

Narratives of Artificial Intelligence and Religion, a panel for the 2017 BASR conference.

The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, in association with the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence/Royal Society's 'Narratives of Artificial Intelligence' project, proposes a panel on the religious narratives that shape current discourse on AI and robotics and their technological development.

From Hephaestus's golden handmaids to Karel Čapek's Roboti, we have been imagining intelligent machines since long before we could build them. As AI and robotics begin to fulfil their promise, they therefore arrive pre-loaded with meaning, sparking associations - and media attention - disproportionate to their capacities.

This panel seeks to draw attention to how many of these meanings come from religious narratives and forms, even if the overtly secular, or even new atheist, rhetoric of many technologists would deny any continuities with the accounts of 'irrational goddists', seen as a remnant of an ignorant past. However, daily we see self-proclaimed technology 'evangelists' make marketing promises about omniscient AI, 'prophetic' transhumanists talking about an end of times through mind uploading and the end of the flesh (a 'dead format'), and algorithms and 'black box' AI's being treated as wise oracles, requiring 'faith' in their answers and abilities.

In exploring these continuities, this panel is itself continuing the discussion that we began in the 2016 BASR conference panel, "AI, Robots, and Religion: An Initial Conversation". This panel led to a Religious Studies Project podcast and a special issue on AI and religion is in progress.

If you are interested in being included in the panel, please send a 250 word abstract to Beth Singler at bvw20@cam.ac.uk by end of the day Friday 19th May.