# The dual sociality of big data practices: epistemological, ethical and political considerations

**Judith Simon** [1,2]

**Abstract.** Big Data, especially if assessed in its societal context, is a contested term and topic. Proponents emphasize its promises for economic prosperity, technological and societal advances, skeptics are alerting us to ethical and societal dangers of big data practices. In line with the symposium's focus on the social aspects of cognition and computing, I will investigate the dual sociality of data practices by focusing on a) big data related to human agents and b) the usage of these big data practices in political decision-making processes affecting societies and the lives of human agents therein. Given this framing, I will argue that any critical assessment of such big data practices requires a combination of epistemological, ethical and political considerations. More precisely, understanding the epistemology of big data is essential for any ethical and political assessment and intervention. On the one hand, numerous ethical problems, for instance those related to anonymity and privacy, can only be targeted if their epistemological premises, such as the possibilities of re-identification, are properly understood. On the hand other, using big data for political decision-making requires an understanding of the epistemic quality of big data analyses, of their premises, potential biases and limits, in order to prevent an unwarranted "trust in numbers" (Porter 1995), just as much as it requires an understanding of the potential ethical and political consequences that come with using big data for governance. Finally, these relationships between epistemology, ethics and politics need to be figured out for any effective governance of big data itself.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## REFERENCES

[1] T. Porter, Trust in Numbers. The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life, Princeton University Press, Princeton, US, (1995).

[1] Technologies in Practice Group, IT University Copenhagen, Rued Langgaards Vej 7, 2300 Copenhagen DK. Email: jusi@itu.dk.

[2] Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, Universitaetsstr. 7, 1010 Vienna AT. Email: judith.simon@univie.ac.at.