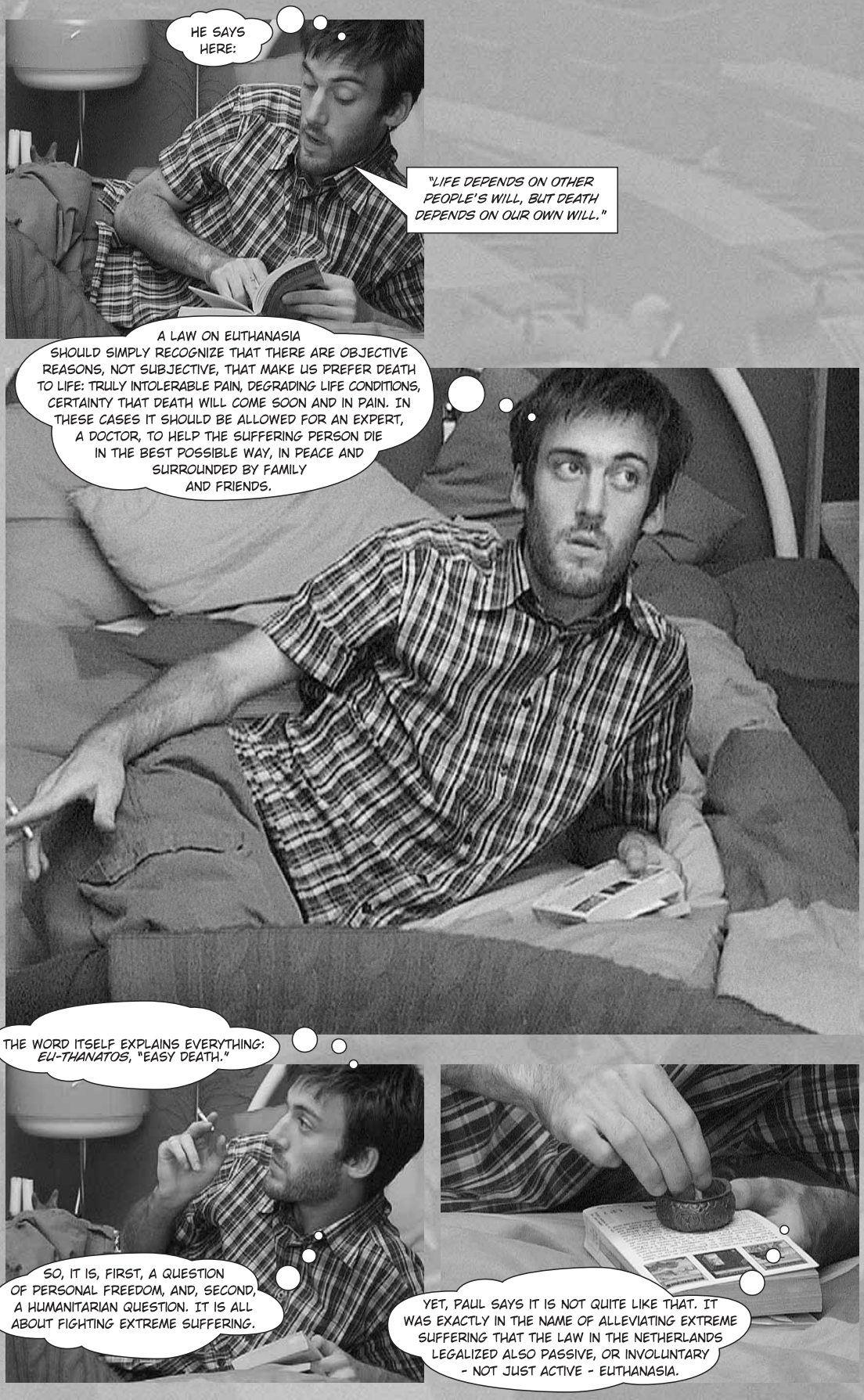

I'VE JUST MET CHARLES. HE TELLS ME ABOUT A FRIEND OF HIS, AN OLD MAN WITH A TUMOUR. THIS MAN IS FULL OF METASTASES AND SUFFERS INCREDIBLY. THE DOCTORS HAVE GIVEN HIM THREE MORE MONTHS. HE IS DESPERATE AND WOULD LIKE TO PUT AN END TO HIS SUFFERING, HE EVEN SEEKS HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS. CHARLES WOULD LIKE TO DO SOMETHING. BUT WE HAVE NO LAW ON EUTHANASIA. HELPING A TERMINAL PATIENT WITH NO HOPE OF RECOVERY TO DIE IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. YOU'D BE FACING A MURDER CHARGE.
Euthanasia


THE ONLY PLACES WHERE EUTHANASIA IS LEGAL ARE THE NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM AND OREGON STATE IN THE U.S., I THINK.
INSTINCTIVELY, I WOULD SAY THAT CHOOSING THE MOMENT OF ONE'S DEATH IS A QUESTION OF FREEDOM, A PERSONAL RIGHT OF EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL.
I'VE READ SOMEWHERE, THOUGH I DON'T REMEMBER WHETHER IT WAS IN BENJAMIN OR ELSEWHERE, THAT THE ULTIMATE VALUE IS NOT EXISTENCE IN ITSELF BUT RATHER A PROPER EXISTENCE, WORTHY OF A MAN.
IF SOMEONE FINDS HIS LIFE NO LONGER BEARABLE WHY SHOULDN'T HE HAVE THE RIGHT TO END IT?
VAN GOGH
Gennaio

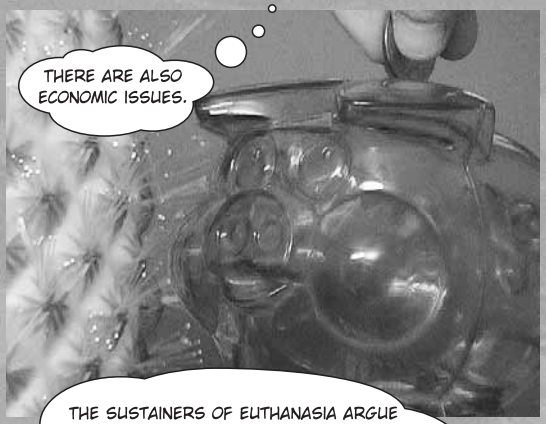

WHY ARE THERE SO FEW COUNTRIES WITH LEGALIZED EUTHANASIA? WHY SUCH STRONG RESISTANCE TO ALLOWING A DOCTOR TO HELP A PERSON DIE?
MAYBE FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS.
NO, I DON'T THINK SO.
BUT MANY OBJECTIONS TO EUTHANASIA DO NOT HAVE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS.
SURE, IF ONE BELIEVES LIFE IS GOD'S GIFT, ONE IS LIKELY TO FEEL THAT ONLY GOD CAN TAKE THAT GIFT AWAY.
NOW, I'VE ASKED MY ENGLISH FRIEND, PAUL, WHO IS OPPOSED TO EUTHANASIA THOUGH NOT A RELIGIOUS MAN, TO THROW SOME LIGHT ON THE ISSUE.
HE CLAIMS THAT BEING OPPOSED TO EUTHANASIA DOESN'T MEAN BEING OPPOSED TO SUICIDE. AND, IN FACT, YOU WILL HARDLY FIND A COUNTRY WHERE SUICIDE IS ILLEGAL, OR RATHER, THE ATTEMPT OF SUICIDE. IF YOU WANT TO KILL YOURSELF AND SUCCEED IN DOING SO, THE LAW DOES NOT STOP YOU. IF ANOTHER PERSON SAVES YOU AND YOUR ATTEMPT FAILS, YOU WILL NOT BE PROSECUTED.

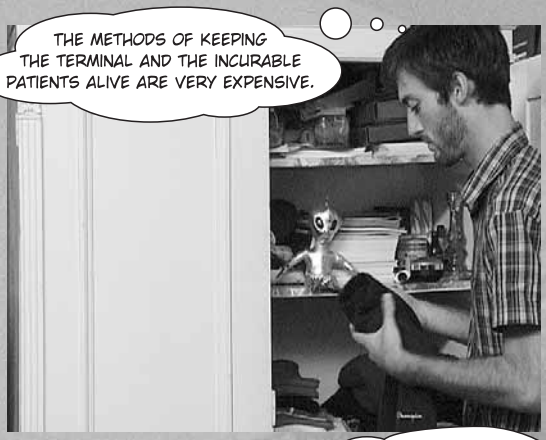

BUT EUTHANASIA MEANS THAT SOMEONE, USUALLY A DOCTOR, HELPS ANOTHER PERSON DIE: WITH A LETHAL INJECTION, WITH POISON, OR SIMPLY, BY DISCONNECTING THE MACHINE THAT KEEPS A TERMINAL PATIENT ALIVE.
IT IS JUST WHAT THE AMERICAN DOCTOR BY THE NAME OF JACK KEVORKIAN, ALSO CALLED "DOCTOR DEATH", DID: HE HELPED MORE THAN 130 PERSONS DIE AND WAS FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER IN THE END.
HERE'S WHAT MY FRIEND SAYS:
ONE MUST BE CONTRARY TO EUTHANASIA BECAUSE NO GROUP OF PEOPLE, NOT EVEN QUALIFIED DOCTORS, SHOULD BE GIVEN THE RIGHT TO DECIDE OVER THE LIFE OR DEATH OF OTHER PEOPLE. IT IS AN ETHICAL AND A LEGAL QUESTION, NOT A RELIGIOUS ONE.
LET ME JUST FIND MONTAIGNE'S ESSAYS. HERE, I'VE EVEN PLACED A BOOKMARK.
MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE STOOD IN FAVOUR OF SUICIDE JUST LIKE THE STOICS IN ANCIENT GREECE.


HE SAYS HERE:
"LIFE DEPENDS ON OTHER PEOPLE'S WILL, BUT DEATH DEPENDS ON OUR OWN WILL."
A LAW ON EUTHANASIA SHOULD SIMPLY RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE OBJECTIVE REASONS, NOT SUBJECTIVE, THAT MAKE US PREFER DEATH TO LIFE: TRULY INTOLERABLE PAIN, DEGRADING LIFE CONDITIONS, CERTAINTY THAT DEATH WILL COME SOON AND IN PAIN. IN THESE CASES IT SHOULD BE ALLOWED FOR AN EXPERT, A DOCTOR, TO HELP THE SUFFERING PERSON DIE IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY, IN PEACE AND SURROUNDED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS.
THE WORD ITSELF EXPLAINS EVERYTHING: EU-THANATOS, "EASY DEATH."
SO, IT IS, FIRST, A QUESTION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM, AND, SECOND, A HUMANITARIAN QUESTION. IT IS ALL ABOUT FIGHTING EXTREME SUFFERING.
YET, PAUL SAYS IT IS NOT QUITE LIKE THAT. IT WAS EXACTLY IN THE NAME OF ALLEVIATING EXTREME SUFFERING THAT THE LAW IN THE NETHERLANDS LEGALIZED ALSO PASSIVE, OR INVOLUNTARY - NOT JUST ACTIVE - EUTHANASIA.


THIS MEANS THAT A DOCTOR, ACTING ON HIS OWN RESPONSIBILITY, CAN ALSO PUT TO DEATH INCURABLE PATIENTS WHO HAVE NOT ASKED FOR EUTHANASIA:
IT DOESN'T JUST APPLY TO PATIENTS IN A PERMANENT COMA BUT ALSO TO MENTALLY ILL OR DISABLED PERSONS. IN SOME CASES, THE PATIENT'S VERY OLD AGE IS ENOUGH TO MAKE THE DOCTOR INTERVENE.
THE DATA I GOT FROM PAUL IS IMPRESSIVE:
APPROXIMATELY ONE HALF OF EUTHANASIA CASES IN THE NETHERLANDS ARE INVOLUNTARY OR PASSIVE ONES. A RESEARCH FROM 1990 REVEALED THAT AS MUCH AS 0.8% OF ALL DEATHS IN THE NETHERLANDS ARE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF EUTHANASIA, PERFORMED WITHOUT THE PATIENT'S REQUEST.
AFTER ALL, EVEN THE QUESTION OF A TRANQUIL AND DIGNIFIED DEATH IS NOT SUCH A CLEAR MATTER.


I'VE READ ABOUT A CASE IN PORTLAND, OREGON, THAT HAPPENED IN DECEMBER 1999. THE PATIENT TOOK THE LETHAL MEDICINE AND FELT SICK.
THERE WAS NO DOCTOR WITH THE PATIENT, SO THE WIFE TOOK HIM TO A HOSPITAL.
JUST IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS WHEN HE ALREADY SEEMED DEAD, THE PATIENT WAS RESUSCITATED AND DIED SOME TIME AFTERWARDS.
ANYWAY, THE ASSISTED SUICIDE DIDN'T REALLY WORK IN THAT CASE.
CLANG-CLANG-CLANG


THERE ARE ALSO ECONOMIC ISSUES.


THE METHODS OF KEEPING THE TERMINAL AND THE INCURABLE PATIENTS ALIVE ARE VERY EXPENSIVE.


THE SUSTAINERS OF EUTHANASIA ARGUE THAT THE MONEY COULD BE WELL SPENT ON MEDICAL CURES, LIKE TREATING MALFORMATIONS IN FETUSES OR PROVIDING BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS FOR NON-TERMINAL PATIENTS.


IT SEEMS TO BE A RATIONAL CHOICE OF HELPING THOSE WHO CAN STILL BENEFIT FROM IT.

Vote!

Euthanasia?

Yes

No

% Yes % No