

About Plant Blindness and Plant Ethics

Ulrich Melle¹, Jan Braeckman², Suzy Huysmans³, Jan Rammeloo⁴, Steven Dessein⁴, Patricia Mergen⁴, Koen Es⁴

¹ University of Leuven, Leuven

²Private

³Private

⁴Meise Botanic Garden, Meise

Plants (mosses, algae, fungi and green plants) tend to be ignored and literally ‘overlooked’ by most people who seem to be naturally more connected emotionally to animals. The term “*Plant blindness*” was introduced in 1998 by Wandersee and Schussler (Allen, 2003) and is defined as “the inability to notice plants in one’s environment”. Over the years scientists became concerned as by ignoring them, it impacts interest of the public and ultimately by policy makers for plants and puts the available funding for research at risk. In this regards the Meise Botanic Garden and a group of experts from different backgrounds sit together regularly to analyze and understand the phenomenon aiming at raising Plant Awareness among the general public, the scientific community and the decision makers.

The group defined an action plan composed of three major components : education, learning paths and plant ethics. The latter can be perceived as a way of behaving, where all living beings, thus including plants could be treated with respect. The concept has been pushed further in several European countries leading to an official morality code setting a list of rules and norms for appropriate behavior towards plants (Marder, 2016). Relevant examples are the publication by the Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology (ECNH) and the City of Geneva in April 2008 on “The dignity of living beings with regards to plants”. A group of experts composed of stakeholders from Switzerland, Germany and Austria have listed a set of principles leading to a position paper about the Rights of Plants.

Within this part of the workshop, after a short introductory talk, the participants will in group be confronted with sometimes surprising, sometimes controversial statements and questions around the concepts of Plant Blindness and Plant Ethics. The outcomes of these reflections will be summarized and presented at the end of the workshop. By participating in this workshop, you agree that the outcomes will be used by the Meise Botanic Garden as contribution to their Plant Blindness Action Plan.

We decline any responsibility in case of side effects, if after participating to this workshop, your perceptions while taking your Sunday walk or perform activities such as gardening will be permanently altered. As of today, there is no known cure, once you have been infected by the plant loving virus.

William Allen (2003) Plant Blindness *BioScience*, Volume 53, Issue 10, Pages 926, [https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568\(2003\)053\[0926:PB\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2003)053[0926:PB]2.0.CO;2)

Michel Marder (2016) Plant Morality vs. Plant Ethics in the Philosopher’s Plant Los Angeles Review of books <http://philosoplant.lareviewofbooks.org/?p=177> (consulted 16/05/2018)

Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology ECNH (2018) The dignity of living beings with regards to plants. Bern , 21 pages