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**David E. Guinn on A Dictionary of Human Rights (2nd Edition) by David Robertson. London, England: Europa Publications, 2004. 346pp.**

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**A Dictionary of Human Rights (2nd Edition) by David Robertson. London, England: Europa Publications, 2004. 346pp.**

David Robertson's A Dictionary of Human Rights is a curious, rather idiosyncratic collection of 230 brief essays covering a sampling of human rights related concepts, issues or, in a few cases, individuals. As Robertson declares in the preface, the book, "a form of annotated dictionary, is for all those who are not legal experts and who want to get a quick grasp of basic issues in human rights discourse without either being blinded by the endless legal technicalities or forced to ignore them" (3). In this respect he succeeds admirably. The mini-essays are generally well written and, as he promises, free of legal jargon. However, it must be noted that they are personal essays in which Robertson's opinions play a significant role. For example, in explaining the US failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, Robertson believes that "many women were unwilling to put their practical interests second to a status issue, and preferred the, arguably, patronizing protection to the absolute abandonment of gender labeling in policy" (80).

What is more difficult in this book is determining the real subject and scope of the work. It is not clear exactly what Robertson intends to cover by the term "human rights." As he admits, he uses the term "interchangeably[y] with 'civil liberties' and 'civil rights'" and rejects the idea that there are important distinctions among those terms (3). He also admits to a "bias" favoring "political and constitutional entitlements and freedoms, rather than economic- and social-need satisfaction" and drawing most of his examples from "the USA, European human rights documents and institutions, and from the German Constitution" (3).

These biases are clearly reflected in the terms that he has elected to include in the dictionary. For example, he defines many of the rights amendments from the US Constitution by numerical designation (e.g., Fourteenth Amendment, etc., as opposed to the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution) and defines some terms that would appear to be appropriate to define broadly, such as the term "Equal Protection," according to the narrow technical meaning provided by the US courts. Indeed, there appears to be no effort to address broader human rights concepts important in the international human rights arena, such as "rule of law" or "*jus cogens*."

Mirroring this is a tendency to include terms that are historically significant within a specific countries (like the US) toward which he is biased, but may not be part of current international human rights law. For example, he includes entries on "Sus Law," an 1839 British stop and search law repealed in 1984, and "Lochner" a 1905 US Supreme Court case that came to symbolize the concept of substantive due process (a term not separately defined by Robertson) that was used as a tool to undercut progressive social or economic rights legislation.

Other entries would appear to reflect Robertson's personal interests rather than any discernable, theoretically coherent vision. For example, he includes entries on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the German Constitution, and the Israeli Basic Laws. Why those countries and not others? He also includes biographical entries—but they are equally idiosyncratic. For example, he includes entries on the philosophers Dworkin, Grotius, Hart, Locke, and Nozick—but not Kant, Mill, Rousseau, or Rawls. He includes the US revolutionary figure Thomas Paine, but not Madison or Jefferson whose connection with the Bill of Rights, at least, is far stronger. He includes entries on US Justices Benjamin Cardozo and Earl Warren, but not John Marshall or Oliver Wendell Holmes or William O. Douglas.

Finally, the volume includes an interesting though eclectic sample of important documents within the human rights tradition, including the Magna Carta, the UK and US Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as well as contemporary constitutional documents, from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Israel, and South Africa. He adds in some UN and European instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the conventions against torture and on the Rights of the Child; and the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter. Finally, he also includes Thomas Paine's Rights of Man. While he indicates that the appendices "are of most relevance to the subject material covered," the list similarly demonstrates the eclectic nature of the overall work.

A Dictionary of Human Rights could be a useful resource for those interested in rights related issues in the US and select countries of Europe. Issues it covers are handled relatively well. However, it must be used with careful recognition of its limitations.

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