factors (e.g., individual and personality variables), meso-level factors (e.g., social networks, institutional access), and macro-level factors (e.g., existential security and economic stability).

Multi-agent artificial intelligence (MAAI) modeling and social simulation provide new tools for incorporating factors at all of these levels into “artificial societies” within which scientists and stakeholders can run experiments to explore the conditions under which – and the mechanisms by which – religious conflict emerges and is sustained within various contexts.

This presentation will discuss the methodological innovations provided by MAAI, outline several examples of the application of this approach to issues related to religious conflict, and explore some of the implications for wider ethical discourse about AI and religion.