

# Ecosystem changes at Chernobyl

## A case study in causal complexity

Deborah Oughton  
Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences, UMB

It is 25 years since the Chernobyl accident and, while there is a general consensus that the ecosystem around the nuclear power plant has changed, there is intense scientific debate about the severity, level and cause of these effects, including whether or not the observed changes equate to “harm”. Scientific research has focused on studying effects at the genetic, individual, population and ecosystem level, for a range of different species, which offers a rich source of material for a philosophical analysis of causation, including from a gene ecology perspective. The absence of humans from the site adds an additional source of complexity. The proposed paper will use the case as an example of the challenges in addressing causation within biology, as an example of the interface between science, philosophy and ethics.