

[Alexander Herzen](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Monday 17 March 2008



It may seem odd to quote a 19th century Russian philosopher here, we tend to deal more with the thinkers of the Enlightenment. But Tom Stoppard, commenting on the events of the 1968 student "revolution" makes a point I hadn't seen before (clearly, my knowledge of 19th century Russian philosophers needs to be brought up to speed).

...[Alexander Herzen](#)?s [3] own words about the English in the 19th century: "They don't give asylum out of respect for the asylum seekers, but out of respect for themselves. They invented personal liberty without having any theories about it. They value liberty because it's liberty."

Well, quite, and could we have a few more of our servants in government paying attention please? We don't value liberty because it makes us more equal in outcome, nor do we set aside liberty when it does not. We don't value liberty for the security it offers us, nor do we set it aside when said liberty is vaguely threatened by adolescent males with home made bombs. And most certainly we don't value liberty because it allows The State to monitor us all so that we are safe, or so that we can "prove our identities".

We might indeed agree to certain measures, for example, the prancing and preening that is party politics, for long experience has shown us that this is a means to an end, the furtherance and protection of that liberty.

But as to the end result, the aim, that is indeed that liberty, and to ask what that liberty is for is to ask a nonsensical question. We value liberty simply because it is liberty.

Not just liberty from and most certainly not simply liberty to: but freedom, the right to cleave our own path through life, the liberty to choose our own path to perdition, as long as we are not interfering with the very same rights of our fellows.

There's not much of 19th century England that I would want to bring back but this is indeed one part. What terribly confuses me about the modern world is that not everyone agrees with me.

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