

# Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

## *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*

LEONARD LAWLOR and JOHN NALE (Eds.)

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This volume is a compilation of all the important concepts espoused by philosopher and sociologist, Michel Foucault. Written by various academics and experts in Foucauldian studies, the volume provides a rich reference for readers on the concepts and terms elaborated by Foucault and academics utilizing his works. The concepts and definitions provide platforms for appropriation of the terms to various areas of knowledge and disciplines. The edited work further shapes the interdisciplinarity of Foucault's philosophy, in terms of application and praxis.

Lawlor and Nale divide the compendium into two: the terms saliently explained by Foucault in his works and the thinkers who Foucault has written about in his work and have influenced him in the generation of his ideas.

In the first part, the contributors, in discussing and clarifying the meanings of the terms and concepts in Foucault's philosophy, have utilized more than 50 works of Foucault, in English and in French. Some of the concepts and themes that can be highlighted are: *biopolitics and biopower, discipline, discourse, ethics, freedom, knowledge, power and truth*.

Foucault uses archaeology as form of "unearthing and forming connections" and not particularly as a form of epistemology, or a logical and scientific way of reflecting on how we acquire knowledge. Transcending from just accepting knowledge in itself, Foucault calls one to dig deeper than the surface. Gary Gutting discusses how Foucault uses archaeology as a metaphor to understand the ways of knowing and form connections of what we acquire as knowledge to socio-historical conditions.

As Foucault brings in this facet of connecting knowledge building processes with socio-historical conditions and allowing the subjectivity of the shared collective to proliferate, he presents other factors that play a role in generating knowledge—relations and discourse.

Connected with the methodology of archaeology of knowledge is the concept of discourse. Richard Lynch defines discourse as a "set of statements that are correlated with each other, among which certain regularities obtain ... these discourses are not fixed and invariable, but rather are bound by all the prior statements and altered by every

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new statement that is made within a given discourse” (120-121). Participants in the discourses, similar to those engaging in archaeology of knowledge, by relating knowledge of the present to the historical conditions of the past, form continuities and inter-actions that may not be fixed or stable, but dynamic. This also has an implication to how Foucault characterizes truth. As new knowledge is being formed through the practice of discourse, truth may never be absolute.

As relations stir the products of knowledge and stimulate the production of relative truths, the important concepts of *biopolitics* and *biopower* become very significant in Foucault’s philosophy. From its etymology, the Greek word ‘bio’ means ‘life.’ Within Foucault’s conceptualizations, he intertwines politics and power, to the capacity of subjects, as entities with agency. Eduardo Mendieta further elaborates that to enact power as “political agents ... members of a living species,” human beings use *biopower* (37).

The discussion on *biopolitics* and *biopower* relates well to the ambivalence experienced by the subject, particularly as subjects are placed in forms of control and discipline. The concept of discipline is very significant in Foucault’s philosophy. In fact, in this volume, Devonya Havis well illustrates how discipline is connected with *biopolitics*, and how subjects as ‘bodies’ are constantly being disciplined through the forms of surveillance and censure, to the point of the coercion toward particular ways of acting (110). This creates a push and pull factor, the ambivalence experienced by subjects as they follow rules and are disciplined to the point of total institutionalization, yet they resist through their political capacities and agency.

In Foucault’s elucidation of ethics and aesthetics of existence, he examines the pivotal role of power and subjectification, i.e., each person has the capacity to be a subject and an individual who can exercise self-choice, as a mode of being and a way of life. In the chapter on Ethics, Gary Gutting exemplifies how power and subjectification are fundamental for an individual to enact distinctive tastes and preferences by which agency is deployed. The use of agency means that an individual “avoids the full force of social power structures by finding a location within the interstices of these structures where the individual as such can flourish” (140). The heart of Foucault’s ethics, then, is not within the metaphysical or normative ethics, but through aesthetics of existence, “a private enterprise rather than an imposition of rules for how we should live” (140).

This brings us to question: to what extent is an individual free to live this kind of aesthetic existence, considering that there is still this structural force from disciplinary power? In Jana Sawicki’s contribution, she emphasized that Foucault rarely discusses the concept of freedom, in an existentialist and phenomenological sense. Sawicki contextualized what freedom may mean in Foucauldian terms: a capacity for critical and historical reflection and the “capacity to transform relations of power through ethical practices of freedom” (158). This may mean that the state of freedom is not universal or absolute; however, it celebrates the human potential to think for oneself and to constantly reflect upon the socio-historical conditions, connect these with the present, and allow these to serve as guide for the future. This process allows one to determine the choices to make despite conditional constraints.

Lawlor and Nale do an exemplary work in the organization of the text as well as providing an immense and profound resource to anyone who wishes to engage in the study of Foucault’s philosophy.

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