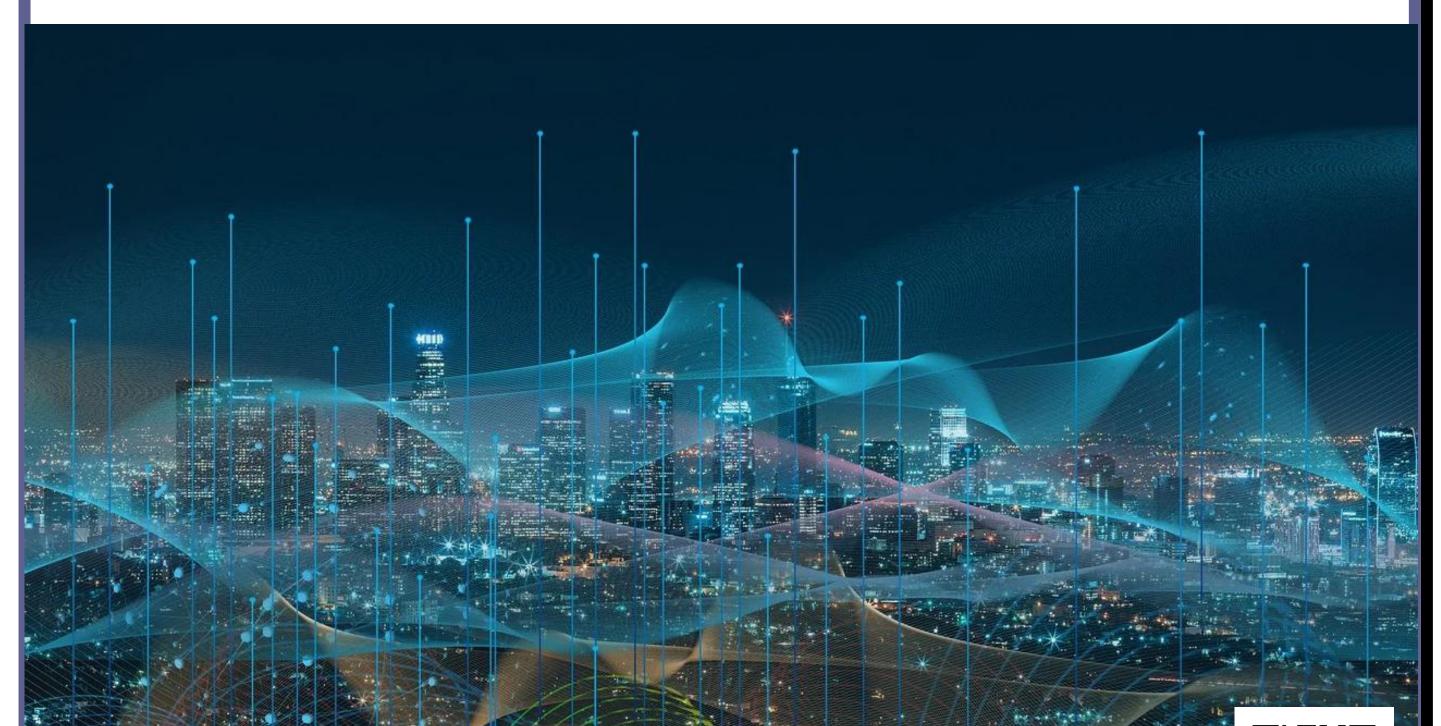# Mercator Lecture
for AI in the Human Context

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AI Ethics: A Deflationary yet Cautionary View

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Center for Science and Thought
Konrad-Zuse-Platz 1-3
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Abstract

Recent advances in AI research and development are raising a host of difficult ethical questions related to the impacts of AI technologies on human life. Although the project of building "moral machines" is not new, AI Ethics is now a vibrant field of research and public policy. One could hardly be blamed for being bewildered by the state of the public discussion on AI. I will defend what I call a deflationary view about the future development of AI and the moral status of advanced AI systems. My view is nonetheless cautionary because the narrow and limited machine learning algorithms that we currently have are already wreaking havoc in some crucial spheres of human life and disrupting established social practices; think, for instance, of generative AI such as ChatGPT. I will try to show that AI ethics, done properly, has the conceptual resources to help us move beyond the lofty realm of principles and to contribute to the judicious regulation of AI technologies.

Bio

After a B.A. at Laval University and an M.A. at the University of Victoria, Jocelyn Maclure earned a DPhil from the University of Southampton. Before joining the Department of Philosophy at McGill University in 2021, he taught for 17 years in the Faculty of Philosophy at Laval University. He held visiting appointments in several universities. Jocelyn Maclure's research is primarily in ethics and political philosophy. His book Secularism and Freedom of Conscience (Harvard University Press, 2011), co-authored with Charles Taylor, appeared in 9 languages. His recent work on artificial intelligence and on end-of-life issues led him to explore different metaphysical questions ranging from the mind-body problem to the enigma of personal identity. As a public philosopher, he served as an expert-analyst for the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on cultural and religious accommodations, co-chaired the group of experts on medical assistance in dying, advanced medical directives and neurodegenerative diseases, and participated in numerous public debates. He is the current president of the Quebec Ethics in Science and Technology Commission.