Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied evolution to everything from psychology to aesthetics. A self-declared 'philosopher,' he wrote on many topics, and contemporaries saw him as one of the most important intellectual figures of their time. After co-presenting his theory of natural selection with Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace visited Spencer in 1862 when he wanted to find out what evolution really meant.

Despite his importance, only a few full-scale biographical studies of Spencer have ever appeared. This is mainly because of a development, occurring within his own lifetime, condemning Spencer to irrelevance - the emergence of disciplinary walls fencing off different realms of inquiry where he recognized no such divisions. Historical scholarship on Spencer has thus come from scholars in various fields - political thought, sociology, ethics, psychology, English literature, feminism, science - who deal mostly with his effects in their own little jurisdiction.

Mark Francis, in the Political Science Department at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, admirably seeks to cut across such provincialisms by creating an integrated intellectual biography of Spencer, a "hybrid between biography and textual analysis" (4). Arranged in four parts discussing Spencer's life and personality, his metaphysics, his writings on biology and philosophy of science, and his political theory and sociology, the book is an unabashedly revisionist view of Spencer with many intriguing observations and conclusions.

One important point is Francis's argument that Spencer really lost his overweening faith in progress much earlier than previously thought: after his breakdown at age 36, he projected his loss of faith in his own abilities onto the rest of the universe. Hence 1856 becomes the new dividing line between Spencer's early strident optimism and his later belief in the need to adjust to circumstances. Other points are striking, such as the contention that Spencer drew a parallel between the "assimilation of food by an organism and the assimilation of information by human intelligence." (203) Francis's reinterpretation of Spencer as a "corporate thinker rather than an individualist" (334) - continuing an argument he advanced in the late 1970s - is a view that goes against most scholarship on Spencer, and will no doubt prompt rebuttals. But this fulfils Francis's aim to "create new interpretative patterns where none existed." (viii)

The first part of Francis's book not only draws a new portrait of a 'playful' Spencer - it is also its most powerful section. "An Individual and his Personal Culture" is an almost psychobiographical account of how Spencer constructed his public persona and in so doing presented a challenge to future readers. In an act of retroactive self-fashioning, by the end of his life Spencer had put much of his creative energy into writing his massive Autobiography - a work so detailed that all but the most sceptical investigator would feel as if she entirely knew Spencer after reading it. (As for those sceptics, Spencer destroyed any material that contradicted his desired posthumous reputation). Francis has managed to solve this problem by using indirect evidence - others' accounts about Spencer and some minute clues he and others left behind - to create a new and intimate portrait of Spencer's private life.

There are some problems. Sometimes the reader has to work out for himself the direct link between Spencer's work and Francis's elaborate discussions of various milieus - intellectuals' beliefs in a 'New Reformation'; the thoughts of those working on a relaunched Westminster Review; the background of psychology. More vigorous editing would have reduced other repetitions and digressions. And the book simply does not live up to its ambitious title - a more accurate subtitle would have been "and the Invention of his own Life".

But the book's most frustrating part is the footnoting, wherein Francis indulges an apparent taste for score-settling. This would all be very well if he properly supported every rebuttal. But he seems too eager to correct scholars in various fields without fully demonstrating an awareness of all of the relevant literature on these different subjects. Consider, for instance, Francis's work in history of science. When he makes elementary mistakes in it (Darwin saw species as natural categories (230); phrenologists were vitalists (389n40)), or when he mischaracterizes the historiographical debates over Lamarckism (387n110), the reader is left wondering how or where he got his information. But perhaps Francis has encountered a pitfall for anyone writing about a transdisciplinary figure. Or
perhaps in the course of 'living' with Spencer for almost thirty years he has absorbed some of his subject's own autodidacticism and willingness to chide others.

But the simple fact that we finally have an integrated book-length picture of Spencer that goes beyond his *Autobiography* offsets such complaints about individual parts. In so doing Francis has performed an enormous service to historians of science and Victorianists, and *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* deserves our close attention.