

Anthony Burke, *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence: War against the Other* (Routledge, 2007)

All too often security is presented as an unquestionable good. This concept may be mobilized to identify the need for collective wellbeing or to silence political opposition and justify exclusionary – or violent – normative orders. Seldom, however, are its meanings, origins, and rationalities interrogated. Anthony Burke's powerful book stands as an unflinching corrective to this trend. Rather than simply showing how security is used for political purposes, he deconstructs the very logic of security, calling into question security's desirability and ethicality as an organizing force of modern life. He argues that 'dreams of security, prosperity and freedom hinge, from their earliest conceptualizations to the contemporary politics of the national security state, on the insecurity and dying of others' (p. 13). While it may seem obvious that societies should strive to overcome security achieved at the expense of others, security's roots reach deep into the foundations of the nation-state, the social contract, and modernity. Getting beyond security as such will require self-reflexive, ethical confrontation of uncomfortable truths and the implementation of deep structural changes.

In a remarkable interdisciplinary performance, Burke draws upon key theorists of postmodern ethics (e.g. Levinas, Derrida, Foucault) to reinterpret the role of security in contemporary empirical examples and classical political philosophy. Security, he finds, is a form of power, a political technology that profoundly shapes the relationship of individuals to the state. It traces back to the founding principles of the modern nation-state, wherein state violence was legitimized for the protection of self and property and subjects relinquished freedoms as they were absorbed into the body-politic. As with all concepts, security betrays a troubling aporia, or an unresolvable tension at its core: it is dependent upon and defined by its opposite, which in this case is the exploitation and repression of others. Burke writes: 'the constitution of sovereignty subsumes and represses cultural, linguistic and political differences, rather than liberates them, and that such unities would already be secured through the negative imagination of the Other' (p. 39). Early philosophers of the social contract revealed this tendency in their juxtaposition of the 'civilized' world with the 'savage' state of nature of indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas. Imperialist and colonialist projects were first rationalized and then erased from the social imaginary by means of this framing of the nation-state. Burke illustrates the continuation of this particular articulation of sovereignty and security through his chapters on Israel and Palestine, Australia and Indonesia, and the US and Vietnam and Iraq. Today's imperialist projects may acquire different shapes and purposes, but they are nonetheless inflected by the same destructive tendencies of security.

Burke heralds the productive power of art, and of poetry in particular, to move people beyond the perniciousness of the security concept. Because a violent and jagged history is implicit in security projects, poetry offers a

form of expression and communication to problematize the hegemony of security and initiate sustained, ethical remembrance of and engagement with others. In the face of Suharto's brutal regime of massacre and repression in Indonesia, for instance, which was presented by some media as providing the national security necessary for economic stability and trade in the region, Burke mobilizes the poem '1965' by Gig Ryan about the killings:

The river winding red and green with corpses/She told me/They stood them on the banks/and shot them . . . /Blood and rotting, you could smell it/she told me, crying, rivery/out of earshot/We keep the books, the names, hope/in our heads/The blocked rivers trailing like glaciers/The Army's fear like a slow-worm . . . (p. 61)

Remembrance is key here, as is listening. Thus 'We keep the books' of those to be remembered, of the past not to be forgotten, and one is called upon to listen and respond when told what has occurred. Rather than seeking escape in art, the task should be to embody the sentiments expressed and to draw upon them to move – at least emotionally – *through* the suffering and fear brought on by security operations.

In a chapter on the erection of the wall between Israel and Palestine, Burke explores the limitations of contemporary ethics for contending with seemingly intractable political disagreements and overdetermined acts of violence. The wall serves as both a physical and existential barrier to achieving a state of collective being beyond security. This impasse is captured by the rhetoric of a former Tel Aviv lawyer: 'Sovereignty is like a woman. Do you share your wife with someone else' (p. 66)? The logic of the wall, Burke explains, is a paternalistic imposition to divide territory, ostensibly to prevent the even worse outcome of sharing what is considered sacred. The wall is an active renunciation of a different kind of ethics defined by interconnection instead of opposition:

The separation wall is a perverse attempt to deny both the *fact* of the dense and troubled web of interconnection between Palestinians and Israelis – historical, economic, political and territorial – and the ethical implications that flow from this fact: the practice of responsibility it necessitates if the conflict is ever to be resolved. (p. 83)

The writings of philosophers like Levinas may be deficient in coping with the complexity of relationships and ruptures among groups and states because they are too focused on the individual level, on strangely decontextualized and idealized interactions between two people. Burke supplements the literature on ethics of the Other by identifying the need for ethical allegiances, interconnections, and acts beyond the state, on the level of the transnational. While it is not entirely clear how such a transnational ethics could be operationalized, a recognition of its necessity adds a dimension of messy realism to the project of overcoming security.

Integral to this critique of security is an understanding of the generative capacity of power, and of security as an essential part of the power apparatuses of modern society. Foucault famously described two modes of power: disciplinary power focusing on individuals and biopolitical power operating on the level of populations. Burke's attention to transnational ethics adds a geopolitical dimension, wherein imperialist relations among states can be taken into account. The combined result is an encompassing 'strategic imagination' that directs all aspects of life to security imperatives and logics. With this expanded view of power, the political technology of security can be seen to give rise to a form of 'neoliberal sovereignty' in the contemporary context of globalization. The two heads of the neoliberal sovereign are the eradication of the public (through privatization and marketization) and the amplification of social control (through militarized borders, for instance). Modernity persists 'not as a time but as a political formation which brings not just the repression and alienation of labour but detention centres, prisons, death camps, ethnic cleansing, counter-insurgency, nuclear weapons and killing at a distance' (p. 134). While certain aspects or functions of the state may be diminishing, others are growing, and sovereignty as a form of governance is not the least bit threatened by globalization.

Against the forces of strategic calculation that define modern security, Burke presents an injunction to develop ethical concepts and practices to move *beyond* the hegemony of security, as a form of discourse and mode of governance. This includes the need to recognize the violence inherent in security and to acknowledge the sordid histories of exclusion, exploitation, and destruction that mark attempts to carve out secure territories:

In the wake of 9/11, our critical task is not to help power seek out and destroy the 'enemies of freedom' (as Bush put it in his address to Congress on 20 September 2001) but to question how they were constructed *as* enemies of 'freedom'. . . . It is to wonder if *we*, the free, might already be enemies of freedom in the very process of imagining and defending it. (p. 215)

This is a call for the deconstruction of constructs such as 'freedom' and the adoption of probing reflexivity in the face of threats, real and imagined. More than that, however, a post-security ethics requires sustained, humble, collaborative engagement with others, especially with those different from oneself. The goal is to recognize such an ethics-of-the-Other as an ongoing, forever incomplete process, and to simultaneously seek its instantiation – or its possibility – in material and social structures. Burke explains:

The necessity then is not merely to encourage relationship and reciprocity, but to continually critique and transform the institutional structures, technologies and powers of mediation that shape and condition encounters, and that limit and channel the possibilities for life – especially when they do so violently and coercively (p. 89).

Given the rise in ethnic violence and economic insecurity in the 21st century, the post-security ethics espoused by Burke could not be more timely or important.

In summary, *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence* questions the foundations upon which security concerns rest. It is important to note that this book does not deny the reality of threats, fear, or violence but instead advocates for a full and responsible accounting of these phenomena and their root causes. Although this book performs an excavation of the ontological character of security and therefore remains largely philosophical, one could easily imagine complementary work delving into specific structural inequalities that iterate to keep societies trapped in security's destructive binary of safety and violence. This is the pressing invitation that Burke's book provides.

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David Jeneman, *Adorno in America*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Alex Thomson, *Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2006)

Those still sifting through the debris wrought by Walter Benjamin's passage through the humanities and social sciences are probably already feeling the winds changing in Adorno's direction. Since the turn of the century, enthusiasm for Adorno's work in the Anglophone academy has been starting to replicate his friends' previous ubiquity. When it comes to secondary sources on Benjamin, we've reached saturation point. It's better to return to his work than read another new text about him. Adorno, by contrast, still requires some positioning since responses to his work have been rather mixed. If, as Frederic Jameson assures us, Adorno is the philosopher for our age, then it makes sense to know what he was on about.

David Jeneman's and Alex Thomson's books exemplify the important work that a new generation of scholars is undertaking to, on the one hand, make Adorno more accessible, and, on the other, to dispel jejune categorizations of the man's opinion on a variety of matters. *Adorno in America* is a work that, like the man himself, is difficult to categorize. And therein lay its strength. It is a work of social history, critical theory, and cultural analysis that manages to seamlessly blend all three of these often competing approaches. Jeneman's purpose is to show just how Adorno was completely engaged with American society during the decade and a half he spent there in exile. To say that Adorno was 'politically and socially detached' from America is to remain blind to the fact that he completely immersed himself in its culture, especially the entertainment and communications industries.