

Philosophy 5520, Philosophy 6520, Honors 5520  
Spring 2021

Instructor: Margaret Battin  
Distinguished Professor  
Department of Philosophy  
battin@utah.edu

TA: Ben Battistone  
Honors College

### **ADVANCED BIOETHICS: ETHICAL ISSUES IN DEATH & DYING**

Death and dying? These may seem like grim subjects, but they pose challenging philosophical issues—from metaphysical questions like those posed by the ancient Greeks—for instance, “why is death bad?”— to practical dilemmas in contemporary medicine. What about withholding or withdrawing care from a patient in the end-stages of life? Is a brain-dead person dead—and what is it to be dead, anyway? Does a person sedated to unconsciousness have any experience at all? Is suicide always wrong, or understandable in some circumstances? (this has been an issue from Plato forward). Should we legalize physician-assisted dying, and if so, should we follow the model of Oregon and nine other US jurisdictions, or the model of the Netherlands and other Benelux countries, or the model of Canada—or devise something new? What about end-of-life illnesses with long downhill courses, like heart failure and cancer, or dementias like Alzheimer’s? What is *suffering* in end-of-life situations—does only physical suffering count, or mental suffering, or what is called existential suffering? And what about triage protocols, prioritizing some patients over others, that may lead to death in COVID-19?

This course will use case problems, readings from the bioethics and medical literatures, and a wide variety of (zoom)-visiting speakers from around the world to explore these compelling issues. It will provide basic coverage of relevant ethical theory. Assignments will include short papers, interactive discussion sessions concerning specific case puzzles, and a term project to be presented at the end of the semester.