



HEALTH ETHICS SEMINAR

2026-
2027
SERIES

Structurally Embedded Suffering: Externalism, Injustice, and the Ethics of MAiD for Mental Illness



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Thursday, 17 September 2026
12:00 - 13:00 MDT
ONLINE via Zoom application
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One of the most contentious aspects of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) in Canada is the question of whether it should be available to persons for whom mental illness is their sole underlying medical condition (MI-SUMC). The debate has largely centered on questions about decision-making capacity, vulnerability, suicidality, and whether clinicians can reliably determine psychiatric irremediability. Yet relatively little attention has been paid to a more fundamental question about the nature of mental disorder itself. In this talk, I consider how assumptions about the ontology of mental disorder bear on the ethics of MAiD MI-SUMC. In particular, I look at externalist approaches in the philosophy of psychiatry, according to which mental disorders are not wholly internal to the individual but are partly constituted by a person's relationship to their social, material, and cultural environment. Bringing these accounts into dialogue with theories of structural injustice, I develop the concept of *structurally embedded suffering*. I argue that the structural embeddedness of psychiatric suffering has implications both for how irremediability for mental disorder is assessed and what the state's responsibility is to remediate structural injustice in the context of mental health care.

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