

AI Experts Debate Whether Artificial Intelligence Becomes Civilization's Destroyer or Its Savior

Final webinar of the eight-part AI Webinar Series on Thursday, August 20

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, August 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [G20 Interfaith Forum](#) (IF20), the world's leading organization focused on the intersection of faith and policy, in cooperation with the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation (IAMC), will close its eight-part AI Webinar Series on Thursday, August 20, with a session asking the question that has shadowed the entire series: whether artificial intelligence turns out to be a threat or a benefit is still a decision human beings get to make. AI and the Future brings together AI policy specialists, working technologists, and scholars of governance for the series final conversation.



IF20

Marianna Richardson, IF20's Director of Communications and head of its AI working group, framed the stakes of the session in stark terms.

"Artificial Intelligence is currently being described as both the destroyer and savior of civilization," Richardson said. "Looking at the future of AI, we, as an international community, need to decide which way the development of AI will go."

That decision, IF20 argues, is an ethical one before it is a technical one. AI will shape the future by amplifying human capabilities and transforming how people learn, work, and solve problems together—but its impact will depend on whether societies guide it with strong ethical frameworks that protect dignity, fairness, and human agency. Aligned with shared values, AI can help build a future that is more creative, connected, and compassionate.



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*Dr. Marianna Richardson,
IF20*

The panel is deliberately unlike-minded. AI policy specialist Clara Langevin works on how governments can adopt AI responsibly; technologist Josh Tan builds AI as public infrastructure rather than private property; engineer and tech ethicist Manisha Jain has spent a decade inside generative AI at Google, Meta, and Microsoft; accounting professor David A. Wood teaches organizations how to put AI to work; and

international affairs scholar Valerie Hudson, who describes herself as an AI “gloomer,” has studied AI and politics since 1991. Their disagreements are the point.

The session concludes a series that has run since June and has taken up AI and faith, translation, benchmarks, the planet, peace, human flourishing, and education. IF20’s AI work began in New Delhi in 2023 and has continued through convenings in Pune, Brasília, and South Africa, and through the creation of an AI Interfaith Task Force bringing technologists and religious leaders together to develop ethical guidelines and advocate for international standards.

The webinar will be held Thursday, August 20, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. EDT. Marianna Richardson will moderate. Expert speakers will present and discuss the topic, after which audience members may submit questions in the chat for further discussion by the panel. Register for the free webinar at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_oSp0FMD8Rfm5GfznAWutrg

Speakers will include:

Marianna Richardson (Moderator) — Director of Communications for the G20 Interfaith Forum and head of its AI working group. She is an adjunct professor of management communication at Brigham Young University’s Marriott School of Business and editor-in-chief of the Marriott Student Review. She has represented IF20 at international AI convenings, including the UN’s first Global AI Dialogue in Geneva.

Clara Langevin — Senior Manager, AI Policy on the Emerging Technologies team at the Federation of American Scientists, where she focuses on promoting responsible AI adoption across sectors and creating policy guidance on AI and data ethics, transparency, and explainability. She previously headed the AI and Machine Learning Platform at the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Brazil, a World Economic Forum affiliate, leading projects on public-sector AI procurement, healthcare, and precision agriculture. She holds an MPA in Development Practice from Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs and a degree from the University of Washington’s Jackson School of International Studies.

Dr. David A. Wood — Glenn D. Ardis Professor of Accounting at Brigham Young University and author of *Rewiring Your Mind for AI: How to Think, Work, and Thrive in the Age of Intelligence*. He

has published more than 250 articles, books, monographs, and cases, and has helped organizations around the world learn about and implement generative AI. Accounting Today has named him one of the 100 most influential people in accounting.

Josh Tan — Leads technology at Current AI and Public AI, runs Stanford AO at Stanford OpenLab, and co-founded Metagov, a laboratory for engineering institutions. He completed his PhD and postdoc at Oxford and has held fellowships at Stanford, Princeton, and MIT. His work explores the intersection between artificial and collective intelligence, with a focus on AI as shared public infrastructure.

Manisha Jain — An engineer and thought leader in tech ethics who has spent more than a decade working in generative AI at Google, Meta, and Microsoft, including on projects such as Gmail SmartReply and Google Translate. Her essay “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Human Dignity, and Technology: Reflections on Benefits and Risks of AI,” published in The Review of Faith & International Affairs, examines how AI can support foundational human needs while threatening higher-level ones such as dignity, self-actualization, and connection. She works to bridge cutting-edge engineering with human-centered strategy.

Dr. Valerie Hudson — University Distinguished Professor and holder of the George H.W. Bush Chair in the Department of International Affairs at Texas A&M University’s Bush School of Government and Public Service. A specialist in foreign policy decision-making, she has a long association with AI in the social sciences, from her 1991 edited volume Artificial Intelligence and International Politics to her role as co-editor of and contributor to the 2023 Oxford Handbook of AI Governance. Foreign Policy named her one of the Top 100 Most Influential Global Thinkers in 2009, and her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense’s Minerva Initiative, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Fulbright Commission.

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