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.
EQUAL FREEDOM AND UTILITY
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EQUAL FREEDOM
AND UTILITY

_Herbert Spencer’s Liberal Utilitarianism_

D. WEINSTEIN
_Wake Forest University_
For my parents

To the Sierra night sky
Contents

Acknowledgements x
Note on the text xii

Introduction 1
1 Social evolution 11
2 Social evolution and the moral psychology of equal freedom 33
3 Equal freedom and moral rights 67
4 Moral rights and utility 83
5 The logical coherence of Spencer’s liberal utilitarianism 114
6 Spencer’s ethical reasoning 139
7 Land nationalization and property 181

Conclusion 210
Bibliography 218
Index 228
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Note on the text

I have placed some references in parentheses, rather than in the footnotes, if the text has previously been footnoted in full or if the context of my discussion clearly indicates the book or article being cited or referred to. Whenever possible, I have used original editions or reprints of older books. Otherwise, I have used modern standard editions.