

## Tekst 6

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# Dutch decision on euthanasia

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## Editorial

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- 1 The Netherlands has become the first country to legalise active euthanasia. The decision by the Dutch upper house of parliament on April 10 goes much further than any previous legislation elsewhere.
- 2 Denmark had earlier authorised passive euthanasia (the withholding of treatment that can keep terminally ill patients alive). And in 1994 the American state of Oregon legalised medically assisted suicide.
- 3 France's National Ethical Committee came out against the decriminalisation of euthanasia a year ago, but made an exception, in extreme cases, for passive euthanasia. Depending on the circumstances, French law continues to regard euthanasia as either manslaughter, murder, or failure to assist a person in danger. At first sight, the issue of active euthanasia would not seem to be on the agenda.
- 4 However, the taboo that has been broken by a European neighbour forces us to ask ourselves certain questions. Deep down, we have all at some time thought about euthanasia, either after having had to face the ordeal of a dying loved one, or imagining ourselves in such a situation.
- 5 That probably explains why public opinion is broadly in favour of euthanasia, or at least certain forms of it. A poll carried out in September 1998 for the daily *Le Figaro* and the France 3 television channel couched the question as follows: if you were suffering from an incurable disease or experiencing extreme suffering, would you wish to be helped to die? Of the interviewees, 79% said yes, and only 12% gave a categorical no. A smaller but still substantial majority (61%) believed that the law should allow doctors to help terminally ill patients to die if they ask them to. Only 35% disagreed.
- 6 Looked at from a personal angle, the freedom to die when one feels one has had enough, and "the right to a dignified death", to use the terminology of those who advocate decriminalisation, are defensible and even desirable.
- 7 But what if they are looked at from the point of view of human society as a whole? To accept or legalise the curtailment of lives because they have no future or are painful or unconscious is to admit, *a contrario*, that life is worth living only if it is beautiful, good and useful. That is precisely the message that our consumer society implicitly hammers home.
- 8 The Dutch decision was not the result of a new situation created by technical progress, as is the case in other bio-ethical issues such as in vitro fertilisation or genetic manipulation.
- 9 Euthanasia poses the same ethical problems as it ever did. The technical question is only a side issue: on the one hand, with modern hospital techniques, it is easier than it used to be to terminate a life, and on the other it is now possible to quell suffering by using palliative treatment.
- 10 That prompts the question: what is actually changing? A particular conception of humankind? That is something we should ponder long and hard.

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- 1p **20** ■ Which of the following statements is true, according to paragraphs 1-3?  
1 The Netherlands has set an excellent example by introducing a law authorising active euthanasia.  
2 France has so far disapproved of any attempt to legalise euthanasia.
- A** Only 1 is true.  
**B** Only 2 is true.  
**C** Both 1 and 2 are true.  
**D** Neither 1 nor 2 is true.
- 1p **21** ■ Which of the following could be inserted between “sight,” and “the issue” at the end of paragraph 3?  
**A** after all,  
**B** conversely,  
**C** for example,  
**D** moreover,  
**E** therefore,
- “That probably explains why...” (begin alinea 5)
- 1p **22** □ Zeg in je eigen woorden waarnaar “That” verwijst.
- 1p **23** □ Geef de kern van alinea 5 weer.
- 1p **24** ■ What does the writer argue in paragraphs 6 and 7?  
**A** Euthanasia is permissible only if the quality of someone’s life has deteriorated in every respect.  
**B** Euthanasia seems to be all about individual freedom, but actually devalues our notion of human life.  
**C** In the matter of euthanasia public interest should come before private considerations.  
**D** The choice of euthanasia should be up to the individual, who is the only one capable of judging the quality of his life.
- 1p **25** ■ Which of the following is in line with paragraphs 8 and 9?  
**A** Medical developments do not make euthanasia a clearer option.  
**B** Present-day technical developments have decreased the value of human life.  
**C** The change in public attitude to euthanasia reflects recent medical breakthroughs.  
**D** The legalisation of euthanasia in the Netherlands influences people’s attitudes towards other ethical questions as well.