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LIBERTY, PEACE, AND FRIENDLINESS:

THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF AUBERON HERBERT

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Studies
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ABSTRACT

The political ideas of Auberon Herbert are usually associated with the late Victorian Individualist thinkers primarily influenced by the philosopher Herbert Spencer. Although Herbert derived his political philosophy of Voluntaryism from Spencer's thinking it also owed much to J. S. Mill. Voluntaryism was based on a Lockean-Spencerian conception of individual natural rights that asserted self-ownership and the moral obligation for individuals to respect the rights of other people. Rights protection against force and fraud constituted the primary purpose of government, which held only the same rights as its individual creators. Herbert, aptly describing Voluntaryism as the system of liberty, peace and friendliness, applied these principles to a range of situations from street maintenance, to collective property purchase, and, finally, to the voluntary support of the state. Voluntary taxation was the most controversial component of Herbert's theory, emphasising its distinctiveness. Although Herbert resisted socialist and new liberal attempts to expand the role of the state, his reasons for doing so shared little in common with conservative critics of this direction. Herbert, a republican and democrat, repeatedly attacked privilege and advocated significant change including land reform and universal suffrage. His position represented that of a radical reformer seeking to promote Voluntaryism as the basis for friendly co-operation among free individuals at home and abroad. An internationalist, Herbert opposed aggressive imperialism, but also supported national self-determination, including Irish Home Rule. The notion of the voluntary state has led to claims of Herbert's anarchism, but research indicates a greater complexity to his political ideas. Overall, Herbert was an extreme libertarian who never completely lost sight of the state, although he greatly limited its role. While Herbert's political theory was idealistic, it avoided the social prescription usually associated with utopianism. Herbert's commitment to an ethos of radical progressivism was one he shared with other

contemporary socialist and anarchist thinkers who, like Herbert, attempted to live the politics they espoused. For his political philosophy and activism, Herbert warrants acknowledgement as one of the most prominent English libertarians of the nineteenth century.

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