

THESIS

**AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ASSISTED SUICIDE THROUGH THE
LENS OF PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND SOCIETAL VALUES IN JOJO
MOYES' *ME BEFORE YOU***

Submitted to English Letters Study Program of Universitas Ma Chung in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Undergraduate Degree of English Letters



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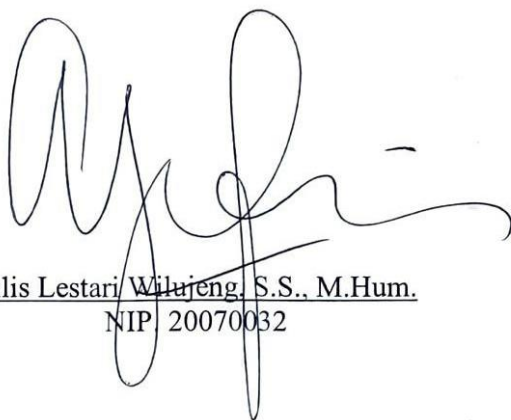
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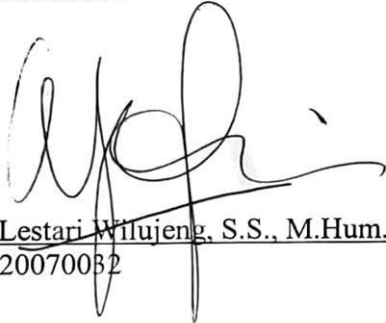
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Dengan ini saya menyatakan bahwa Laporan Skripsi dengan judul **An Ethical Perspective on Assisted Suicide Through the Lens of Personal Autonomy and Societal Values in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*** ini beserta seluruh isinya adalah benar-benar karya saya sendiri, dan saya tidak melakukan penjiplakan atau pengutipan dengan cara-cara yang tidak sesuai dengan etika keilmuan yang berlaku dalam masyarakat keilmuan. Atas pernyataan ini, saya siap menanggung resiko / sanksi yang dijatuhkan kepada saya apabila kemudian ditemukan adanya pelanggaran terhadap etika keilmuan dalam karya saya ini, atau adaklaim dari pihak lain terhadap keaslian karya saya ini.

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ABSTRACT

An Ethical Perspective on Assisted Suicide Through the Lens of Personal Autonomy
and Societal Values in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*
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This study explores the ethics of assisted suicide from the perspective of personal autonomy and societal values in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*. The objectives of the study are: (1) to analyze the ethical arguments regarding assisted suicide through Will Traynor's personal autonomy and societal values upheld by Louisa Clark, Will Traynor's family, and other characters; and (2) to examine how the ethical perspectives of the characters reflect the ethical issues of dignity, personal freedom, and the value of life, including the influence of relationships, emotional conflicts, and social expectations on ethical decision-making. This research is conducted qualitatively, involving textual analysis to explore the ethical dimensions presented in *Me Before You*. The findings reveal the ethical tension between Will's assertion of personal autonomy to preserve dignity and the opposing societal values emphasizing the sanctity of life. The characters' diverse perspectives show the complexity of ethical decision-making.

Keywords: *ethical dilemma, personal autonomy, societal values, assisted suicide, ethical literary criticism*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The ethical debate about assisted suicide has remained a sensitive topic and complex issues across cultures and societies. Briggs et al. (2022) stated that the legalization of assisted dying, including euthanasia in which a doctor administers a lethal dose of medication to a patient, and physician-assisted suicide, or PAS, where a fatal drug was given to the patient and they will take those drugs themselves, is increasing across the world. The movement for the legalization of assisted suicide is driven by people who greatly suffer in the period before they die (Golden et al., 2010).

Some people support the right of individuals to make autonomous decisions for their lives and deaths, while others might oppose it because of religious, cultural, and moral beliefs that prioritize the sanctity of life. Even though some people accept the concept of assisted suicide, Lee et al. (1996) stated that many professional organizations remain opposed to it, where a survey revealed that practicing physicians are divided on this issue. People who are against assisted suicide believe that human

life is more valuable and needs to be protected even if the one who lives the life no longer wishes it (DuVal, 1995). Thus, discussions on human rights and personal autonomy have become a controversial topic over the past few years, and literature has served as a medium to explore the societal perspective on critical issues.

Jojo Moyes, the author of *Me Before You*, offers a narrative that covers the themes of love, sacrifice, and ethical dilemmas surrounding assisted suicide. The novel was published in 2012, in which it tells about a quadriplegic man named Will Traynor, a once-active man left paralyzed after an accident, and Louisa Clark, a quirky yet compassionate woman who works as his caregiver. As the two of them deepen their bond, Louisa discovers Will's plan to seek assisted suicide. The plan sparks a moral conflict between Will's desire for autonomy and the societal values that oppose the decision. The story goes along with the tension between personal autonomy and societal values in the context of assisted suicide.

This ethical dilemma of assisted suicide also covers the concepts of personal autonomy and societal values. Personal autonomy refers to a person's right to make decisions of their own life, including choices about death. According to Mendz and Kissane (2020), supporting assisted suicide is a form of respect for the autonomy of individuals, as they said that respect for people demands respect for their autonomous choices as long as the result does not harm others. On the other hand, societal values are the shared beliefs, principles, and collective norms that influence how such decisions are perceived and judged.

In this research, I want to focus on analyzing the ethical perspectives that are presented in *Me Before You* through the contrasting point of view of its characters. It will cover Will Traynor's decision of personal autonomy in choosing to end his life that stands in opposition to the social expectations embodied by characters like Louisa and Will's family. This ethical conflict mirrors real-world debates, making the novel a valuable subject for literary analysis, and that's one of the reasons why I want to get deeper into these complex social issues.

1.2 Problem Statements

This research will focus on these two questions:

1. How is the ethical dilemma between personal autonomy and societal values portrayed in the act of assisted suicide?
2. How do the ethical perspectives and choices of the main characters reflect the concepts of dignity, personal freedom, and value of life?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study address the ethical issue surrounding assisted suicide as portrayed in the novel *Me Before You* that relates to the identified problem statements. The first objective aims to analyze the ethical arguments about assisted suicide through the contrasting perspectives of the characters. It responds to the first problem statement by identifying the moral reasoning behind the different points of view in the story. The second objective aims to explore how the ethical perspectives of the characters reflect the ethical issue about dignity, choice, and the value of life. This aligns with the second problem statement, allowing the understanding of how the characters in the novel personify and negotiate the ethical themes related to assisted suicide. Together, the objectives provide a framework to analyze the moral tensions and ethical arguments that the novel *Me Before You* presents.

1. To analyze the ethical arguments regarding assisted suicide as presented in *Me Before You* through Will's personal autonomy and the societal values upheld by Louisa, Will's family, and other characters, by identifying key moral reasoning and applying relevant ethical theories.

2. To examine how the ethical perspectives of the characters in *Me Before You* reflect the ethical issue about dignity, personal freedom, and the value of life, including the influence of relationships, emotional conflicts, and social expectations on ethical decision-making.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

For the scope of my research, I focused on analyzing the ethical perspectives of each character regarding assisted suicide. I explored the arguments and perspectives of the characters such as Will, Louisa, Will's family, and others. In this analysis, I emphasized the themes of personal autonomy, which was represented by Will's choice of his right to decide over his own life and societal values, which were reflected by the concerns, emotions, and moral arguments of people that oppose his decision. Also, the limitation of this study was that I only analyzed the novel and did not include an analysis of the film adaptation as well as the absence of triangulation, which made the analysis subjective and written based on my personal interpretation.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research analysis of *Me Before You* has personal significance in that it enables me, as the writer, to deepen the understanding of ethical dilemmas and human rights issues. By analyzing literary work through the perspectives of each character, I gain a different point of view between personal freedom and social expectations. I also encourage readers to think thoughtfully of both sides of the ethical debate in the story about assisted suicide and to understand from both

perspectives. This study will help readers understand the moral reasoning behind Will's desire and decision for autonomy and the opposing perspectives rooted in love, family obligations, and societal norms.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

There are some key terms definitions to understand the content of this research.

1. Ethical Dilemma

An ethical dilemma is a situation in which someone has to choose or determine the best ethical alternative for the principal (Figar & Đorđević, 2016).

2. Personal Autonomy

Personal autonomy is a concept recognized in theories that presupposes the capacity for intentional action based on one's own rational deliberations, as well as freedom from external control (Sjöstrand et al., 2011).

3. Societal Values

Societal values refer to the collective beliefs, norms, and moral principles that a society upholds.

4. Assisted Suicide

Assisted suicide refers to a situation where a person provides the necessary means to another person, who then voluntarily and consensually uses lethal dose to end their own life. In the act assisted suicide, it is the person who intends to die that makes the decision to take the final action (DuVal, 1995).

5. Ethical Literary Criticism

Ethical literary criticism is defined as a critical approach for reading, analyzing, and interpreting the ethical aspect and function of literary works from the perspective of ethics (Nie, 2021).



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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

2.1 Literary Theory

In this study, I focus on Will's personal autonomy and Louisa as well as Will's family, which portrayed the societal values regarding assisted suicide from an ethical perspective. Therefore, I used several theories to support the findings and to answer the problem statements. The theories are intrinsic elements of a novel and character and characterization theory.

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements of a Novel

Generally, literary work is divided into two main types, which are fiction and non-fiction. Fiction is made-up narrative that is created from the author's imagination, while non-fiction presents factual stories based on real people, information, or events. Types of fictional literary works include drama, poetry, and prose (Andari, 2019). Aminuddin (1987) stated that prose is a series of stories to express the author's imagination. As for fictional prose the examples include flash fiction, short stories, and novels. According to Simaibang (2017:122), the word "novel" come from the Italian word "novella," which meant "new". A novel is a new form of prose fiction that is usually long and complex, exploring human experience through a connected series of events. It can reflect the world's living realities through the author's description, imaginations, experiences, and dialogues (Novita, 2019).

The elements in the literature are divided into two categories, intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. Said and Hula (2022) stated intrinsic elements emphasize all things that are related to the story in the novel, while extrinsic elements are elements that are outside of the literary work. The intrinsic elements of a novel consist of 7 parts, namely:

1) Theme

The theme is the central idea of a story. It is the underlying message that the author wants to convey to the reader. To find the theme of the story, readers can focus on the story's plot, character development, symbols, as well as the overall message that the author seems to be communicating. According to this, I can say that the key themes in the novel *Me Before You* are about personal autonomy vs. social expectation and the value of life. However, Jojo Moyes, the author of the novel, does not explicitly take side and instead, the author presents both perspectives, allowing the reader to have their own opinions.

2) Character

The phrase "character" refers to any person or figure that the author creates to complete the whole story. Characters are important to drive the plot forward, act on, and to engage the reader's interest. In line with this, I observe the characters in the novel *Me Before You* are Will Traynor, Louisa Clark, Camilla Traynor, Steven Traynor, Georgina Traynor and Nathan. All the characters mentioned are the major characters in the novel, while the minor characters are Alicia Dewar as Will's ex-girlfriend and Louisa's mother, Josie Clark.

3) Setting

Setting refers to the time and place in which the story unfolds in which it provides contexts for the characters, plot and themes of the story. Based on this, the first main setting in the novel *Me Before You* is Stortford, a fictional English town by Jojo Moyes, where Louisa Clark and Will Traynor live. Second one, Will's family estate, the Granta House, where it's also the place where Louisa works as Will's caregiver. Third, it is Louisa's house. Next one, Mauritius, the island country in the Indian Ocean, where Will, Louisa, and also Nathan travel but happened to be their final bittersweet trip. The last main setting will be in Switzerland, the location of Will's final decision.

4) Plot

The plot is a sequence of interconnected events within the story of narrative literary work. It can show the reader what happens to the characters in the story as well as their reactions and the consequences of their actions. The exposition of the story begins with an introduction of a character named Louisa Clark, a young woman who takes a job as a caregiver of Will Traynor, a once wealthy and adventurous man who becomes quadriplegic after a motorcycle accident. The rising action comes with their first meeting where Will is cold and rude to Louisa but as time goes on, their bond deepens. However, Louisa soon discovers Will's plan to do assisted suicide at Dignitas in Switzerland and tried to change his mind by taking a trip with him to Mauritius. The climax is that on their trip, Lou confesses her love to Will and beg

him to stay alive with her. After all, Will remains firm in his decision while explaining that love cannot change his reality. The falling action is when Will travels to Switzerland to proceed with assisted suicide and dies on his own terms, leaving Louisa with a letter with financial support and encouragement to fully live her life beyond her small town. The story ends with the resolution of Lou trying her best to embrace Will's advice to experience a greater life.

5) Point of View

The point of view is the specific perspective from which the story is told, it can be from the character or a narrator, depending on what perspective the author of the novel chooses. I recognize that in the novel *Me Before You*, Jojo Moyes uses multiple points of view of the characters. Mainly the story is narrated from the first-person point of view, which is Louisa's perspective. However, some of the chapters shift to the other characters, including Camilla Traynor in chapter 8, Treena Clark in chapter 17, Nathan in chapter 22, and Steven Traynor in chapter 25.

6) Language Style

Language style refers to the writing style that the author uses to make the narration of the novel. It also can be the technique that the author uses for the sentence structure, word choice, and tone. I notice that Jojo Moyes uses a conversational language style. Since most of the chapters in the novel are from Louisa's perspective, the narration is casual, relatable, and also includes humor, sarcasm, and everyday

expressions. Additionally, since the story set is in England, there's also some British slang in the narration.

7) Message

The message refers to the idea or underlying theme that the author wants to convey. The author hopes that from the message the readers can reflect or take it as an insight. Readers can find the message by looking at the character actions and the plot development. I figure out from reading the whole story and observing the characters, especially Will and Louisa, that the message in the novel *Me Before You* is about embracing life fully and accepting that some decisions are beyond our control.

2.1.2 Character and Characterization

According to Mustafa and Jumino (2021), character and characterization are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated because it continuously influences each other. In literary work, a character refers to any person or figure who creates an appearance to complete the story, the ones who show moral, intellectual, and emotional features in their speech as well as behavior. Characters are divided into two types of categories, major characters and minor characters. Major characters are the main players in the story, driving the story with their actions which directly impact the narrative's direction. Furthermore, major characters are typically dynamic in which they experience significant change and growth throughout the story. On the other hand, minor characters play roles as supporting characters in which they can influence the major characters' actions and decisions. According to Saraswati (2019), there are

some types of characters, such as round and flat characters.

1) Round Character

Round characters are usually the major characters who drive the story. They have complex and multi-dimensional with nuanced personalities, emotions, and motivations. The characters often undergo development or change. Additionally, round characters play an important part that give their personalities multiple layers of psychological traits (Saraswati, 2019). In *Me Before You*, Will Traynor and Louisa Clark are classified as the round characters because they both evolve emotionally and show some development throughout the novel. Will deals with his own emotional conflict about his paralysis, dignity, and autonomy, and for Louisa, she shows personal transformation from a basic knowledge woman to someone who confronts ethical dilemmas.

2) Flat Character

Flat characters are commonly the minor characters who represent particular ideas without much complexity. The characters are predictable and do not undergo significant change or growth throughout the whole story because they tend to be simple and one dimensional with few dominant traits. In *Me Before You*, Will's family, including his mother, father, and his sister, as well as Will's ex-girlfriend and Louisa's mother are classified as the flat characters because they all show a consistent traits and ethical points of view and also limited narrative focus. The characters' perspective remains stable and do not undergo significant change.

Characterization is the process in literary method that the author uses to reveal a character's traits, motivations, and psychology, either directly through description or indirectly through actions, dialogue, and thoughts of the character. Minedrop (2005:8) stated that there are two primary characterizations methods, direct characterization and indirect characterization. According to Ellis (2022), direct characterization is when the author directly tells the reader about the character's trait, personality, motivation but inhibits the reader from drawing their own conclusions about the character. While indirect characterization, Ellis (2022) stated that it is when the author shares the details of the character's traits through their actions, thoughts, dialogue, internal monologues, or interactions with other characters.

2.2 Critical Theory

To deepen the understanding of the discussion about personal autonomy and the right to life, this study employed several theories, including ethical literary criticism, existentialism, and human right theory. These theories provided insights into the novel's portrayal of human dignity, individual freedom, and ethical considerations surrounding assisted suicide.

2.2.1 Ethical Literary Criticism

The theory of ethical literary criticism is to interpret and analyze literature from an ethical perspective (Nie, 2015). According to Zheng (2020), ethical literary criticism uses ethics as the starting point to find the relevant problems within literary work and the author through a process of analysis and interpretation. This theory

focuses on morality, justice, responsibility, and human values, particularly when they face complex decisions to test their principles. The approach of ethical literary criticism does not seek by simply judging the right or wrong of the characters, but to explore how ethical conflicts are represented.

As stated by Nie (2015), the “ethics” in the concept system of ethical literary criticism is that it refers to the ethical relationships and moral orders that maintain human relations. The main concern of ethics in literary work is the accepted ethical relationship established between the human and human, human and society, as well as human and nature. Additionally, it is also concerned with the moral order derived from the ethical relationship and various ethical norms. Therefore, literature serves to illustrate how ethical relationships and moral structures undergo changes, analyze their consequences, and provide insights and lessons drawn from human experience to advance human society.

There are ethical theories and principles that are related to the case of assisted suicide, including:

1) Utilitarianism

The principle of utilitarianism holds that it is morally justified for people to end their suffering if it increases their happiness and decreases their suffering. According to Stos (2018), immoral acts can be considered acceptable if the consequences are favorable. One action can be permissible if it promotes happiness, pleasure, joy, and tends to reduce unhappiness, pain, and suffering.

2) Deontology

Stos (2018) mentioned that the word “deon” in deontology come from the Greek means duty. The principle of deontology holds that actions are ethically right or wrong based on duties and specific set of rules. Traditional deontology usually does not agree with assisted suicide because it is an act of intentionally ending life and it violates the moral duty not to take away someone’s life. However, patient centered deontology can support the act of assisted suicide if it is grounded in respect for a person’s autonomy.

3) Virtue ethics

The principle of virtue ethics is about living a life of virtue (Stos, 2018). The concept evaluates morality based on the individual’s character traits like compassion, empathy, courage, and wisdom as well as their morals, reputation, and motivation.

4) Personal Autonomy

The principle of personal autonomy holds that the process of making decisions should focus on all aspects to be autonomous, in which the individual is able to make decisions for their lives and bodies. In the case of assisted suicide, if a person wants to end their suffering, then their choice should be respected.

In the novel *Me Before You*, the theory of ethical literary criticism is used to analyze the moral dilemma regarding Will Traynor’s decision to pursue assisted suicide and how those around him, such as Louisa Clark and Will’s family, responded to his decision. This theory helps to explore the moral justifications and objections

surrounding assisted suicide, discussing the ethical tension between personal autonomy and social expectations. Ethical literary criticism provides a valuable lens for analyzing these perspectives without favoring one over the other but to understand the complexity of the ethical issues raised.

2.2.2 Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical theory originating in the 19th and 20th centuries that emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in human life. According to Sofiyatul Karima (2023), the development of existentialism can be divided into two categories that is Theists, who believe in and do not reject the existence of God, and Atheists, who do not believe in and reject God. To be clear, Theists view humans as a form that depends on God, while Atheists view humans as a form that depends on themselves. Jean-Paul Satre (1905–1980), a philosopher who declared himself as an atheist existentialist, said that human have autonomous freedom and can determine their own nature freely. The goal of the theory of existentialism is to “live” and to be recognized as an individual. Satre stated that human only comes into existence when they become who they want to be because it is regarded as a wish or desire is a conscious decision while placing the full weight of freedom and moral responsibility of life on the shoulders of human themselves (Sofiyatul Karima, 2023). Sunardi (2003) points out that human freedom is the starting point of Satre’s existentialism as the philosopher says that “Human reality is free, basically and completely free.” According to Emilia (2023), existentialism holds that individuals have the freedom to determine the meaning and purpose of their own lives through their choices and actions. However, this freedom carries full responsibility for

individuals to create meaning in their own lives, as well as to take accountability for themselves and others (Sunardi, 2003). In contrast with Jean-Paul Satre, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) is a theistic existentialist who emphasize that human existence finds fulfillment not in radical freedom but in connection with others and with God. While Satre believes in human with full autonomous, Marcel believes in the idea of availability or willingness to be present for others. According to Tayko (2023), Marcel emphasizes that communication and existence of others are important, and this bond is necessary for individuals to be open to themselves by discovering the being within and engaging in communion with others through communication. Additionally, the idea of autonomy is to discover oneself as approachable rather than exerting authority through controlling. Aini (2017) stated that there are some basic principles of existentialism, including:

- 1) Choice

Individuals are designed to make and choose choices in life to determine what they want to be in their future through actions and decisions. According to Aini (2017), even when people seem not to choose something, it still constitutes a choice. In *Me Before You*, Will make a choice of what he believes the best for him by ending his life through assisted suicide. Not only Will, but Louisa and Will's family also face choices on how to respond and react to Will's decision.

- 2) Freedom

Aligning with the above principle, choice, individuals are free to make and choose a choice in their life even when circumstances are limited. They have freedom to choose what is the best for them. Nursoufiliani

and Febrianty (2024) mentioned that freedom does not only apply to being physically free, but freedom also means of someone making choices independently and determining their life direction without external pressure. In *Me Before You*, Will's personal autonomy is a form of existential freedom. Even though there are consequences and societal opposition, he still insists to make his own decision for his life and death. Besides that, Louisa and the other characters also struggle with their own freedom to support or oppose this ethical dilemma.

3) Responsibility

Altogether, choice and freedom come with responsibility. Individuals are fully responsible for their actions (Nursoufiliani & Febrianty, 2024). Existentialism embraces the concept that humans must accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions and not blame others for their choices of decision. In *Me Before You*, Will accepts the responsibility for his decision and is aware of the impact on himself and the people around him. Louisa and Will's family also take responsibility for their responses towards Will's choice.

In the novel *Me Before You*, Will's personal autonomy aligns with Satre's existentialist ideals where his decision to end his life by assisted suicide is grounded in a personal confrontation with meaninglessness and suffering. Will chooses what he believes is the path based on his individual value where he feels powerless. On the other hand, Marcel's ideas can be applied to Louisa and Will's family who tried to make themselves 'available' to Will in his suffering. Louisa's persistent care for Will represents Macel's emphasis on availability, presence, and relational meaning even

though she disagrees with Will's choice.

2.2.3 Human Rights Theory

Human rights theory focuses on emphasizing the inherent dignity, freedom, and the equality of every individual. According to Higgins (1991), human rights are not privileges granted by governments, but a universal right which all human beings possess by virtue of their humanity. Donnelly (2013) stated that human rights are the rights that one has simply for being human. Furthermore, human rights provide not only just legal protection, but also moral principles rooted in respect for human agency and the prevention of suffering. Sen (2015) further emphasized that human rights are grounded in the principles of freedom, dignity, and well-being.

Furthermore, Ward et al. (2009) mentioned that people around the world have become more aware and interested in human rights, as it shows from the hundreds of new books published on the topic each year. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) is a globally agreed upon document that represents the fundamental principles of human rights. By grouping the various rights contained in the UDHR into 4 key areas, each topic associated with human rights aligned with the ethical perspective on assisted suicide, that is:

1) Right to Life (UDHR, Article 3)

According to Dragne (2013), the most fundamental human right for all human beings is the right to life as it means that every person has an inherent right to live. This principle is the foundation of all other rights in which no other rights can be applied without being alive.

2) Right to Autonomy and Self Determination (UDHR, Article 3 and 18)

Hilpold (2018) stated that autonomy is an expression of self-determination. Autonomy is important for human dignity and personal liberty in which everyone has the freedom to make decisions for their life, body, and beliefs without external pressures. It includes the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

3) Right to Dignity (UDHR, Article 1)

Human dignity is grounded in an individual's ability to make their own decisions and in their sense of self-worth (Glensy, 2016). Besides, every person must be treated with respect, regardless of their status or conditions for the concept of dignity to uphold the right to life, autonomy, and equality.

4) Equality and Non-Discrimination (UDHR, Article 2)

Farooq (2022) explained that equality and non-discrimination are principles of human rights that lie at the heart of fair society in which everyone regardless of their race, sexuality, disability, or any other status should be treated with equal dignity.

Therefore, by using this theory, I will delve into the tension surrounding Will's decision to end his life through assisted suicide, as well as the moral opposition he faces from Louisa, his family, and other societal expectations that are portrayed in the novel *Me Before You*. This theory will also help deepen the understanding of exploring ethical conflicts, such as how the characters' reactions, including Louisa's and Will's family, to his decision that reflects debates about autonomy, dignity, and ethical responsibilities toward people with disabilities.

2.2.4 English Society and Assisted Suicide

As stated in section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961, encouraging or assisting assisted suicide is illegal with a penalty up to 14 years imprisonment under the laws of the United Kingdom (Troke & Birch, 2025). Before the Suicide Act 1961, suicide was a crime and those who survived could be prosecuted or imprisoned. Thus, the law in England and Wales decriminalized suicide to protect survivors from prosecution. However, by the early 1960s, the Church of England re-evaluated its stance on suicide and suggested that doing counseling, psychotherapy, and suicide prevention for people could offer better solutions.

Nowadays, the legalization of assisted suicide remains a dilemma for society (O'Neill et al., 2003). Danyliv and O'Neill (2014) mentioned that there is ongoing debate on legalizing assisted suicide in the United Kingdom, however, individuals are still under the law where assisted suicide could face prosecution under the 1961 Suicide Act. Although the support for legalization of assisted suicide or euthanasia has increased, Danyliv and O'Neill (2014) stated that the opposition to the legalization deeply held religious beliefs. According to Troke and Birch (2025), Switzerland established Dignitas, a "right to die" organization, that legalize assisted suicide in 1942 and attract people from around the world. However, even though the support for the act of assisted suicide grows in the United Kingdom, the debate remains divisive for people still balancing compassion and autonomy.

The novel *Me Before You* is set in England where the act of assisted suicide remains illegal. Therefore, the other characters who oppose Will's decision to undergo assisted suicide reflect societal values that prioritize the sanctity of life and relationships. Will's focus on personal autonomy and choice, however, reflects a

growing but still contested value in the United Kingdom, especially among some people.

2.3 Earlier Studies

I use several related studies for the topic of my analysis. These studies, written by different authors, provide valuable insight for my thesis. The five theses that I use are entitled “*Will Traynor’s Suicidal Decision as Depicted in Novel Me Before You by Jojo Moyes*”, “*The Types of Masculinity in Me Before You (2012) by Jojo Moyes*”, “*Love and Belonging Needs of Main Character in Novel Me Before You*”, “*Human Dignity and Autonomy in Euthanasia: A Sociological Perspective on Life and Death*”, and “*Balancing Personal Autonomy and the Right to Life in Euthanasia*”.

The first study is entitled *Will Traynor’s Suicidal Decision as Depicted in Novel Me Before You by Jojo Moyes*, written by Lody Kristiyawan Mustafa and Jumino (2021). In the thesis, the authors found that Will’s decision to end his life by assisted suicide is influenced by various factors. Firstly, it is from his own characteristic. Will, who was once a person full of passion and deeply cherished his past life before the accident, struggles to accept the reality that he cannot go back to that time. Secondly, it is from the internal and external conflicts he experienced. Will cannot adjust with his condition as quadriplegic, where he cannot do anything but sit in his wheelchair. The fact that he knows that there is no prospect for his recovery and that he cannot live the way he wants, makes him feel useless and depressed. Besides, Will also faces conflict with his family, including Camilia, his mother and his sister Georgina, because of his plan to commit assisted suicide. The other external conflict is with Will’s ex-girlfriend

Alicia and his good friend Rupert who come to visit him while also giving him an invitation to their wedding. Lastly, his love story with Louisa is also a significant factor. Although after their bonds deepen and Louisa becomes the only reason for him to get up each day, and also all her efforts to change his mind, they are still not enough for Will. Thirdly, it is from the psychological effects that Will struggles to accept the reality that his independence and ability to pursue the dreams he once held have been taken away from him. He believes that the only way to end his never-ending pain is by committing suicide. This thesis helps me to focus on Will's personal autonomy in his decision and the opposing societal views, while also analyzing his mental state as well as the reactions of the other characters.

The second study is entitled *The Types of Masculinity in Me Before You (2012) by Jojo Moyes*, written by Rialdo Dwi Yesa and Delvy Wahyuni (2022). In the thesis, the authors found that all of the characters, particularly Will Traynor, embodied idealized masculinity. The authors stated that there are seven forms of masculinity portrayed in the novel that are strength, power, stoicism, action, control, independence, and self-sufficiency. After his accident that left him quadriplegic, Will lost his old version of himself, an adventurous man who enjoyed extreme sports. Not only did he lose the ability to do the things he loved, but Will also lost his confidence, control, and sense of power over his own life. This thesis gives me insight into how Will's struggle with his identity and his ethical decision-making process.

The third study is entitled *Love and Belonging Needs of Main Character in Novel Me Before You*, written by Grace Ruth and Robby Satria (2020). In the thesis, the authors found that one of strengths for people to continue living their life is by giving and receiving love. The authors mentioned that love and belonging need can be

fulfilled from family, friendship, and intimate relationships. In this case, Louisa Clark faces struggles to fully give and receive love with Will Traynor. Louisa believes that their love will change Will's mind, and she pours all her efforts to encourage him to continue living his life and let go of his plan to do assisted suicide. However, all of them were still not enough for Will and with a heavy heart, Louisa has to accept that she cannot change his decision. This thesis provides an analysis of Louisa's psychological development and her emotional growth regarding Will's choice to end his life.

The fourth study is entitled *Human Dignity and Autonomy in Euthanasia: A Sociological Perspective on Life and Death*, written by Patrick Menezes (2023). In the thesis, the author found that the act of euthanasia revolves around the concept of human dignity and autonomy. The acceptance or rejection from people regarding euthanasia is impacted by historical background, religious belief, and cultural norms. It is stated by the author that families frequently have difficulties in the decision making about their loved ones' end of life because each of them may have different views on euthanasia. Some of them may agree that with the act of euthanasia to end the patients' suffering, while others may oppose it on moral or religious backgrounds. This thesis gives me perspective about the ethical dilemma and to analyze Will's personal choices regarding assisted suicide to end his suffering.

The fifth study is entitled *Balancing Personal Autonomy and the Right to Life in Euthanasia*, written by Akshat Hedge, Balpreet Kaur Bhatti, Vedika Dalvi, and Purna Chandora (2024). In the thesis, the authors found that the act of euthanasia is a complex issue that involves ethical, legal, and social dimensions which make the agreement on it difficult. The authors stated the difference between euthanasia and

assisted suicide in which assisted suicide involves providing the individual performs the final act, while euthanasia is performed by a medical professional. It is also mentioned by the authors which countries legalized euthanasia or assisted suicide, like Switzerland, have legalized assisted suicide for mentally competent and terminally ill individuals. On the other hand, euthanasia cannot be legalized in India, except in cases where passive euthanasia is permitted under strict guidelines. There are strict standards that include psychiatric consultations in countries where the act of euthanasia is legal and seen as acceptable. This study provides a broader perspective about the ethical dilemma between respecting individuals' personal autonomy and society's obligation to protect life.

Of all the written related studies, I am sure that my research is different from the earlier studies mentioned above. Unlike the previous studies that highlight only one character or single theme, this research focuses on analyzing ethical arguments of multiple characters in the novel *Me Before You*. Besides, instead of supporting for or against assisted suicide, this thesis uses comparative and balanced approach in which I compare the ethical arguments and dilemmas faced by all the character's perspectives in the book.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Studied Material

The study focuses on a novel entitled *Me Before You* (2012). It is a romance novel written by a British novelist named Jojo Moyes. The book was first published on 5 January 2012 in the United Kingdom.

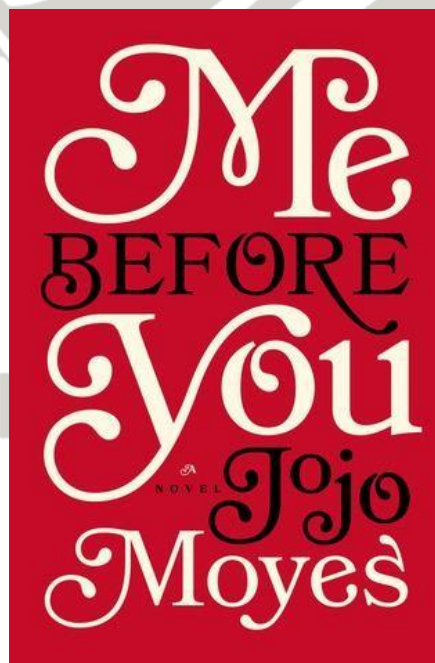


Figure 3.1 *Me Before You Book Cover*

The story tells about Louisa Clark, an optimistic, cheerful, and kindhearted 26-year-old woman who becomes a caregiver to Will Traynor, an intelligent, wealthy, and adventurous 35-year-old man who becomes quadriplegic after being hit by a motorbike. Being paralyzed and no longer able to do anything, Will loses the will to

live. Louisa is surprised by Will's bitter attitude during their first meeting, as he resents his life's limitations. However, Louisa's warm and caring nature slowly breaks down Will's cold behavior, and they become close to each other. As their connection deepens, Louisa discovers that Will plans to undergo assisted suicide, and she is determined to change his mind. Louisa makes efforts to convince Will that life is still worth living, planning activities that he can do, but none of her attempts succeed in stopping Will from wanting to end his life.

3.2 Study Design

In this research, I used a descriptive qualitative method , focusing on analyzing the ethical issues. The goal was to understand and interpret the ethical dilemma about assisted suicide, personal autonomy, and societal values that are portrayed in the novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes. Therefore, to explore the arguments and perspectives from the characters about assisted suicide and how the novel showed the tension between personal autonomy and societal values regarding assisted suicide, I relied on several theories, including ethical literary criticism, existentialism, and human rights theory, to gain better knowledge.

3.3 Data Gathering

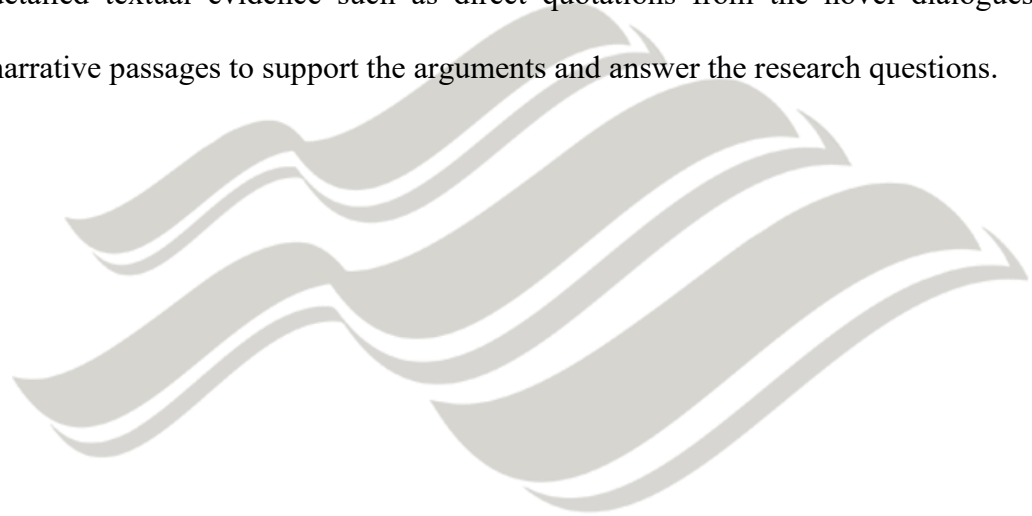
The primary data source of this research was the novel *Me Before You* (2012) by Jojo Moyes. I did a thorough reading and note-taking of the book to collect relevant data such as characters' dialogues, narrative descriptions, characterizations, and characters' motivation that were related to the research questions about the moral

debates regarding assisted suicide. The narrative descriptions included the narrator's interpretation of the characters' thoughts and feelings throughout the chapters. It also described a character's actions, especially those that were not spoken. In *Me Before You*, Louisa Clark was the narrator in most of the chapters since the story was told from a first-person perspective. However, in some chapters the narrator shifted to another characters. Therefore, I gathered data by capturing the narrator's interpretation and perspectives of the events, descriptions, and dialogues from their viewpoints. For characterization, I analyzed the characters' personality traits, behaviors, how other characters describe them, and the development throughout the story. Lastly, I analyzed the characters' motivations, including their reactions to events and their emotional response to difficulties, dilemmas or to other characters. These data also included the ethical argumentation from characters in the novel like Will Traynor, Louisa Clark, Will's parents, and other characters whose perspectives related to the ethical issue of assisted suicide.

3.4 Data Analysis & Interpretation

After gathering the data using the close reading method, which focused on the passages of the novel and line-by-line analysis, I combined the theory of characterization, ethical literary criticism, existentialism, and human rights theory to gain better understanding of the ethical positions of each character through the lens of personal autonomy and societal values. First, I used characterization to analyze characters traits, motivations, development, and internal conflicts to understand each character's ethical view. Second, I identified and analyzed the characters' ethical arguments using the ethical theories such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue

ethics to understand their moral reasoning. Third, using existentialism, I focused on the themes of choice, freedom, and responsibility to have better understanding of characters' decisions and conflicts. Fourth, I applied human rights theory, particularly principles about right to life, autonomy, dignity, and equality to analyze characters' ethical positions. Thus, the resulting analysis was reported descriptively by combining detailed textual evidence such as direct quotations from the novel dialogues and narrative passages to support the arguments and answer the research questions.



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CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The two research questions mentioned in Chapter I of this study will be discussed in this chapter. In doing so, the theories mentioned in Chapter II will be used to support the analysis and interpretation by providing several dialogues from the novel.

4.1 Portrayal of Ethical Dilemma between Personal Autonomy and Societal Values in *Me Before You*

The act of assisted suicide has become an ethical dilemma and a subject of debate all around the world. Different countries have their own approaches to handling assisted suicide cases. Some countries have legalized assisted suicide, and there are countries that prohibit the action because it does not align with their law. Thus, *Me Before You*, a novel written by Jojo Moyes, brought the debated ethical dilemma through a story that invites readers to put their thoughts and consider the perspectives of someone who wishes to pursue their personal autonomy by ending their life, as well as the societal values that uphold the sanctity of life and oppose assisted suicide because it conflicts with their belief.

4.1.1 Characters Involved in the Ethical Dilemma

Aside from Will Traynor and Louisa Clark, the two main characters who actively drive the narrative, there are also other characters who are involved in the

ethical dilemma surrounding Will's decision to undergo assisted suicide. These include Will's family, his personal medical caretaker named Nathan, and Louisa's mother, Josie. All of them have opinions on Will's decision.

1) Will Traynor

Will Traynor is considered the major and round character, as defined by Saraswati (2019) in the theory of character and characterization in section 2.1.2, because he drives the story and also experiences character development throughout the narration. As the one who takes the action, Will is indeed involved in the ethical dilemma.

In a conversation with his mother, Will demonstrates his personal autonomy by expressing his desire to end his life through assisted suicide, stating, *"I don't want to live like this, Mother. This is not the life I chose. There is no prospect of my recovery, hence it is a perfectly reasonable request to ask to end it in a manner I see fit."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 140-141, Chapter 8). This conversation captures the evidence of Will's application of ethical literary criticism, as discussed in section 2.2.1, where Will employs utilitarianism principles from Stos (2018) which hold that it is morally justifiable to end someone's pain if it increases their happiness. Will is aware that his condition will not get any better, and for his own peace, he decides to use his freedom of choice to decide whether to continue his life or not.

Although Louisa's presence brings joy to Will's life, as Will himself admits, *"Sometimes, Clark, you are pretty much the only thing that makes me want to get up in the morning."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 350, Chapter 18), he faces a dilemma. Will loves Louisa and wants the best for her, but he

cannot put away his desire to be fully autonomous. As highlighted in section 2.2.1, one of the ethical theories and principles includes personal autonomy, in which it emphasizes respecting someone's choice if they want to end their pain. Therefore, Will expresses to Louisa, stating, ***"It's not enough for me. This – my world – even with you in it. And believe me, Clark, my whole life has changed for the better since you came. But it's not enough for me. It's not the life I want."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 425, Chapter 23). From Will's statement, it is evident that even though Louisa has a positive influence and expresses her love and care, Will remains unchanged for he says, ***"Louisa, nothing was ever going to change my mind. I promised my parents six months, and that's what I've given them. You have made that time more precious than you can imagine. You stopped it being an endurance test –"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 428-429, Chapter 23). Will is still unhappy because of his lack of independence and life's limitations. In this ethical dilemma, Will knows that Louisa loves him deeply and that his choice to undergo assisted suicide will be painful for her, but he still highly values personal autonomy so much that even love cannot change his decision.

2) Louisa Clark

Along with Will, Louisa Clark is also considered a round character because she plays an important part in the story, which aligns with the character and characterization theory discussed in section 2.12 of Saraswati (2019). As Will's caregiver, Louisa develops a deep relationship with him and becomes undoubtedly involved in the ethical dilemma.

After accidentally overhearing the conversation between the Traynors' family about Will's plan to seek assisted suicide, Louisa couldn't believe that the family hired her to monitor Will and prevent him from ending his life, and therefore, she expresses her anger and sadness by saying, ***"Don't you think it would have been fair to mention that I was basically on suicide watch?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 155, Chapter 9). Louisa almost left the Traynors' house and quit her job by writing a letter of what she wanted to say and addressed it to Will's mother, Camilla. She believes that every human being, including disabled persons, has the right to live as it aligns with the theory in section 2.2.3 about human rights. However, after a lot of consideration, Louisa changed her mind about quitting her job and expressed her thoughts, stating, ***"I can't sit by and just quietly wait out the time until ... Will ... well"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 165, Chapter 10). Louisa wants Will to live and even plans activities suitable for quadriplegics and it is shown in her statement, ***"I want Will to want to live too."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 167, Chapter 10), which suggests her commitment to change Will's mind.

3) Camilla Traynor

Will's mother, Camilla Traynor, can be considered a flat character because she does not undergo significant changes, as suggested in section 2.1.2 about character and characterization theory. Although classified as one of the minor characters in the story, her perspective and the ethical dilemma she experiences play an important role in the whole story.

It took Will's suicide attempt for Camilla to agree with his son's decision to have six months before going to Dignitas. As a mother, Camilla was shocked to hear her son's wish to end his own life, and it shows from this narration, *"When Will first told me what he wanted, he had to tell me twice, as I was quite sure I could not have heard him correctly the first time. I stayed quite calm when I realized what it was he was proposing, and then I told him he was being ridiculous and I walked straight out of the room."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 140, Chapter 8). However, she knew his son very well, and even if she didn't agree with his decision, Will would try it again. Camilla hardly tries to see the world through her son's eyes so that she can understand how he feels. Two weeks after having a conversation with her beloved son about his decision, Camilla said, 'Yes.' because what else could she have done? By hiring Louisa, she believed that in these promised six months, there is a possibility that things could change.

4) Steven Traynor

Will's father, Steven Traynor, is a minor character and a flat one because his character is simple and his perspective remains stable throughout the story without any change, as explained in section 2.1.2 on character and characterization theory. As Will's father, Steven is also involved in the ethical dilemma.

Steven is devastated with his son's decision to seek assisted suicide at Dignitas, especially since he was the one who found Will after his suicide attempt. Therefore, Steven appreciates Louisa's presence, as she brings a

source of joy to his son's life. He supports Louisa's planned activities for Will, expressing, ***"I think it would be marvellous to get Will out and about. You know it can't have been good for him staring at the four walls day in and day out."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 164, Chapter 20). He also reassures Camilla there is no need to worry about Will and Louisa going out together when she was considering who else could accompany them, stating, ***"Will needs to be allowed to feel like a man."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 167, Chapter 10). As a man himself, Steven understands that Will has lost his independence and always requires assistance since the accident. Therefore, he wants Will to experience some autonomy and not always depend on someone else.

5) Georgina Traynor

Will's sister, Georgina Traynor, can also be classified as a flat character, as she shows a consistent trait and ethical point of view, as implied in section 2.1.2 regarding flat characters in character and characterization theory. Georgina does not undergo significant changes concerning the ethical dilemma.

When she first knows about Will's current condition, Georgina expresses her feelings, saying, ***"He's so ... different now. It's like he's determined not to see the good in anything."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 132, Chapter 7). However, after her mother informs her everything of Will's intentions, Georgina is taken aback by Will's decision. Her anger and disagreement are evident when she tells her mother, ***"I can't believe you're even agreeing to it. What about your religion? What about everything***

you've done? What was the point in you even bloody saving him the last time?" (Moyes, 2012, p. 133, Chapter 7). Georgina's perspective does not change until the end, even though she knows that this situation is hard for Will, she still views Will's decision as wrong and selfish.

6) Nathan

Nathan, Will's personal medical caretaker, is also one of the minor characters that have a role of supporting the other characters, aligning with the character and characterization theory in section 2.1.2. He plays an important part in the story as he is the one who is in charge of taking care of Will in the house. Nathan has been taking care and accompanying Will for two years, and so, he is also involved in the ethical dilemma.

He has witnessed Will's best and worst days, therefore, Nathan does not judge Will's decision because as a medical professional, he understands that Will's condition will not be getting any better. In a conversation with Louisa, Nathan expresses his thoughts, saying, *"I've sat there with him and there is nothing I can say to the guy, nothing that is going to make it any better. He's been dealt with the shittiest hand of cards you can imagine. And you know what? I looked at him last night and I thought about his life and what it's likely to become ... and although there is nothing I'd like more in the world than for the big guy to be happy, I ... I can't judge him for what he wants to do. It's his choice. It should be his choice."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 400, Chapter 22). Nathan's statement expresses that he believes Will has the freedom to make his own choices in life, which aligns with the theory of

existentialism in section 2.2.2 that was stated by Aini (2017) as one of the basic principles of existentialism. Nathan values Will's personal autonomy and respects his right to make his own decisions, even though deep down, he wishes Will would choose to live.

7) Josie Clark

Louisa's mother, Jossie Clark, is a minor character who does not undergo significant changes throughout the story and her perspective remains stable. Josie is also involved in the ethical dilemma as she expresses her opinion after hearing Louisa's story of Will wanting to go to Dignitas in Switzerland to end his life by assisted suicide.

As a parent and a mother, Josie cannot believe that Will's parents' acceptance of their son's choice, exclaiming, ***"But his parents! They can't let him kill himself. What kind of people are they?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 449, Chapter 25). She believes that his parents, particularly his mother, should have intervened to protect him, and it is shown from her saying, ***"He's vulnerable and there is no way on earth she should entertain the thought of it."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 450, Chapter 25). Josie strongly disagrees with Will's decision to seek assisted suicide and cannot believe that Will's mother and father would allow Will to end his own life.

4.1.2 Will Traynor's Personal Autonomy

The novel *Me Before You* portrays Will's personal autonomy through his arguments and decisions. Throughout the storyline, Will is consistently confident in

his decisions and not easily swayed by the opinions of others. He is always a person who takes the lead and controls himself, even his mother described Will as someone whose words are always heard, however, after his accident, Will loses his independence. As stated by Lody and Jumino (2021), Will is a man who lives to the fullest by always engaging in activities and maximizing his time, which explains his success as a businessman. Not only that, but Will also enjoys doing extreme sports and is always full of passion in his life. However, after the accident, he did not only lose the ability to do the things he loves, but Yesa and Wahyuni (2022) also mentioned that Will lost his confidence, control, and sense of power over his own life. Will expresses his despair, stating, ***“It’s nothing like the life I want. Not even close.”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 426, Chapter 23), which explains his strong desire for personal autonomy and the difficulty he has adjusting to and accepting his new reality as a quadriplegic because he deeply cherished his life before the accident. Will’s inability to accept his condition is evident when he tells Louisa, ***“I can’t be the kind of man who just ... accepts”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 427, Chapter 23).

There is moment when Louisa asks Will if it would have been better for him to live a smaller life in the past so that he might be able to adapt more easily to his current difficult situation, however, Will expresses his inner feeling of reminiscing about his old days, replying, ***“I will never, ever regret the things I’ve done. Because most days, if you’re stuck in one of these, all you have are the places in your memory that you can go to.”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 265-266, Chapter 15). It was the life he chose, and he has no regrets. Nevertheless, Will’s sudden life transition from being independent in everything to a state of total physical dependence becomes the source of his emotional and psychological distress. His statement, ***“I am not designed to***

exist in this thing – and yet for all intents and purposes it is now the thing that defines me. It is the only that defines me.” (Moyes, 2012, p. 426, Chapter 23), emphasizes Will’s belief he has lost his identity. And so, that is the biggest reason why Will asks for assisted suicide to end his life in the manner he sees fit.

From the perspective of the existentialism theory in section 2.2.2, Will’s decision is aligned with the concept from Jean-Paul Satre that a person has the autonomous freedom to determine their life freely. Will’s statement, *“I need it to end here. No more chair. No more pneumonia. No more burning limbs. No more pain and tiredness and waking up every morning already wishing it was over. When we get back, I am still going to go to Switzerland.”* (Moyes, 2012, p. 427, Chapter 23), highlights his belief that without autonomy, his life is meaningless and he has lost his identity. According to the basic principles of existentialism stated by Aini (2017), humans are designed to make their own choices in life for their future through their action and decisions. Therefore, Will Traynor uses his personal autonomy to be free to choose what is best for himself, which aligns with what Nursoufiliani and Febrianty (2024) stated that freedom is not only about physically free but also free to make choices independently and determine one’s life direction without societal pressure. Will’s decision to seek assisted suicide also aligns with the ethical literary criticism theory in section 2.2.1 regarding utilitarianism which Stos (2018) stated that immoral action can be permissible if it brings happiness and reduce pain and suffering.

Will’s personal autonomy is not only his own struggle but also a conflict for those around him like his mother, Camilla, and Louisa, who prioritizes the sanctity of life and hopes for the possibility of him finding a new meaning of life despite his physical limitations. However, Will remains steadfast with his decision, even stating,

“I’m not expecting of recover.” (Moyes, 2012, p. 344, Chapter 18), emphasizing that the choice to end his life is the only way he can regain control over his circumstances. It is evident in his conversation with Louisa as he tells her, ***“It’s not enough for me. This – my world – even with you in it. And believe me, Clark, my whole life has changed for the better since you came. But it’s not enough for me. It’s not the life I want.”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 425, Chapter 23).

4.1.3 Societal Values Opposing Assisted Suicide in *Me Before You*

The novel *Me Before You* explores not only about Will’s personal autonomy but also the societal values that oppose Will’s decision to seek assisted suicide. The opposition is from the perspectives of Louisa Clark, the Traynor family, and also the English society that drives the story with arguments surrounding assisted suicide as they concern and prioritize the sanctity of life.

1) Louisa Clark

Louisa is a woman who embodies compassion, empathy, and hope. Her initial response after knowing that Will’s plan to seek assisted suicide is a mix of disbelief, sadness, anger, and resistance. However, after a lot of consideration, Louisa becomes determined to show Will that life still holds meaning and that he can find happiness and experience joy. She plans outings and activities to give hope and encourage him to live, as evidenced by her statement, ***“I had a hundred and seventeen days in which to convince Will Traynor that he had a reason to live.”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 178, Chapter 10). She is doing her best to motivate Will by making plans for the two of them, imagining how life could be fun if they experience things together, and as they

grow closer, the connection deepens. Louisa's actions align with Gabriel Marcel's existentialism theory in section 2.2.2, which emphasizes the importance of being available and present for others.

Louisa always tries to see the good in situations and maintains hope for a better future. In a conversation with Nathan, when he mentions that Will's condition will not get any better and that they should respect Will's decision, she expresses her frustration, asking, ***"But if we don't have faith that he can feel better, even get better, then how is he supposed to keep the faith that good things might happen?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 400, Chapter 22). This shows Louisa's disagreement with the idea that ending his life is the only better solution for Will. Louisa's compassion is evident in her persistent care for Will as she seeks Will's dignity despite his disability. This aligns with the human rights theory regarding equality and non-discrimination discussed in section 2.2.3, as she treats Will with equal dignity regardless of his condition. She sees Will for who he is, not defined by his limitations. Louisa recognizes Will's desire to be seen as an individual, as reflected in her thoughts, ***"He could be happy, if surrounded by the right people, if allowed to be Will, instead of The Man in the Wheelchair, the list of symptoms, the object of pity."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 346, Chapter 18). That is why she tries to convince him that they can work on this together, assuring him, ***"I know we can do this. I know it's not how you would have chosen it, but I know I can make you happy."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 424, Chapter 23). Louisa's action reflects societal belief in the sanctity of life and that there is a possibility of finding purpose even in difficult situations.

2) Will's Family

The reaction of William Traynor's family upon hearing Will's decision to seek assisted suicide raises the tensions within family and societal expectations. Camilla Traynor, Will's mother, is depicted as protective and emotionally invested in her son's condition. She is shocked and devastated, also in a state of denial upon hearing her son's wish to end his life, evident by her saying, *"When Will first told me what he wanted, he had to tell me twice, as I was quite sure I could not have heard him correctly the first time. I stayed quite calm when I realized what it was he was proposing, and then I told him he was being ridiculous and I walked straight out of the room."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 140, Chapter 8). Deep down, Camilla knows that her son's condition is difficult, however, she still cannot accept his choice to end his life. Unable to accept the situation, Camilla put her energy into seeking new treatments and therapies, including hiring a companion for Will, in hopes that there is a possibility of changing his mind. Her disagreement with Will's decision to do assisted suicide aligns with the ethical literary criticism detailed in section 2.2.1, specifically the principle of deontology which think that intentionally ending a life violates moral duty because it emphasizes preserving life. She also put high hopes on Louisa as she sees that Louisa brightens her son's day and that maybe she could bring the possibility of him changing his mind, saying, *"I thought you might cheer him up. And you do cheer him up, Louisa. You seem to be one of the few people who are able to get through him."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 155, Chapter 9). As a mother, Camilla's actions reflect societal values rooted in the sanctity of life and family to

protect her family at all costs. From this ethical dilemma, Camilla questions whether she failed as a mother because she went through the feelings of guilt and helplessness. Even though she eventually agrees to the promised six months before going to Dignitas, her acceptance is portrayed as an act of love rather than genuine support.

The other family member who opposes Will's decision to pursue assisted suicide is his sister, Georgina Traynor. Knowing the information of her brother's decision to go to Dignitas from her mother, Georgina responds with anger and frustration, viewing assisted suicide as wrong and selfish, stating, ***"But Dignitas? It's just wrong. I know it's hard for him, but it will destroy you and Daddy. I know it. Think of how you would feel! Think of the publicity! Your job! Both your reputations! He must know it. It's a selfish thing to even ask. How can he? How can he do this?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 134, Chapter 7). She voices her opposition by confronting her parents for not considering the consequences of Will's choice, especially her mother for agreeing to his decision, stating, ***"I can't believe you're even agreeing to it. What about your religion? What about everything you've done? What was the point in you even bloody saving him the last time?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 133, Chapter 7). Her action also aligns with the principle of deontology as discussed in the ethical literary criticism in section 2.2.1, because she prioritizes the sanctity of life and familial responsibility. She believes that Will is selfish, thinking only about himself and not considering the pain his death will cause those who love him. Georgina's reaction reflects a common societal perspective that opposes assisted suicide, prioritizing well-being and familial

duty over personal autonomy.

3) Josie Clark

As someone outside of the family members and who doesn't have much interaction with Will, Louisa's mother, Josie Clark, is really shocked when she hears that Will wants to end his life by assisted suicide. Her strong opposition is evident in her disbelief that Will's parents would support such a choice, exclaiming, ***"But his parents! They can't let him kill himself. What kind of people are they?"*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 449, Chapter 25). Josie couldn't believe that they, especially Will's mother, allowed him to do assisted suicide, saying, ***"He's vulnerable and there is no way on earth she should entertain the thought of it."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 450, Chapter 25). As a mother herself, the thought of parents allowing their child to end their life made her angry. Josie even said that she will protect her family members no matter what happens and it is evident in her saying, ***"I would fight for you two, for Thomas, until my dying breath."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 449, Chapter 25). Josie's stance also aligns with the deontological principles discussed in section 2.2.1, in which her action emphasizes moral duties such as preserving life and the responsibility to protect vulnerable family members.

4) English Society

The ethical dilemma of assisted suicide and the setting of the novel *Me Before You* are not incidental. Assisted suicide remains illegal in England under the Suicide Act 1961. As stated by Troke and Birch (2025) in section

2.2.4, encouraging or assisting assisted suicide can lead to imprisonment. Therefore, people in the United Kingdom are still under the law and could face prosecution if they assist someone in ending their life in the country. Thus, the novel portrays Will's struggle to pursue his personal autonomy and the response of those around him. In the story, the characters' responses to Will's decision to undergo assisted suicide reflect the attitudes in English society, where most of them oppose his decision. Those who disagree with Will's wish are Louisa, Will's mother, Camilla, Will's sister, Georgina, and Louisa's mother, Josie, because of the sanctity of life. They believe that life is valuable regardless of suffering or disability. Danyliv and O'Neill (2014) stated that there is a debate on legalizing assisted suicide in the United Kingdom, as some start to support personal autonomy, just like Will's father, Steven, and Nathan, Will's medical caretaker, who choose to respect Will's personal autonomy and his right to choose and make decision. However, even though support increases, it remains illegal in the country as they try to balance compassion and personal autonomy.

4.2 Ethical Perspectives and Choices of the Characters

Will's situation presents an ethical dilemma because he is torn between two morally significant but also conflicting options which are the societal perspective to preserve life and the personal autonomy perspective to make decisions about one's own life. The novel *Me Before You* shows how the main characters' ethical perspectives which refer to their moral principles or values shape their judgments

about what is right or wrong in particular situation. Their perspectives and choices address the ethical dilemma of dignity, personal freedom, and the value of life in the context of assisted suicide. Their choices and attitudes toward this issue reveal differences in their understanding of the concept.

4.2.1 Dignity and Personal Freedom

Will Traynor's decision to choose assisted suicide to end his own life is a way of claiming his personal freedom to preserve his dignity. Before the accident, Will's life was defined by independence and adventure and after becoming a quadriplegic, the loss of physical autonomy really hurt his sense of self-worth. Will expresses this when he says, *"I am not designed to exist in this thing – and yet for all intents and purposes it is now the thing that defines me. It is the only that defines me."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 426, Chapter 23), emphasizing that for him, dignity is inseparable from autonomy. Not only that he wants people to see him as he used to, but Will himself also want to be the man he used to be, stating, *"I want to be in Paris as me, the old me. I want to sit in a chair, leaning back, my favourite clothes on, with pretty French girls who pass by giving me the eye just as they would any other man sitting there. Not looking away hurriedly when they realize I'm a man in an overgrown bloody pram."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 253, Chapter 14). The decision that Will take for his own dignity is align with the existentialist perspective in section 2.2.2 that individual have the freedom to determine the purpose of their own lives through their actions and Will choose to define his decision even by choosing death.

Louisa Clark, on the other hand, perceives a different concept of dignity which are perseverance and deeply valuing life, regardless of the physical limitations. All of

Louisa's efforts to engage and encourage Will to try new experiences in his current condition reflect her belief that dignity can be maintained through hope, adaptation, and connection with other people, and not just in personal autonomy. However, as the story goes by, Louisa comes to understand Will's perspective even though she cannot fully accept it and that shows how complex it is to respect the different concepts of definition with other people when it conflicts with one's own values.

4.2.2 Value of Life

The novel *Me Before You* also explores the concept of the value of life and how the characters have their own perspective on the concept. For Will, he argues that that quality of life matters more than having a life with dependency and suffering. His ethical perspective is rooted in autonomy and the principle of utilitarianism in section 2.2.1, for he believes the value of life depends on its quality, fulfillment, and freedom from suffering. Will evaluates his life not just by his existence but also by well-being and dignity which is evident when he says, ***"I need it to end here. No more chair. No more pneumonia. No more burning limbs. No more pain and tiredness and waking up every morning already wishing it was over. When we get back, I am still going to go to Switzerland."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 427, Chapter 23), emphasizing that living his life in his current condition is not worth living. In a conversation with Louisa, Will explains that he led a fulfilling life before his accident and that his wheelchair he's sitting on right now is what defined him, saying, ***"I loved my life, Clark. Really loved it. I loved my job, my travels, the things I was. I loved being a physical person."*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 426, Chapter 23). Will knows that his current condition will not get any better and is likely to worsen anytime as he says, ***"I know most people think living like me is about***

the worst thing that could happen. But it could get worse. I could end up not being able to breathe by myself, not being able to talk. I could get circulatory problems that mean my limbs have to be amputated. I could be hospitalized indefinitely." (Moyes, 2012, p. 324, Chapter 17). Therefore, he wants to end his life on his own terms through assisted suicide.

Will's perspective of preserving life differs from Louisa, Will's mother Camilla, and Louisa's mother Josie, who all see that life is precious and deserves protection. Their perspectives reflect societal values that emphasize the sanctity of life and oppose the act of assisted suicide, in which that align with the people in England who still considered that assisted suicide is morally wrong to be done, as discussed in section 2.2.4 about English society and assisted suicide. Louisa believes that every life is worth living regardless of circumstance or ability. With her sense of empathy and compassion, Louisa took time to research about Will's condition to convince him to continue living, stating, *"I've done loads of research on the internet, talking to other quads about how to make this work."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 425, Chapter 23). She believes that Will's life is still worth living even after his accident and that they can find ways to make it work together, saying, *"I know we can do this. I know it's not how you would have chosen it, but I know I can make you happy."* (Moyes, 2012, p. 424, Chapter 23). This sums up Louisa's view on the value of life. For Camilla, as a mother of Will, she struggles to accept Will's decision because of her maternal love and the desire to protect her son at all costs. She believes that each moment of life has value in it, regardless of hardship and how difficult the situation is. Camilla's disagreement with Will's decision and her efforts to find him companionship which led her to Louisa, reflected her hope and thought that with time and care, Will might find his desire to live. Lastly, Louisa's

mother, Josie, believes that choosing death is wrong. She believes vulnerable people who are suffering or in pain should be cared for, stating, ***“He’s vulnerable and there is no way on earth she should entertain the thought of it.”*** (Moyes, 2012, p. 450, **Chapter 25**). Josie prefers endurance over acceptance of death as a solution, which is why she is shocked that Will’s family would allow him to do it.



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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In this chapter, I aim to conclude the study by addressing the problem statements presented in Chapter I of this study. These include the ethical dilemma between personal autonomy and societal values portrayed in the act of assisted suicide in Jojo Moyes' *Me Before You*, and how the ethical perspectives and choices of the main characters reflect the concepts of dignity, personal freedom, and value of life. All of these problem statements are addressed using several theories in the finding. These theories include character and characterization theory, ethical literary criticism theory, existentialism theory, and human rights theory.

The novel *Me Before You* tells the story of Will Traynor, a once lively man whose life takes a drastic turn after an accident, leaving him physically dependent. In his difficult journey, Will met Louisa who becomes his caregiver as well as companion. As they spend lots of time together and grow closer, Louisa discovers Will's desire to end his life through assisted suicide.

The ethical dilemma centers on Will Traynor's decision to pursue assisted suicide to claim his personal autonomy because of his physical suffering and loss of independence he once had. Will's choice aligns with the existentialism theory about the principles of freedom and self-determination and also emphasizing dignity that is closely related to personal autonomy. However, Will's personal autonomy conflicts with the societal values held by other characters, such as Louisa Clark, Will's family,

specifically his mother and sister, and Louisa's mother because they prioritize the sanctity of life. These opposing views also reflect the English society where assisted suicide remains illegal and morally contested.

The characters' ethical perspectives show a complex understanding of dignity, personal freedom, and the value of life. Will's perspective focuses on quality of life which is to claim his right to choose death to preserve his dignity. While Louisa, who embodies hope and perseverance, believes in the inherent value of life, regardless of disability or limitations. And for Will's mother, Camilla Traynor, her perspective on the value of life belief in preserving life despite hardship. However, after Will's suicide attempts, she reluctantly accepts his decision as she realizes that continuing to force him to live would only prolong his pain. Lastly, Josie Clark, Louisa's mother, believes that life is sacred and must be protected regardless of suffering or disability, and that ending one's life is morally wrong, as she prefers endurance and care rather than accepting death as a solution.

In summary, *Me Before You* explores one of today's challenging ethical issues, portraying the conflict between personal autonomy and societal values in a way that allows people can see both perspectives.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this research study, I would like to provide some suggestions, including:

5.2.1 For General Readers

This research study encourages readers to analyze *Me Before You* with an open mind and look closely at the ethical dilemmas surrounding assisted suicide. By doing so, readers may deepen their understanding and awareness of the diverse perspectives on personal autonomy and societal values, as presented by Will, Louisa, and their families. This can also lead to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in ethical decision making and foster empathy for those facing such choices in real life.

5.2.2 For Future Researchers

To expand this research study, future researchers could explore the ethical dilemmas of assisted suicide from other theoretical perspectives to deepen understanding of autonomy and life value.

5.2.3 For English Letters Study Program

The English Letters study program can provide more in-depth explanations of relevant theories so that students can deepen their theoretical understanding, enhance their empathy, and better prepare them so that they can thoughtfully engage with complex ethical dilemmas in both literature and in practical everyday life.

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