



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Introduction to Case Studies in This Course

Description

This page introduces how case studies are used in the course "[Genomics, Ethics, and Society](#)."

Body

All of the units in this course contain a case study (which may also be linked to the online class discussion for the unit, though it isn't in every case). As part of the assessment for this class, everyone is required to write up two case studies for assessment from the six cases in the main content units for the course, and then to complete the final case study (which constitutes Unit 8). For undergraduates, the case studies during the course are each worth 20% of the final grade, and should be a maximum of 4 pages long (excluding references); the final case study is worth 30%. For graduate students, each case study during the course is worth 15% of the final grade, and should be a maximum of 5 pages long; the final case (which for graduate students involves some independent research) is worth 20%. (Graduate students also have to write a research paper).

In this introductory unit, we aim to help you to think about how to answer a case study. We provide some tools for helping you to do this. We include a model case study that's similar in form and structure to the kinds of cases provided here and what we've called the Ethics Assessment Process - a set of questions that, while not all relevant to every case, should help in focusing your thoughts about the cases you are addressing.

In many instances, these cases seem to raise moral dilemmas, where it at least appears that someone could be in a situation where they both ought to do A and ought to do B, but cannot do both. Some philosophers argue that there can't be genuine moral dilemmas since all apparent value conflicts are ultimately resolvable – a view particularly associated with value monism (as discussed in the background material to this case). On this view, since apparently conflicting values can all be translated into a 'master value' (such as "human wellbeing") then we should be able to resolve all apparent dilemmas in terms of this master value. Other philosophers, however, argue that because we accept a plurality of incommensurable values, we may not be able to resolve all value conflicts. We may, after reflection, have to accept that we are in a situation in which whatever we do, a wrong of some kind will occur. This may mean that even when we do what we think is right, we are left with what's called an "ethical residue" – feelings of regret, guilt or shame – for instance, shame at having to do something that runs against our deepest conception of the kind of person we aspire to be, or guilt where we find ourselves unable to avoid wronging some individual or groups of individuals, or causing some environmental harm.

For further discussion of moral dilemmas see:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-dilemmas/#4>

[Continue to Practice Case Study: Assisted Migration of Rust-Resistant Whitebark Pine](#)

Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Instructor Materials

Topics

Case Study Method

Discipline(s)

Genetics and Genomics

Life and Environmental Sciences