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978-0-521-62264-6 - 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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*For my parents
To the Sierra night sky*

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Acknowledgements

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