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978-0-521-13501-6 - The Practice of Rights
Richard E. Flathman
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The practice of rights

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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LONDON - NEW YORK - MELBOURNE

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

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

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521135016

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First published 1976
This digitally printed version 2010

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

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Flathman, Richard E
The practice of rights.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Civil rights. I. Title.
JC571.F52 323.4 75-38185

ISBN 978-0-521-21170-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-13501-6 Paperback

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For
NANCY, KRISTY, KARIE, AND JENNY

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PREFACE

The present work represents a continuation of my effort to analyze concepts that are prominent in politics and in political philosophy. Both the importance of the topic of rights and the assumptions from which the work proceeds suggest that the analysis should be able to stand alone as an attempt to contribute to clarity and critical reflection concerning a dimension of political life. One hopes, of course, that studies of this sort will accumulate toward an integrated understanding of major features of politics. The recurrence of certain themes and topics – for example, *rules, action, practices, the social* – in the analysis of a number of major political concepts offers some encouragement in this regard. The more apparent of these continuities, however, tend to be at what might be called the metatheoretical level. It remains to be seen whether they foreshadow coherencies of a more substantive character. But substantive coherence of the sort sought by political philosophy can be forced only at the cost of losing contact with the political realities putatively under analysis. Hence patience (sustained by belief in the value of particular studies) is required. Unfortunately, substantive discontinuities and disjunctions are less difficult to come by.

Work on the present study began in 1970–1, when I had the pleasure of a year's residence at the Centre Universitaire International in Paris. My thanks to the staff of that excellent facility for their many kindnesses and to the University of Chicago for research leave and generous financial support. Most of the writing was done between 1972 and 1975 under the distinctive conditions that obtained in the Department of Political Science of the University of Washington at Seattle. Whatever range of effects the experiences of those years may have had on it, there

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is no doubt that this study benefited from the able research assistance of Susan Hekman and Craig Carr, from the comments of Arthur DiQuattro, Selvin Eisen, Margaret Levi, Joel Rosch and Stuart Scheingold, and from my many conversations with Paul Brass, Morton Kroll, and especially Ruth Horowitz. My thanks also to Phillip Abbott, Nannerl Keohane, Paul Peterson, and Melvin Richter, all of whom commented critically and helpfully on the manuscript.

London, 1975

R. E. F.