

BOOK REVIEW

***The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, editors Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 741 pp + xiv. ISBN: 9780521119214.**

The *Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* is magisterial in scope; forbidding in length; endlessly interesting, surprising, provocative and insightful as a reference source; and, occasionally somewhat frustrating or curious for the baffled reader confronted with over 700 pages of erudite guidance to almost every imaginable highway and byway of Foucault scholarship today (*almost*: more on this, tendentiously, shortly). I should add that while these foregoing reasons make it a very exciting addition to that body of scholarship, they also mean that it is not the easiest book to review. I have never before admitted in the opening sentences of a book review – because I have never had cause to admit such a shameful fact – that I have not read every single page of the book under review. But here I am making such an admission – as I just mentioned, and in my defence, the book runs to over 700 pages and its 117 separate entries run the conceptual gamut from ‘Abnormal’ to ‘War’ (Terms) and ‘Althusser’ to ‘von Clausewitz’ (Proper Names).

A Lexicon, like its close scholarly relatives the Encyclopaedia, the Dictionary, the Handbook and the Companion, is doubtless not intended to be read from cover to cover, and this particular Lexicon presents a range of different points of entry or pathways of reading. For example, in the midst of writing something on Foucault’s strategic resort to rights discourse in his late work, it was very helpful to me to be able to turn to John Protevi’s entry on ‘War.’¹ One can dip into this treasure trove to solve any manner of problems (equally to raise them, or sharpen them, of course) in the course of one’s own research. Or one can pick an entry and follow it. Here the particular path that a reader traces through the *Lexicon* will depend both on that reader’s chosen entry point and on the trail that he or she is directed to by the cross-references at the end of each individual entry. Betraying my own disciplinary affiliations, one of my first journeys through the *Lexicon* went as follows: I started with Andrew Dilts’s excellent entry on ‘Law,’² crucial topic but by no means an easy entry to write, which then sent me in the direction of Jana Sawicki’s entry on ‘Freedom,’³ which in turn sent me to the entry on ‘Critique’ by Christopher Penfield,⁴ and thence to Ann V. Murphy on ‘Finitude,’⁵ (pp. 153-5), ‘Death’

¹ *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (2014), 540-45.

² *Ibid.*, 243-49.

³ *Ibid.*, 156-61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-55.

by Arun Iyer,⁶ and finally Eduardo Mendieta on 'Biopower.'⁷ (It occurred to me, giving myself over to the serendipity of the trail of cross-references, that one could play any number of games with this voluminous text – 'Six Degrees of Separation from Biopower/Biopolitics' was one that sprang to my mind. But, at any rate, following this path through the Foucauldian thicket, adventitiously moving from topic to topic, really does impress upon the reader the range, scope and inventiveness of Foucault's thought and the various and unpredictable turns that it takes.) Then again, I could not help myself from heading straight to certain entries on certain topics. The *Lexicon* is replete with eminent and emerging scholars and there is an absolute wealth of material. Again, my reading choices were partial in at least two obvious senses of that term, but I learnt a great deal from the two careful, nuanced and precise entries by Mark Kelly on 'State'⁸ and on 'Revolution,'⁹ and also Banu Bargu's insightful treatment of 'Sovereignty'¹⁰ and Stuart Elden's clear explication of (and very helpful reading list on) Foucault's treatment of 'Space.'¹¹ I could go on at greater length, but a review of a book of this sort is probably more helpfully directed not to the individual entries themselves but to the editorial conception, and organisation, of the volume as a whole. It is on this level that several questions arose for me.

Let me start with the question of the choice of entries. Some choices clearly command inclusion. Some of these I have already mentioned. Terms such as biopower and sovereignty, for example, are so fundamentally a part of Foucault's conceptual vocabulary that their omission would seriously undermine the authority of any *Lexicon*. Just as one could not have a Marx *Lexicon* without the labour theory of value, one could not purport to have a Foucault *Lexicon* without an entry on power, or on discipline, or subjectification, and so forth. All the usual conceptual suspects are included, and often themselves excitingly and masterfully addressed by the usual scholarly subjects. (Deleuze on Foucault on the *dispositif* was a nice touch.) And yet a Foucault *Lexicon* would not really be a *Foucault* *Lexicon* without some more playful, unexpected, and *outré* inclusions. (A *Foucault* *Lexicon* surely has itself to poke some fun at the will to taxonomize and tame the wild profusion of Foucauldian things...). So we are treated to several entries, as the editors put it, on 'more obscure themes and notions.'¹² They would include Christianity and death in such a category, and I am not so sure I would agree with this, at least not with 'Security, Territory, Population' and *The Birth of the Clinic* in mind, but undoubtedly painting, love and Shakespeare are not topics one would ordinarily associate with Foucault. Of course, anyone approaching such a text comes with their own demands and interests. Why is there not an entry on 'Rights', this reviewer might ask, in nit-picking and barrow-pushing mode? Why not a stand-alone entry on 'The Pastorate' or on 'Pastoral Power'? Why not

⁶ Ibid., 94-98.

⁷ Ibid., 44-49.

⁸ Ibid., 477-81.

⁹ Ibid., 438-42.

¹⁰ Ibid., 456-65.

¹¹ Ibid., 466-71.

¹² Ibid., xv.

something on 'Surveillance' or on 'The Panopticon,' on 'Delinquency' or 'The Carceral' or 'The Gaze'? Why an entry on 'Liberalism' and not a separate one on 'Neo-Liberalism', given the current and evolving contestation over the 1979 lectures? Any exercise in capturing Foucault's concerns (or any thinker's, really) necessarily invites such responses and on the individual level they cannot be taken too seriously. But on a broader level they do implicate (what I think are more important) questions about editorial choices and the motivations and philosophy that underlie them. The introduction to the volume is very short at two pages and beyond a few remarks about what each entry is individually hoping to achieve (a coherent summation of its chosen topic and the relation between that topic and Foucault's thought, and the provision of some references for further reading) it does not offer much guidance in the way of how to approach the collection itself. The choice of what topics to exclude might be deliberate and itself indicative of a particular editorial interpretation of Foucault, but it is not clear, beyond a general intent to capture the important and the lesser-known, what policy guided the inclusion and exclusion of topics. Nor is it clear, amongst those included, which topics are seen to be more important and which of lesser importance? Is there an implicit message in the fact that the entry from Phillippe Artières on 'Prison,'¹³ itself the topic of a full-length study by Foucault and possibly his best-known work, is less than a page while the entry (a very good one, it has to be said) on 'Sovereignty' (announced as a 'counterconcept' and 'negative pole' in its first paragraph) runs to almost ten pages? Indeed, that lexicon of lexicons, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, informs me that a 'lexicon' is a 'dictionary ... [or] a vocabulary of some department of knowledge or sphere of activity; the vocabulary or word-stock of ... a particular speaker'. If this is so, and lexicon is strictly construed, then entries 1-91 ('Terms') make sense, but it is not clear why 'Proper Names' (entries 92-117) are included. Of course, to say the first 91 entries 'make sense' is by no means to concede that it would not have been more helpful to a reader to offer some internal discrimination between these different terms. Some, like genealogy and archaeology, are particular methods or analytics of Foucault's. Others, like discipline and biopower, might be called concepts. Yet others, like liberalism and love and space and politics, are of course not *Foucault's* terms. Far from wanting to exclude the discussion of 'Proper Names', though, I would perhaps have added to it with something like 'Places' (entries on 'America', 'Iran', and 'Tunisia' would have presented some very interesting possibilities). In short, I felt on reading (parts of) this wonderfully interesting and rich body of work on Foucault by many excellent Foucault scholars that I was in need of, to mix my metaphors, a compass for the lexicon that not only articulated some of these choices but engaged some of the methodological questions they raise about approaching Foucault in this taxonomic or categorical way. But then perhaps I am taking both the idea of the lexicon too seriously or too literally, and not simply embracing the experience of wandering between these different and fascinating entries without an editorial guidebook. Perhaps, ultimately, such works are to be 'judged' (there is no entry on 'Judgment', complains the legal theorist in passing) not on what they include or exclude but rather on the questions they give rise to and the problems they

¹³ *Ibid.*, 392-93.

engender. Perhaps I am reading this text in too un-Foucauldian a way, demanding a readers' manual from the very beginning instead of supplying one myself. At any rate, and despite the questions I've raised of this book, it is one I plan on returning to again and again over the coming years.

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