

MA Thesis Prize 2019-20
Department of Philosophy

Jointly winner

Hannah van den Bosch

‘Grieving in a Time of Climate Change: An eco-feminist reflection on the contemporary responses towards eco-grief from a perspective of injustice’

Abstract for thesis:

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a critique of the current responses to a recent phenomenon people are calling ‘eco-grief’. Ecological grief, or eco-grief is “the grief, pain, sadness or suffering that people identify as experiencing when they lose a beloved ecosystem, species or place (Is Climate, 2019). More people nowadays seem to express the emotion in the face of accelerating climate change; examples can be found in climate science communities, indigenous cultures and among younger generations. These experiences of eco-grief are however often dismissed as a personal mental health issue and are criticised for being de-motivating. In this thesis, I argue that rejecting expressions of eco-grief is not only unwarranted, but also unjust, because this constitutes both an affective and epistemic injustice. In so doing, this thesis points to the wider value that can be gained from reflecting on the barriers to its expression.

Judges motivation:

One-way climate change impacts people’s mental health is through intense feelings of grief, as people suffer climate-related losses to valued species, ecosystems and landscapes. Despite growing philosophical and scientific research on climate change, ecological grief remains a neglected phenomenon. “Grieving nature in a time of climate change” is an original and practically important attempt to start filling this gap. Combining ideas from feminism, ecology and moral philosophy, this thesis argues that grief is a legitimate and valuable response to ecological loss that cannot be chalked off simply as a personal mental health issue. The thesis puts into focus some of the social and individual barriers that dissuade people from expressing their ecological grief. And it highlights some outstanding questions of philosophical and scientific significance for further research. In doing so, “Grieving nature in a time of climate change” addresses an important problem in an accessible and original way, highlighting fruitful research directions for understanding ecological grief and managing its consequences.