Philosophy 108-10: Data Ethics
Instructor: Karen Rice
First full session | June 4-July 6, 2018
M-Th | 10:45-12:45

Course description:
Much of the ease of our lives is a result of big data, but many of us feel deeply uneasy about 1) the data that is collected on us, 2) how it is interpreted, and 3) how it is used. In this course, students will engage with experts in the fields of law, ethics, epistemology, technology, and public policy to enable them to assess data issues critically, informedly, and ethically.

Topics:
Privacy rights (moral and legal), consent (to terms of use and other policies), algorithms and the epistemic standards for knowledge gained algorithmically, public policy, automation in public policy decisions, systemic oppression, and virtuous decision-making when choosing between convenience and security.

Types of readings/sources: The course will require critical engagement with philosophical articles and book chapters; technical explanations of algorithms, surveillance techniques, and other data systems; documentaries and art projects; and expert guest speakers from relevant fields.

Assignments: Rather than requiring more traditional philosophy papers, students develop practical writing and argumentative skills through four policy memo assignments. The memos are each a concise, focused three pages, tailored in every way to their audience, explaining a problem and defending a course of action. In addition, students will participate in and judge a policy debate.
Reading responses will be required as part of daily preparation for class.