Speaker Series:
Safeguarding Democracy in the Age of AI

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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THE AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR EPISTEMOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

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https://zoom.us/j/91990847612

Speaking (Through) Algorithms: Free Speech and Artificial Intelligence

ABSTRACT

Philosophers and legal scholars are currently debating the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for freedom of expression. In this presentation, I discuss the free speech issues raised by two distinct AI technologies: social media recommendation algorithms and so-called generative AI, with a focus on large language models (LLMs). First, I show that, through their recommendation algorithms, social media platforms control the dynamics of speech visibility in the digital public sphere. For this reason, algorithmic recommendation is relevant to the philosophy of free speech. Then, I turn to generative AI and consider reasons to grant or withhold speech rights to artificial agents. I also discuss AI users' right to receive information and consider whether this right could render specific forms of LLM regulation illegitimate. My goal is to raise – not settle – philosophical questions that stem from the rapid development of AI.

Étienne Brown is a faculty member at the Centre for Law, Technology and Society and an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ottawa. His research examines the ethics and political philosophy of the digital public sphere and new information technologies, including artificial intelligence. His current work examines the ethical implications of states and large digital platforms regulating online discourse, the philosophical underpinnings of recommendation algorithms, and freedom of expression in the age of large language models. He is the founder and co-organizer of Philmod.org , a community of academic researchers and technology professionals interested in the philosophical implications of content moderation and social media platform policy.

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