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Jim Logan

‘Taming Titans’

It’s no secret that the companies of Big Tech — Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft — dominate their industries. Indeed, they’re frequently called competition-killing monopolies that should be broken up and closely regulated.

Now, UC Santa Barbara’s Arthur N. Rupe Great Debate Series will tackle the subject with “Taming Titans: How Should We Regulate Big Tech?” Tuesday, May 18, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. via Zoom.

The event will feature three different scholars.

Sonia Katyal holds the Distinguished Haas Chair at UC Berkeley School of Law and is co-director of the Berkeley Center for Law & Technology. She has published widely on the intersection of technology, intellectual property and civil rights (including antidiscrimination, privacy and freedom of speech).

Kate Klonick is assistant professor of law at St. John’s University School of Law and affiliate fellow at the Information Society Project at Yale Law School. She has published on Facebook’s new Oversight Board, the internet’s effect on freedom of expression and private platform governance, and issues related to online shaming, artificial intelligence, content moderation, algorithms, privacy and intellectual property.

Randal C. Picker is the James Parker Hall Distinguished Service Professor of Law at the University of Chicago Law School. He is co-author of “Game Theory and the Law” and “Security Interests in Personal Property: Cases, Problems and Materials.”

The debate will be moderated by Michael J. Burstein, vice dean and professor of law at Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University in New York City.

“I am thrilled and honored to moderate this year’s Rupe Debate on regulating big tech,” Burstein said. “These companies have become essential parts of modern life and how to regulate them is one of the key policy questions of our time. This debate is an opportunity to answer that question from wide and diverse perspectives.”

“The stakes of this topic are high, as we saw with Trump’s indefinite ban from Facebook for two incendiary posts,” said Susan Derwin, director of UCSB’s Interdisciplinary Humanities Center (IHC), which is co-presenting the debate with the campus’s College of Letters and Science. “The ‘big five’ tech companies are deeply intertwined in our society and the lives of its members. And the industry has not developed as other industries have, such as the aeronautics industry or radio and television.”

As Derwin notes, technology companies have been regulating themselves while amassing tremendous amounts of personal data, which raises questions about privacy and user protections.

“We hope the debate will advance our understanding of the impact of big tech on our private lives and on public discourse,” she said. “Our goal is to help our audience critically grasp why it is important to regulate this industry and to be well-informed about the key topics that will be discussed in the media and in public discourse in the coming months and years, as lawmakers wrestle with this important issue.”

The Rupe Great Debate Series explores contemporary societal issues of national and international significance through the presentation of eminent figures who hold divergent viewpoints.

The debate is structured as a roundtable discussion in which the moderator establishes a framework for the topic, poses questions to the panelists and facilitates discussion among them.

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