

Libertarianism Aspects as Reflected in “Dallas Buyers Club”

Film

Finasari – 13020112140013
Diponegoro University

Abstract

This thesis focuses on Libertarianism aspects as reflected in the characters of *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) film by Jean-Marc Vallée. *Dallas Buyers Club* film describes a reflection of libertarian movement or individual liberty with the limited intervention from the government by the characters named Ron Woodroof and Dr. Eve. The aim of this thesis is to describe libertarianism aspects in the movie by analyzing the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The writer employs library research to support the data with the film as the main data and some relevant books, journals, articles, and online documents and websites as the supporting data. To analyze the intrinsic aspects, the writer uses some theories of narrative elements and cinematography elements. To analyze the extrinsic aspects, the writer applies the theory of libertarianism with its key concepts by David Boaz. The result of this thesis proves that, based on David Boaz’s theory, the characters of the movie, such as Ron Woodroof has applied *individual rights, free market, and limited government* and Dr. Eve has applied *spontaneous order* as the basic key concepts of libertarianism.

Keywords : *libertarianism, individual rights, free market, limited government, spontaneous order*

1. Introduction

Health is a vital issue in human’s life. Generally, it is regulated by a system as the apparatus of government to preserve people’s welfare. According to Henry L. Tischler in *Introduction to Sociology*, “the United States has one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world” (2011: 394). However, the fact that its longevity is not the best in the world becomes a major attention. One of the ways to comprehend why the longevity is not higher is to realize that the United States embraces many groups of people who have immensely different life experiences in healthcare. “Critics maintain that the U.S. healthcare system is one that pays off only when the patient can pay” (Tischler, 2011:394). The critical case becomes

the main reason of patient's view of the system. Beside the commercialized healthcare, people's choice of taking medication is also restricted. Patients are only allowed doing the procedure based on the U.S. government's regulation. As the result, the controversy appears when none of the approved medications or procedures works for severe disease such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, etc.

Considering the people's rights towards the healthcare institutions, it is unfair for the government to refuse to help society in finding the solution (Andre and Velasquez, 2015). Basically, since the release of Bill of Rights, all men and women have the same opportunities for getting medications and securities in their lives. The supporting Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 stated that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care...(United Nation, 1949, Article. 25, p.5-6)

The statement means that people have the liberty to treat their disease under the protection of the nation. In healthcare, choosing a medication is people's rights. Thus, restriction towards people's choice violates the rights. In short, the problem caused by government's regulation stimulates the emergence of libertarian movement. According to David Boaz, the libertarianism is an idea to respect individual's rights and against the strict policy of the government (1997:2).

Regarding the issues, the writer is interested in presenting libertarian movement in healthcare of Ron Woodroof and his friends happening in Dallas, United States of America through a film by Jean-Marc Vallée called *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013). It shows the struggle of HIV/AIDS patients to get the medication against the government's health regulation. Therefore, *Dallas Buyers Club* film is intended to be a realistic portrayal of the libertarian movement as the effect of health crisis. The aims of the study in this thesis are: to analyze the intrinsic aspects in *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) film and to explain and analyze the extrinsic aspects about the libertarianism movement as reflected in *Dallas Buyers Club* Film. The discussion mainly is on characters' actions against the strict government's health policy as libertarianism movement in *Dallas Buyers Club*

(2013) film. It uses library research with *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) by Jean-Marc Vallée as the main data while the supporting data are relevant books, journals, articles and sources of information such as online documents and websites to support the analysis. In this research, the writer employs several approaches to analyze both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Intrinsic aspects are analyzed by using exponential approach. Guerin (2005) mentioned about the method in his book entitled *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*,

As such they might be called exponents, in the sense that they are signs or symbols of patterns of meaning. The word *exponent*, in fact, derives from the Latin *exponere*, “to put forth”, with the extended meaning of explanation (cf. “expound”) (2005:143).

It means to examine the most meaningful images and patterns to comprehend the intrinsic of literary work. By applying exponential approach, particular intrinsic aspects such as theme, character, setting, conflict, and the cinematography elements will be elaborated in detail. Meanwhile, the writer uses sociology of literature approach to support the explanation of the topic. As explained by Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature*, a literary work reflects people’s actions in the real world and associates with society’s life as “objects of literary imitation” with language as the media (1949:94). It is connected to the approach of libertarianism theory with the key concepts based on the book *Libertarianism: A Primer* by David Boaz (1997) as the extrinsic approach.

2. Summary of *Dallas Buyers Club*

The story is about a Dallas cowboy named Woodroof who finds himself infected with HIV. He is struggling for the medication and studying about another alternative. Since the helping medication is not approved by the government Woodroof decides to get the medication in Mexico. Later, he learns that he could make it as a business in the US with the help of Dr. Vass as the founder and Rayon as his friend. Woodrof begins selling the drugs to gay people, gay club, until he comes up with the idea from other states in America to make a club and sell it by selling membership. On the other hand, Dr. Eve does not agree with the hospital’s policy with the drugs company, since the hospital uses AZT drugs that

not safe for patients' healthy cells. Without agreement from the hospital she lowers the dosage of AZT. The FDA spots Woodroof's action and as the result he sues the FDA with the support from Dr. Eve who has decided to quit her job. In the end he gets his own rights to use the medication.

3. Analysis

3.1 Libertarianism

Libertarianism is often associated with philosophy studies. According to Jason Brennan (2012:12) libertarianism is a political philosophy that believes in respect for individual liberty as a major and fundamental requirement of justice.

Thus, the belief in justice and individual freedom leads some philosophers to develop a political philosophy as the guidance in governmental spheres. Beside its purpose to advocate individual liberty, libertarianism crucial point is the constitutional government's restriction towards an individual or even society. In the meantime, the term "libertarian" emerges in postwar America with the basic term from "liberal" which means a support of comprehensive government at that time. As an old movement, libertarian thought is known as a part of Locke, Smith, Founding Fathers, and classical liberals. This political philosophy appears to grow continuously after World War II (Boaz, 1997:17).

In recent years of 21st century, the idea of libertarianism develops its form and emphasizes on the personal liberty with a minimalist intervention of the government. David Boaz defines the libertarian mechanism in such particular idea of human and creates key concepts as the basic theory of libertarianism. Boaz (1997) also explains about the definition of libertarian.

Libertarians believe that individuals have both the right and the responsibility to make their own decisions. Non-libertarians of all political stripes believe that the government should make some or many of the important decisions in an individual's life (1997:291)

Thus, the decision-making process of each individual is the essential part of libertarianism. Most of the problems occur from the involvement of government in personal importance that causes violations toward freedom to choose. Besides the rights in individual sector, libertarian also defines the important point of

making wealth by a free market. In economic belief, *Laisseznous faire* became the popular slogan for the free market, anti-capitalist movement. It is indeed to increase individuals' liberty to gain wealth. Libertarian as an anti-capitalist and anti-monopoly upheld this word as the basis since they believe that the great power of government always accompanied by corruption. Furthermore, in the philosophical idea of libertarianism, there are several concepts, which determines the accuracy of the belief itself and the writer will explain it further.

3.2 Key Concepts of Libertarianism

Following the idea of liberty and personal prosperous life, there are several fundamental concepts as themes of libertarian's discussion. David Boaz (1997) described the ideas and it continuously developed from an archaic form in ancient China, Greece, and Israel into the modern shape of libertarian philosophy thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine around 17th and 18th centuries. Thus, there are several points of the libertarianism key concepts.

1. Individual Rights

As the moral agents, an individual has the rights to get the security in life, liberty, and property. Government or society has no involvement in obtaining these rights. It is inherent in the nature of human beings. These rights are not granted by government or by society; they are inherent in the nature of human beings. It is intuitively right that individuals enjoy the security of such rights; the burden of explanation should lie with those who would take rights away (Boaz, 1997:16). In the film *As a libertarian and also an HIV/AIDS infected patient*, Ron Woodroof tries to chase freedom to choose medication that he can get in the nation. However, he cannot get any medication because of the regulation that would not let patients to get the drugs freely. Instead, the hospital asked Woodroof to joining the supporting groups of HIV patients. Besides, the only medication offered by the hospital is to be part of AZT experiment with placebo. His journey started when he asks for an effective medication that is unavailable in the United States. In this case, Ron Woodroof insists and keeps trying to get the

medicine. Woodroof as the HIV/AIDS patients struggling for his individual rights to get proper medication as a libertarian movement. It shows the beginning of Ron's journey to get a freedom of medication.

2. Free Markets

The economic or financial factor is important for human beings to live and grow. Mutual agreement to exchange property is needed in getting the ownership of goods. Libertarians believe that people will be both freer and more prosperous if government intervention in people's economic choices is minimized. In this case, free markets are the economic system of free people, and prominent to create wealth (Boaz, 1997:17). During Woodroof journey towards the medication in Mexico, he realizes that the medicine could make fortune, since there are no effective drugs in the United States. Despite its status as unapproved drugs, Woodroof believes that this medication will be sold well in the market, since there are great issues such as the high number of patients who suffers from this disease and the high price of AZT in United States. Free market strategy to gain wealth in society is the economic principal of libertarian belief. Free market allows every layer of society to compete in economic fields and it is to prevent monopoly practice in the country. In this movie, Woodroof started to sell the drugs randomly to gay people. After spending times to randomly market the drugs, Woodroof gets an idea from a newspaper headline to promote his business in Dallas. This part is considered as an essential thing of the movie, because it is the main idea of the movie's title. The club was inspired by another member group in New York which was dominated by gay people. The marketing strategy was to sell the membership instead of drugs. People were interested with the membership since the spreading news about effective medication went viral.

3. Spontaneous Order

The substantial perceptions of libertarian social analysis are the order or command in society that occurs spontaneously. Those orders are used to get the goal of life with certain relation towards each other. In this case, human needs order to survive in this world. In the other hand, it is easier to say that one

authority should make the order to everyone. However, everyone has different goals. Historically, humans selected for a greater liberty and yet established to develop a complex society with a complicated system. Fundamental organizations in human's life such as language, law, money, and market are developed spontaneously without one authority. As one of the complex network of associations, civil society becomes one example of spontaneous order, since the civil society is not considered as an organization with a purpose. However, association inside the civil society has their own purpose (Boaz, 1997:16). In the journey of the film, characters have been through some events that make them believe that they also have compassion and action to defend other people's rights as a spontaneous order. The drugs representation is only thinking about the business without considering the side effects of the drugs. Eve is being skeptical when she notices the drugs representation's "flashing gold Rolexes" or his gold expensive watch around his wrist. She believes that people who show their fortune are less compassionate to others. Besides, the drugs have already marketed in the United States without a complete test for human safety. In the movie Dr. Eve as one influential characters realized the danger effect of AZT and after further studies, she decided to lower the dosage of AZT's for her trial.

4. Limited Government

Libertarian believes that the central powers or authorities are absolute and corrupt. However, the irony is that human beings are the one who creates government to protect their rights. Thus, libertarians want to limit and distribute such power through the written law calculating and restricting the power of people who becomes the representative. This is a fundamental political intention of libertarianism, to gain individual liberty and financial growth (Boaz, 1997:17).

Through years, these concepts become the fundamental theoretical framework of modern political belief and thought. Therefore, from the statements above, libertarian belief is different with the liberal. In libertarian, they enhance the liberty of individual, restriction to government's involvement and on the other side, liberal believe in government's order. In this part of discussion, the limited government is the root and major belief of libertarian movement. It is also occurs

in the key concepts of libertarianism. From the movie, characters tried to be free from government's intervention towards the buyers club that Woodroof and Rayon made. Several times they had to deal with foreclosure from the FDA. Woodroof continues his journey against the government by calling his lawyer to sue the FDA and also government for the confiscation. He bravely filed to sue government after what they did to his enterprise. He wanted to limit the government's intervention by making such complaint in the court. His decision to sue the government was supported by Rayon, and Dr. Eve with other patients around the club. Thus, everyone was expected to get the best result from Woodroof's submission which was approval of effective and non toxic drugs to be used widely. Judge stated that the drug can be used if it was approved by the FDA. However in the case, FDA would not see any other medication and prevent patients to use other than AZT. The judge also regrets FDA's decision to confiscate all drugs that proven to be safe. Although he does not win the case, the judge allows him to use Peptide T for his own personal use. He arrives home with a bunch of applause by everyone in the club, including Dr. Eve after the effort that he made to limit the government intervention. This scene uses an instrument from Alexandra Streliski called *Prélude* to show the end of his struggling journey to get medication. The sound of piano notes gives a heartwarming feeling through the scene. Woodroof gets the honor as a man who fights for his rights.

3.3 The United States Crisis Towards HIV/AIDS Medication

According to the article by Suzanne White Junod (2016) in the FDA government site entitled *FDA and Clinical Drug Trials: A Short History*, the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic increased around the 1980s in the United States of America. The government was forced to deliberate about the essential requirements of a meaningful solution. Not long after, the FDA built clinical trials for new disease as the investigations known as the "Treatment IND" in 1987 that allowed patients to receive an investigational drug besides the normal "blinded" research (Junod, 2016).

The IND in the treatment was the acronym for “Investigational New Drug” and it was related to NDA or “New Drug Application”. The treatment was used to complete the pre-marketing requirements and only can be marketed if the test was successful. Thus, the IND submission contains several points that have to be completed.

1) alerts regulators to a sponsor's intent to begin clinical studies in the United States 2) provides the preliminary animal toxicity data indicating it is reasonably safe to administer the drug to humans 3) provides information about the manufacturing process for the new drug 4) provides chemistry background material 5) describes the initial clinical study being proposed, focusing on its safety measures (who is conducting the trials, their qualifications and facilities; and the type of study population involved – volunteers, sick patients, prisoners, women, men, children, etc.) and 6) provides assurance that an IRB (Institutional Review Board) will approve the study protocol before the study begins (Junod, 2016).

The case study of the treatments required some points such as, sign a form, established by the sponsor, indicating their qualifications, explaining the facility and place for the research, and the name of a qualified person that responsible for the study protocol. In short, the procedure of making a drug acceptable in the U.S. FDA market has a long process, since it requires several steps and trials.

During the regulations that released from the government, United States of America was dealing with a massive crisis. The article was written by Alexandra Klausner (2016) entitled *When AIDS was a political football: Newly released pictures from NYC Public Library reveals the passionate protests against Federal healthcare cuts as the HIV epidemic ravaged the Big Apple in the early 1980s* in a British tabloid called the Daily Mail, on its website stated that:

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was founded in March 1987 in New York's Greenwich Village with the intent to call worldwide attention to the severity of the public health crisis, according to the New York Public Library (Klausner, 2016).

Despite the great plan of health institution about marketing the drugs, HIV/AIDS patients need a solution for their problem, since it was not only about the medication issue but also other people’s thought in discriminating the patients as a

public health crisis. There is a dramatic public protest throughout the AIDS crisis around 1980s until 1990s. ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) that was founded by playwright and activist Larry Kramer had a fundamental purpose for ordering the launch of experimental AIDS drugs. The organization itself attempted to engage with women and minority group to the issue. It is used to bring the message to the world. The protest also aimed to get the media attention for a greater awareness towards HIV/AIDS issue around the gay and lesbian community.

In addition, around the 1990s the number of HIV/AIDS patients who joined the demonstration was decreased due to the fact that most of them died from the disease itself. However, the spreading of HIV/AIDS information was enormous that time. People began to aware about the symptom and prevention of the disease. The drugs companies started to compete with each other in the drugs marketing. Each of the drugs prices was extremely expensive. For example, the Turing Pharmaceuticals sold AIDS drug, Daraprim from \$13.50 a tablet to \$750 (Klausner, 2016). It became a new issue to the development of HIV/AIDS drugs history. Furthermore, there are several important points of the protest in the fight against the AIDS crisis around the 1980s According to Klausner (2016).

1. Wall Street pharmaceutical companies: for seeking a high profit from people with AIDS by selling the drugs with expensive prices.
2. FDA (Food and Drug Administration): for the long and complicated process of drugs approval which increased the number of the death from AIDS due to the minimum access to get potentially life-saving drugs.
3. CDC (Center for Disease Control): for the narrow information of AIDS, which did not mention about infections that affect women and injection drug users.
4. NIH (National Institutes of Health): for the lack of diversity in treating AIDS. They did not include women and people of color in the clinical trials.

Those were several materials in the crisis during that time. The drug and

information about HIV/AIDS have been developed through years. People wanted to get the right medication and treatment for the disease. Yet, the government released some unfair programs with its year-long process. There were enormous numbers of HIV/AIDS cases in the world. On the behalf of human rights and equality, ACT UP organization did a protest to lash the government to see the issue.

4. Conclusion

Dallas Buyers Club film tells a story about the HIV/AIDS medical crisis around 1980s. The focus of this film is on the struggle of characters that support their rights to choose medications against the strict regulation. The writer analyzes the movement of fighting over the personal liberty of health against the strict policy of government by applying the theory of libertarianism and its key concepts. As the result, figures of libertarians are shown by Ron Woodroof and Dr. Eve because they succeed in fulfilling their role to get their rights to choose medications against the government's strict policy.

In this film, Woodroof as the patient of HIV/AIDS gives the bright example of a sufferer who fights for his rights as a libertarian movement to get a proper medication and also spreading the medication towards free market with a purpose of other medical option with safety. In addition, giving freedom to patients and also applying the right medical procedures is counted as a libertarian movement, which was depicted by Dr. Eve. In getting the individual's right to get medication they applied the key concepts of libertarianism, such as doing the free market, making their own decision and trying to limit the government intervention. The movie depicts each of journey in struggling to medical and economic involvement. In short, the film depicts the application of libertarianism key concepts from both characters as a patient and medical worker.

This topic is related to the essential part of human life, which is the health care system or regulation. In that case, it is a great effort that they put to get the proper medication and save the business. It is considered as a crucial issue in

human's life since it contains the fundamental aspects of both health and human rights.

5. Bibliography

- Andre, Claire and Velasquez, Manuel. (2015). *A Healthy Bottom Line: Profits or People*. 9 July 2016
<<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focusareas/bioethics/resources/a-healthy-bottom-line-profits-or-people/>>.
- Barnet, Sylvan, et al. (2008). *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Benyahia, Casey Sarah, Freddie Gaffney, and John White. (2006). *As Film Studies: The Essential Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Boaz, David. (1997). *Libertarianism: A Primer*. New York: The Free Press.
- Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. (1979). *An Introduction Film Art*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Borten, Craig and Melissa Wallack. (2012). *Dallas Buyers Club, Green - Fifth Revision*. 9 July 2016
<http://focusguilds2013.com/workspace/media/dbc_final-script_-12.02.12-.pdf>.
- Brennan, James. (2012). *Libertarianism What Everyone Needs To Know*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dibell, Ansen. (1988). *Plot: The Elements of Fiction Writing*. Ohio: Writer's Digest Book.
- Fulton, Helen, et al. (2005). *Narrative and Media*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- George, Mary W. (2008). *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Guerin, Wilfred L.et.al. (2005). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Huebert, Jacob. H. (2010). *Libertarianism Today*. USA: Praeger.

- Junod, Suzanne White. (2016). *FDA and Clinical Drug Trials: A Short History*. 5 August 2016
 <<http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/WhatWeDo/History/Overviews/ucm304485.htm>>.
- Klausner, Alexandra. (2016). *When AIDS was a political football: Newly released pictures fom NYC Public Library reveals the passionate protests against Federal halthcare cuts as the HIV epidemic ravaged the Big Apple in the early 1980s*. 20 August 2016 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3404427/When-AIDS-political-football-Newly-released-pictures-NYC-Public-Library-reveals-passionate-protests-against-Federal-healthcare-cuts-HIV-epidemic-ravaged-Big-Apple-early-1980s.html>>.
- Meyer, Michael. (1990). *The Bedford Introduction to Literature Second Edition*. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.
- Meyer, Michael. (2011). *Literature to Go*. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.
- Nelmes, Jill. (2012). *Introduction to Film Studies*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Perrine, Laurence. (1988). *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense*. Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.
- Pratista, Himawan. (2008). *Memahami Film*. Yogyakarta: Homerian Pustaka.
- Relativity Music Group. (2013). *Dallas Buyers Club Soundtrack*. 20 August 2016
 <<http://www.soundtrack.net/movie/dallas-buyers-club/>>.
- Selby. *Basic Cinematic Techniques*. 29 January 2016
 <<http://teacherweb.com/WA/CloverParkHighSchool/MsSelby/Basic-Cinematic-Techniques.pdf>>.
- Sikov, Ed. (2010). *Film Studies an Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sudjiman, Panuti. (1992). *Memahami Cerita Rekaan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.
- Tischler, Henry L. (2011). *Introduction to Sociology Tenth Edition*. United States of America: Wadsworth.
- United Nations (UN). (1949). *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*. 29 January 2016

<<http://www.jus.uio.no/lm/un.universal.declaration.of.human.rights.1948/portrait.a4.pdf>>.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. (1949). *Theory of Literature 3rd edition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

