



Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the euthanasia law in the Netherlands. Despite the fact that this practice is fully accepted by the majority of the Dutch people, the debate continues. It is actually, not more about the convenience of a law that regulates euthanasia, but about its extension: is this law also meant for people who feel tired of life and consider that their life is already “over”? And what to do with psychiatric patients and people with dementia? Can it also be administered to children?

Euthanasia is one of the most controversial ethical dilemmas in Medicine, which divides defenders and opponents on the basis of two conflicting views on life and death: On the one hand, a liberal vision that defends the autonomy and self-determination of each person. On the other, a vision - mostly religious - that affirms that human beings have no right to decide on their own life and death. This last view dominates in most countries outside the Netherlands. But this division is not rigorous. According to the statistics, 9 out of 10 Dutch people accept euthanasia in certain cases, including Christians who understand euthanasia in extreme cases as an expression of the biblical virtue of charity and compassion for those who suffer.

Before the existence of a law, euthanasia was already performed in the Netherlands in a clandestine way. Although most of the physicians who performed it were prosecuted, they were exempted from punishment under certain conditions. The first case, which gave rise to the beginning of the debates, took place in 1973 against the doctor Truus Postman who administered a fatal dose of morphine to her sick mother, after she had repeatedly requested it. The court decisions on the many cases that took place in the following years served as the basis for the current euthanasia law.

The year 1991 provided the appropriate political environment to implement the law, when the first government without a Christian political party was formed for the first time in many years. With the aim of achieving more transparency in the practice of euthanasia, the Minister of Health, Els Borst, belonging to the Liberal Party D66 presented the first bill that was accepted with 104 votes in favour and 40 against.

The Dutch law considers euthanasia a crime under article 293 of the Criminal Law Code with a penalty of 12 years in prison. This sanction is not attributable if the doctor can demonstrate that he has met the so-called prudence requirements: 1) existence of a stable and well-considered desire on the part of the patient; 2) presence of unbearable suffering, without hope of improvement; 3) having informed the patient of his situation and prognosis; 4) absence of other options to alleviate the suffering of the patient; 5) consult another independent physician; 6) accompany the patient until the moment of death.

However, Dutch law does not contemplate as euthanasia the so-called passive euthanasia, that is, the interruption of a proportional treatment that is necessary for the patient's life support. Although in these cases it is the doctor who also makes the final decision, the ease with which it can be carried out means that most cases of euthanasia registered as *natural death* are carried out in this way. .

Although euthanasia is mostly interpreted as a person's right to die, this is not the case in the Dutch law: it is the doctor who has the right - and the legal obligation - to decide whether the legal requirements are met. It is a conflict between autonomies in which the vision of what constitutes a dignified life plays a central role