Department of Philosophy
Colloquium Series

Ubuntu in Elephant Communities

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Thursday, December 1
4-6 p.m.

Watson Hall Room 517

African (Bantu) philosophy conceptualizes morality through ubuntu, which is often characterized by the slogan, "I am because we are," emphasizing the role of community in producing moral agents. This moral community is characterized by care and cooperation, and respect for elders and ancestral knowledge. In turn, moral agency on this account does not derive from rational autonomy as an individual capacity, but from one's contributions to and thus embeddedness in a moral community. We argue that the ubuntu conception of moral community applies to some nonhuman animal communities. African elephant communities are highly cooperative and structured around experienced matriarchs; elephants alloparent, protect their communities, mourn their dead, cherish their elders and pass on cultural knowledge between generations. Since elephant communities possess the defining features of a moral community according to ubuntu, we ought to recognize them as such. This should inform debates around 'population management,' trophy hunting, and human-elephant conflict.

Everyone Welcome!
For accessibility requirements, please contact philosophy@queensu.ca

Please note that all in-person attendees must conform to the Queen's vaccine policy:
https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/administration-and-operations/covid-19-vaccination-requirements