# Should Individual Freedom Be Restricted to Preserve Social Order?

## Exploring Ethical Dilemmas in “Alba”

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Should Individual Freedom Be Restricted to Preserve Social Order?

Humanity is set apart because of the profound gift of free will. It is a fundamental right to determine one's autonomy and make choices independently. Yet no person exists completely apart from society. Social rules place limits on individual behavior in order to protect others and maintain order. This creates an ethical problem: Should individual freedom be restricted to preserve social order? And when is it considered abuse? In Alejandro Rodriguez's play *Alba*, this question becomes a conflict between government and tyranny, or more specifically, between protection and control. Although some restrictions on individual freedom are necessary to preserve social order, those restrictions become unethical when authority values control and obedience more than the autonomy of an individual.

Some restrictions on freedom are necessary for society to function. A society without rules could allow individuals to harm others without consequences. Laws against violence, theft, and exploitation limit individual choices, but those limitations also protect the freedom of everyone else. In this sense, freedom cannot mean having the ability to do absolutely anything. One person's freedom should not come at the expense of another person's safety or basic rights. Social order therefore has an important purpose. Rules can create boundaries that allow people to live alongside one another without constant conflict. However, there is a difference between restricting behavior that causes harm and restricting a person simply because an authority figure wants control.

However, the existence of necessary restrictions does not mean that authority should have unlimited control. Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* presents an extreme example of what happens when power becomes separated from accountability. AM is a sentient supercomputer created by humanity. AM is the villain of the story; he wipes out humanity, keeping five humans alive to torture them for eternity. Despite his capabilities, which are far beyond those of the human mind, his motivations stem from a deeper anger and hatred toward humanity. He is confined to his computerized existence and does not have the autonomy to roam the Earth. In his envy, he punishes humanity. His name is a play on words derived from the quote, "I think, therefore I am." This quote suggests that AM is a conscious, living entity, just as animals and other creatures that are capable of thought are. What sets humanity apart is our free will. As a society, we often take our autonomy for granted, constructing our own social prisons because of redundant emotions such as fear, hate, anger, sadness, and selfishness in an attempt to maintain control. In Ellison's story, humanity created AM, subsequently creating its own demise. Similarly, in *Alba*, after the death of her husband, Alba lays down the holy hammer restricting her daughters from having any type of freedom or autonomy as a false sense of protection. Her need for control backfires, causing an emotional demise among her daughters. The saying, "strict parents raise sneaky kids," is a very accurate statement in regard to this story. Alba's attempt to control her daughters drives them away, leading them to sneak around with boys. One of her daughters, Adela, is ultimately driven to the point of suicide. Like Alba, AM represents an authority that becomes consumed by control. Both examples demonstrate that when power is not balanced by responsibility, freedom can disappear entirely.

Power can be corrupted by a need for control and oppressive societal standards. Wu Zetian was a Chinese empress confined by societal rules. Driven by her defiance, she became a ruthless ruler, sacrificing even her family to preserve her throne and country. Similarly, Alba becomes the sole matriarch of her household following her husband's death. Grief manifests in various ways, and for Alba, her grief turned into a dictatorship. This serves as a social commentary on the pressures we place upon each other. Alba is

driven by fear and her understanding of what success is meant to look like. Her protectiveness has created a prison for her daughters, driving them to rebel. This is a testament to our instinctual craving for autonomy as a species. Ultimately, it is a matter of the purpose behind rules and regulations. Our human emotions can create bias, dictating the integrity of social restrictions that are meant to preserve order.

An opposing argument is that people cannot always be trusted to regulate themselves. Without authority, individuals may prioritize their own desires over the well-being of others, creating disorder. Alba's fear of losing control over her family reflects this concern. After the death of her husband, Alba becomes the sole matriarch of her household and believes that strict rules will protect her daughters and preserve the family. Likewise, societies establish laws because relying entirely on individual morality could leave people vulnerable to harm. Some limits on freedom are therefore necessary. Complete freedom without responsibility could create anarchy and place innocent people at risk. However, preserving order does not automatically justify every restriction placed upon individuals. There is a difference between preventing harm and demanding obedience. In *Alba*, Alba's rigid control creates the very disorder she is attempting to prevent. She restricts her daughters' freedom because she believes she is protecting them, but her need for control drives them to rebel and hide their relationships. Alba's actions demonstrate how excessive restrictions can produce emotional and social consequences that are more destructive than the behavior she was trying to prevent. Her family becomes a social prison in which obedience and reputation are valued above personal freedom and happiness. The story suggests that authority becomes oppressive when protection is no longer the primary purpose and control becomes the goal.

Individual freedom and social order should therefore not be treated as complete opposites. A functioning society requires boundaries, but those boundaries must have limits of their own. Restrictions are justified when they protect people from genuine harm, but they become dangerous when they exist primarily to satisfy a desire for control. *Alba* demonstrates that excessive control can create the very disorder it was meant to prevent, illustrating the catastrophic consequences of power without accountability. Ultimately, true social order cannot depend on the complete surrender of individual freedom. Society must allow individuals enough autonomy to make choices, develop their identities, and live without being constantly controlled by those who claim to know what is best for them. Order is necessary for freedom to exist, but freedom must remain protected so that order does not become tyranny.

References

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