

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR
WEDS, 22 OCTOBER at 12:30pm, ARTS 628

UBUNTU IN AI ETHICS:

FROM CULTURAL REPRESENTATION TO POLITICAL RESISTANCE



Dr Anye-Nkwenti Nyamnjoh is a Senior Research Officer at the EthicsLab, University of Cape Town. His current work explores how the African humanities can inform the ethical questions posed by new and emerging technologies, with a particular focus on critical and conceptual contributions to debates on ethics. He has an academic background in political philosophy and African studies.

Abstract: The global prominence of artificial intelligence (AI) has intensified debates on ethics, often reducing Africa's contributions to a singular invocation of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, a relational philosophy emphasizing interdependence and communal harmony, has been positioned as a corrective to the perceived individualism of Western ethical frameworks. While this rhetorical deployment may serve to offer African epistemic legitimacy in AI ethics, it risks tokenism if uncritically applied. In this talk, I interrogate how Ubuntu is mobilized in AI ethics and explore its potential to go beyond cultural representation toward shaping substantive ethical and political engagements with AI systems. Rather than merely inserting Ubuntu into AI ethics, I advocate for leveraging Ubuntu to shift power, interrogate systemic inequities and advance an African-centered relational ethics that critically engages with AI's worldmaking power.