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978-0-521-02686-4 - Equal Freedom and Utility: Herbert Spencer's Liberal Utilitarianism

D. Weinstein

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This rich and provocative study assesses Herbert Spencer's pivotal contribution to the emergence of liberal utilitarianism, as well as the conceptual and logical integrity of his version of it. Spencer, as much as J. S. Mill, provided liberal utilitarianism with its formative contours. Like Mill, Spencer tried to reconcile a principle of liberty and strong moral rights with a utilitarian, maximizing theory of good. He endeavored, like Mill, to make utilitarianism more ethically attractive by fortifying it with powerful deontological constraints on the pursuit of utility. And yet, insofar as rights were indefeasible for Spencer, his liberal utilitarian amalgam was more unstable than Mill's. In aggressively trying to occupy what Samuel Scheffler has referred to as "a non-existent middle ground" between utility and rights, Spencer's liberal utilitarianism powerfully reveals the philosophical stakes at issue in trying to systematize liberalism by liberalizing utilitarianism.

This is a major contribution to understanding nineteenth-century political thought and to utilitarian studies, and will be of interest to graduates and scholars in the fields of political theory, moral and political philosophy and the history of political thought.

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D. WEINSTEIN

Wake Forest University



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521622646

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First published 1998

This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Weinstein, D. (David). 1949–

Equal freedom and utility : Herbert Spencer's liberal utilitarianism – D. Weinstein.

p. cm. – (Ideas in context: 49)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 62264 6 (hb)

1. Social choice. 2. Utilitarianism. 3. Liberalism.

4. Spencer, Herbert, 1820–1903.

I. Title. II. Series.

HB846.8.W45 1998

192–dc21 97–27895 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-62264-6 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-62264-6 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02686-4 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02686-5 paperback

Cambridge University Press

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*For my parents
To the Sierra night sky*

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Acknowledgements

My study of Spencer's liberal utilitarianism began too many years ago when Martin Seliger of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem suggested that I "have a look at Spencer." I have now had a long and rather hard "look," incurring many debts along the way.

I owe a great deal to Richard E. Flathman, my mentor at The Johns Hopkins University. Dick Flathman gave me the conceptual tools without which this book would have remained too unphilosophical and, therefore, certainly pedestrian. Dick taught me the virtues of thinking rigorously and cautiously. I hope that I have succeeded in doing both in some small measure here. Dick also understood the practical importance of his students finishing their Ph.D.s before dotage set in so that there would still be time left for a life and an academic career. For this, I am grateful beyond measure.

I am equally indebted to J. G. A. Pocock who taught me that there was much more to the history of political thought than just thinking about past political thought. From John Pocock, I learned that thinking about the past should proceed archaeologically even though the best archaeology is invariably a rethinking.

Three others, in particular, have taken precious time to comment upon larger and smaller pieces of this manuscript over the years. They are J. B. Schneewind, John Gray and the late Judith Shklar. I am beholden to all three. I am just as indebted to the exceptionally insightful, anonymous reviewers of earlier drafts of this book.

Many other colleagues and friends have influenced my thinking about Spencer in particular, and about the history of political thought in general, in subtler though no less determining ways. Avital Simhony, as unsparing a critic as she is a close friend, has pushed my thinking forward conceptually and chronologically. Now on to the new liberalism! For helping me thread my way through the threatening shoals of liberal utilitarianism, I must also thank

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Michael Freedden, Fred Rosen, Peter Nicholson and Jonathan Riley. Avihu Zakai, Yaron Ezrahi, Jerry Gaus and Dick Polenberg deserve many thanks as well.

To Ginni Walsh especially, I owe what can never be repaid. When I faltered and doubted, she always became more convinced.

A Scheinbrun Fellowship at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem gave me two years (1987-8) of limited teaching, much reading and even some writing. "Equal Freedom, Rights and Utility in Spencer's Moral Philosophy," *The History of Political Thought*, 11 (1990), 119-42, was a fruit of those sharp-edged Jerusalem years. More recently (1994), Wake Forest University awarded me a Z. Smith Reynolds Research Leave which proved invaluable in bringing this project to a close.

My colleagues in the Department of Politics at Wake Forest deserve to be commended for their valor in putting up with my too-predictable humor, and for standing by me, over the years. Kathy Smith and Hank Kennedy have been rocks of salvation.

In Gale Sigal, I met a fellow traveler in spirit, love and the life of mind. More than anyone, she exemplifies what it means to be an intellectual, and a Bronx-raised intellectual at that.

To my parents I owe most of all. From the disciplined simplicity of prairie modernism to the virtue of toleration, they showed me just about all I ever really needed to know in order to live as I should.

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