

This is an Author's Original Manuscript of an article submitted for consideration in *Resilience* [copyright Taylor & Francis]; *Resilience* is available online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/21693293.2013.842345>

**Please note that this not a final version of the Review Essay, and may be subject to significant change prior to publication. A final version should appear in Volume 1, Issue 3 of *Resilience*, due for publication in October 2013. After publication, the link above should connect directly to the final, published version. Please do not cite this pre-publication draft version.**

## REVIEW ESSAY

### **From security to resilience? (Neo)Liberalism, war and terror after 9/11**

**Ben Whitham**

Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Reading

Email: b.whitham@pgr.reading.ac.uk

*The Liberal Way of War*, by Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, xii + 196pp., £24.64 (paperback), 978-0-415-95300-9

*Liberal Terror*, by Brad Evans, Cambridge, Polity, 2013, xi + 257pp., £16.99 (paperback), 978-0-7456-6532-0

*Liberty and Security*, by Conor Gearty, Cambridge, Polity, 2013, 146pp., £14.99 (paperback), 978-0-7456-4719-7

While security has functioned historically as the major rationality for the subjection of populations to liberal governance, the rationality enabling that subjection is fast changing to that of resilience.<sup>1</sup>

Though there is perhaps a touch of hyperbole to Julian Reid's claim that security is being thoroughly supplanted by resilience as the basis of liberal governance,<sup>2</sup> his point is nevertheless salient. Resilience has become a central feature of discourses and practices of war and security, within and among (neo)liberal societies of the early twenty-first century. Indeed, the present UK government was elected on the basis of a platform wherein building resilience is depicted as the central purpose of national security policy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Julian Reid, "The neoliberal subject: resilience and the art of living dangerously", *Revista Pléyade* 10 (2012): 143-165 (144).

<sup>2</sup> Why should we not, for example, understand resilience as a particular modality or instantiation of the language of security?

<sup>3</sup> Conservative Party, *A Resilient Nation: National Security Green Paper* (London: Conservative Party, 2010).

This essay critically examines three important texts, each of which deals with questions of security and resilience in the context of post-9/11 liberal societies. Reid and Michael Dillon's *The Liberal Way of War* (2009) is the first of three books discussed in this essay; and, though it is an older text, is key to the more recent development of the resilience/security nexus. Also under review are Brad Evans' *Liberal Terror* (2013) and Conor Gearty's *Liberty and Security* (2013). These three texts provide divergent yet interrelated and overlapping critical accounts of the responses of liberal states and societies to security issues of the post-9/11 era.

As will become clear, *The Liberal Way of War* and *Liberal Terror* share rather more theoretical and analytic ground with one another than either does with *Liberty and Security*. This intimacy of approach is evidenced by Reid and Evans' recent collaboration for this journal.<sup>4</sup> Gearty, meanwhile, approaches the same broad political *problematique* but from the perspective of a left-liberal and self-avowedly 'universalist' scholar of human rights law; a refreshing yet flawed alternative to the largely poststructuralist efforts of Dillon, Reid and Evans. The aim of this review essay is not only, then, to critically assess each text on its own terms, but also to draw lines of critical contrast between them and, where possible, to cast them in a productive dialogue with one another.

Dillon and Reid open Chapter 1 of *The Liberal Way of War* with a compelling engagement with the historian Michael Howard's lectures on *War and the Liberal Conscience*.<sup>5</sup> They note that Howard shares with Carl Schmitt a critical view of the liberal way of war as that which, in aiming at universal human emancipation, ultimately *dehumanises* the enemy (5). However, while sympathetic to the resonance of Howard's account with the 'rationalities of liberal imperialism today' (6), Dillon and Reid find his argument lacking. The point of departure for their 'reproblematism' of the liberal way of war is thus that which Howard fails to notice – the fact that, in spite of its grand universal justificatory resources, in the 'attempt to instrumentalise, indeed universalise, war in pursuit of its own global project of emancipation, the practice of liberal rule itself becomes profoundly shaped by war' (7). A thoroughgoing analysis of the liberal way of war must therefore include an analysis of the liberal way of *rule*, or of the 'logics and imperatives of liberalism as a distinctive regime of power relations' (11).

---

<sup>4</sup> Brad Evans and Julian Reid, "Dangerously Exposed: the life and death of the resilient subject", *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1:2 (2013): 83-98.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Oxford: OUP, 1981).

The remainder of the book attempts to elaborate just such an analysis, and is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 2-4) posits three major transitions that the authors view as crucial to the emergence of the contemporary liberal way of war. Chapter 2 suggests an 'intimate' correlation between 'forms of war and forms of life' (15). The liberal way of rule, it is argued, diverges from feudal sovereign and disciplinary ways of rule, by making its referent object 'life itself'. Dillon and Reid thus introduce Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics', the 'massifying' form of political power that emerged at the close of the eighteenth century, 'that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species'.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas the liberal subject – the abstract, universal and sovereign model of individual subjectivity posed by early enlightenment thought – was constituted by 'reason and will', the new 'biological being', brought about in part by the advance of the biological sciences and the new ways in which these sciences allowed us to know and constitute ourselves, was self-regulating, governed instead by 'observable biological dynamics, laws and patterns of behaviour' (18). Dillon and Reid argue that liberal wars are today fought not for human life as such, but for 'population', that is, for human life perceived as the 'biohuman', as species-life. The liberal way of war, concerned as it is to protect the biohuman, is quite willing to kill human beings as a means of 'making life live', since unpredictable actual individual human beings are the source of 'infinite threat' to the biologically constituted population (20).

Whereas Foucault had already mapped the emergence of 'biopower' and 'biopolitics' in the 1970s, Dillon and Reid argue for the need to update our understanding of the biopolitical liberal way of rule and war in light of the emergence and proliferation of 'information' technologies since the later decades of the twentieth century (21). The emergence of 'codes' as a means of understanding and governing the biohuman requires that Foucault's concept of biopolitics 'simply has to be adapted now to the age of life as information' (23). This is a first glimpse of one of the more problematic aspects of Dillon and Reid's book, the use of biopolitics, not so much as a critical analytic concept through which to think about a particular modality of power in a historically specific instantiation, but almost as a descriptor of a reified 'thing' existing 'out there' in the world, perpetually intensifying rather than being supplanted or compromised by other forms of power.<sup>7</sup> Their

---

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003), 243.

<sup>7</sup> Dillon and Reid have recently been accused of 'reductionism' in this regard. See Andreas Behnke, 'Eternal peace, perpetual war? A critical investigation into Kant's conceptualisations of war', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 15:2 (2012): 250-271.

unwillingness to relinquish the concept of biopolitics, and their seeming desire to employ it in 'explaining away' all aspects of the liberal ways of rule and war is troubling.

The rest of Chapter 2 is devoted to a Foucauldian account of the emergence of liberal political economy and *Homo oeconomicus* and of the new modes of government these changes demanded and enabled. Using the work of Melinda Cooper, Dillon and Reid attempt to neatly tie this analysis of the birth of political economy to their notion of liberal rule as biopolitics, positing a synergy between the two whereby '*Homo oeconomicus* and *Homo biologicus* are intimately allied in the liberal order of things' (29). In Chapter 3, the authors contest the distinction between war and rule as 'autonomous domains of existence' that is reified in modern thought. In outlining the character of 'war in the age of biohumanity', they problematize the liberal way of war as premised on particular discourses and practices on 'the organization and use of violence', necessitating the understanding that 'the liberal way of rule is contoured also by the liberal way of war' (35). The 'biopoliticisation' of war, Dillon and Reid contend, is apparent in the creed of liberal internationalism, which seeks to put an end to the belligerent machinations of sovereign states that perpetuate war, in favour of allowing 'the natural properties, rights and freedom of the human to govern instead' (36).

Dillon and Reid argue that the very nature of enmity has undergone a transformation in the liberal way of war, as a necessary adjunct of the biopolitical way of rule. Biopolitics of war, they argue, 'find themselves dealing with a moving, mutable, mutating and metamorphosing target' such that the 'Schmittian existential enemy' has become obsolete in the face of the 'shifting challenges and dilemmas with which liberal strategists are confronted' (44). This seems a particularly appropriate description of the rationalities underpinning the violent discourses and practices of the era of 'humanitarian interventions', the 'responsibility to protect' and even the 'War on Terror' (though the latter often relies on political rhetoric about the 'existential' nature of threats and enemies).

Chapter 4 returns to and expands upon the theme of the 'informationalization' of life in the biopolitical way of rule and war. Adopting a clearly set out Foucauldian epistemological position (56), Dillon and Reid embark upon an analysis of how the production and forms of knowledge about life have shifted. Specifically, they cite the reduction of life to code through the new understanding of life brought about by the advent of DNA, and how this new understanding correlates to understandings of 'circulation' and 'networks' (58). They argue that in the development of the liberal

way of rule 'contingency was ontologized' so that populations have come to be understood as emergent and adapting systems wherein 'complex infrastructures of circulation and connectivity' are both the basis of that way of rule and, at the same time, circulate 'new dangers and threats so effectively' that they demand a correlative way of war. This is a persuasive argument when it comes to understanding the discourses of today's 'liberal wars'. One need only look to the security rhetoric of recent British political leaders to find ample statements about the ways in which 'globalisation' and 'new technologies' are a double-edged sword, providing exciting and positive new ways of being and interacting on the one hand, and facilitating the development of new networks of 'complex threats' on the other.<sup>8</sup>

In Part II, Dillon and Reid emphasise that 'all power is idiomatic and liberalism's is biopolitical' (81). Chapter 5 therefore sketches the phenomenon of 'global triage', whereby the constant danger to life, emanating from the very contingent and organic nature of life itself, requires liberal rule to 'adjudicate membership of the species' (87). There is something of a tendency to repetition in this chapter and the nature of the objects of Dillon and Reid's study does lend itself to the construction of some rather abstruse sentences; one of the more pervasive stylistic issues in an otherwise impressive book.<sup>9</sup>

More illuminating is Chapter 6, wherein the authors conduct a close analysis of some of the ways in which the liberal way of war plays out in this context. Focusing on the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA) (109), especially the emergence in the early 1990s of 'biostrategization', they examine the trend for military engagements with the life sciences, not only in weapons development but also in strategic thinking (112). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, security became 'less a matter of simple survival than continuous emergent adaptation and change in which resilience, recombination and regeneration were now most highly prized' (118). In Chapter 7 Dillon and Reid note that 'critical national and international infrastructures' have, in the post-9/11 era, been 'reified as referent objects of liberal security and governance'. They point to policy papers outlining post-9/11 requirements for rethinking and restructuring infrastructures, which are seen to be 'complexly transnational' and to

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, Gordon Brown's (2008) speech at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) on 'liberty and security'.

<sup>9</sup> These sentences often encapsulate the authors' argument, but rarely serve to make it more intelligible or add much to the debate. For example: 'The liberal way of war thus makes war on life for the purposes of making life live since it is the very emergency of emergence of life processes themselves which engender the threats and dangers against which liberal biopolitics must wage war if it is to succeed in promoting species life' (88).

have 'complex adaptive capacities', in response to the threat of terrorism. Such infrastructures are required above all to become resilient, to be able to 'spring back to life after suffering even catastrophic damage' (129).

The central argument of Chapter 7 is that the liberal way of war is mostly exercised against 'terrorism' in the present day, and that 'Al-Qaeda, especially', are actually reflections of, and could not exist without, the liberal ways of rule and war that the authors have outlined. Contemporary terrorism is, they claim, aimed at the 'discovery and exploitation of the vulnerabilities of the infrastructures of liberal regimes' (133). The response of liberal states, meanwhile, is to develop policies on dealing with 'rogue' individuals and behaviours. Contemporary developments add further to Dillon and Reid's examples. The use of 'signature strike' killings in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a case in point. American Unmanned Aerial Vehicles ('drones') are used to select and attack targets based not upon actual identification of individuals or groups, nor the actual use of violence by those targeted, but upon patterns of behaviour deemed 'signatures' of 'terrorists' or 'insurgents'.<sup>10</sup> There seems to be an element of the biopolitical in the use of drones in general; a means of cleanly, 'surgically' eviscerating dangerous individuals and groups – the malignant tumours that grow in the vulnerable, 'unstable' extremities of the global biohuman organism.

In their conclusion, Dillon and Reid outline their response to the prevailing biopolitical order and provide a provocative end note. In the face of the current 'terms of rule' (150), they focus their strategy of dissent on the figure of the 'good for nothing'. They refer to themselves and their book as a 'good for nothing', posing the sort of difficult questions Foucault posed, undermining an order that makes universal claims yet appears everywhere in contingent forms (155). But to say that the arguments developed in this book are 'simple, direct and immediate' (as opposed to complex, emergent and adaptive), as the voice of the good for nothing is supposed to be, is a difficult claim to substantiate. *The Liberal Way of War* is a doubtless important and rewarding, but nonetheless dense and challenging piece of work.

Brad Evans opens his book with an outline of the titular 'liberal terror', which he describes as a:

---

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Jon Heller, "'One hell of a killing machine': Signature strikes and international law", *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 11:1 (2013): 88-119.

global imaginary of threat which, casting aside once familiar referents that previously defined the organisation of societies, now forces us to confront each and every potential disaster threatening to engulf advanced liberal life (2).

Evans contends, in a passage reminiscent of Slavoj Žižek's writing on the 'zero level' of violence,<sup>11</sup> that since 9/11 liberal societies have been haunted by the 'spectre' of another terrorist attack to the extent that terror itself has effectively been normalised in everyday political life. Chapter 1 of *Liberal Terror* expands upon this *problematique*, firstly with a critique of the glut of interpretations and (mis)appropriations of Schmitt that emerged in response to the War on Terror (3-6). In viewing the War on Terror as an abuse of exceptional power rhetorically justified by reference to the exceptional nature of the post-9/11 terrorist threat, these analyses 'simplified' Schmitt, and used his work to 'reassert clear lines of political division' in an increasingly post-national, globalising world where such a response was actually inappropriate (6).

Traditional, linear 'modernist' understandings of space and time have, in Evans' view, 'entered into lasting crises'. These crises are correlative, Evans claims, to the 'bio-philosophy of late liberalism', which centres on the promotion of 'complex, adaptive, and emergent qualities' and as such 'demands new temporal and spatial awareness'. Here a parallel emerges with Dillon and Reid's diagnosis of the contemporary liberal order as predicated upon notions of contingency, emergence and resilience. The aim of the book, in this context, is to avoid any 'allegiance to the messianic nature of the liberal promise' and instead to 'understand how this faith-based narrative conditions the present' (11).

While Evans shares with Dillon and Reid a strong Foucauldian inflection, he is more heterodox in his use of theory, drawing upon Giorgio Agamben, Walter Benjamin and Žižek, among many others. On the other hand, where Dillon and Reid engage in a certain transdisciplinarity of analysis, especially in their writing on technologies and the biological sciences, Evans writes in a more strongly disciplinary frame, adhering more closely to International Relations interpretations and applications of this diverse array of theorists. Furthermore, for an author making strong anti-foundationalist claims (12), Evans at times suffers from a tendency to let 'theory', and the voices of these other theorists, speak for him, exemplified in his predilection for "as x [Benjamin /Deleuze /Ricoeur /Derrida] once said..." type

---

<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six sideways reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).



statements, which, while useful in reinforcing his argument, sometimes lend a touch of what Jeremy Bentham called 'ipsedixitism'<sup>12</sup>.

Chapter 1 ('Imaginarities of Threat') is not so much an 'introduction' to the book as a substantive diagnosis of the present global security constellation. Like Dillon and Reid, Evans traces the impact of 'complexity' and 'network' thinking on the development of strategy and security policy (17). He notes the significance of 'vital' and 'viral' analogies in political rhetoric on terrorism (19) in helping to meld 'the biological with the digital' (20). In mapping the emergence of the 'global imaginary of threat' that constitutes 'liberal terror' today, Evans emphasises this 'new social morphology' and its spatio-temporal implications.

The crucial feature of 9/11 lies, according to Evans, in the transformation of space-time it enabled. In one incisive passage, he describes how this is reflected in a number of discursive features of the post-9/11 era. The shift from 'terrorism' to 'terror' despatialized threat (26), while the translation of 'September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001', a standard date that 'repeats itself every year in familiar diachronic rotation', into '9/11' produced 'a quantum shift in significance' in temporal terms, so that other events (such as '7/7') are constructed to evoke the imagery of that one. Even 'Ground Zero', Evans notes, signifies more than a place in Manhattan, representing in the new imaginary of global threat 'a point of Zero so as to reinforce the claims that 9/11 was the original sin of globalization' (27).

Evans' wide-ranging and persuasive assessment of the conditions that enable liberal terror is concluded with an outline of two further facets. First, he notes the significance of *fear* in 'conditioning what is possible' in the post-9/11 world, where 'visual representations of threat so integral to our contemporary imaginaries have become globally networked' (29), and where emergence thinking portrays 'terror' as something which '*emerges* from within our afflicted communities' (33). Secondly, Evans points to the preponderance of representations of 'global risks', and of the supposedly scientific methods by which they might be evaluated and managed. Resilience, he argues, is crucial in this regard, having become 'the lingua franca of contemporary security discourse', since it suggests something more than bare survival, rather a positive programme that 'promotes adaptability so that life may go

---

<sup>12</sup> From the Latin phrase *ipse dixit*, translated by Cicero from an Ancient Greek phrase meaning 'he, himself (the master) said it'. *Ipse dixit* was historically used, especially by reference to 'giants' of philosophy like Aristotle, to foreclose further debate and appeal to certainty.

on living despite the fact that elements of our living systems may be destroyed' (39). The birth of the 'resilient subject', in this view, amounts to the birth of:

a *post-political* subjectivity which, accepting the fatefulness of existence, proposes an emergent ontology that is exclusively bound to mastering the control of life-shaping events by pre-emptively governing those catastrophes (actual or potential) which shape the normality of the times. Resilient life as such offers no political concern with a future that may be politically different. What concerns the resiliently minded is whether or not the future is at all liveable (40).

Following this devastating diagnosis of resilient life in post-political liberal societies, the rest of the book elaborates on the ways of being and seeing, the discourses, practices and apparatuses that make up the world of liberal terror. In Chapter 2, Evans criticises the academic field of critical security studies (CSS) (43). In attempting to reach beyond state-centric understandings of security, and borne out of a desire to precisely *challenge* violent liberal impositions on foreign 'others' based on notions of 'national security', CSS employs concepts like 'human security'. In doing so, however, 'the idea of security not only remained ontologically entrenched, but was actually afforded more reverence' (54). To the extent that CSS has failed to challenge the 'incessant commitment to securing the political subject' (55), it has failed in its aim of *critique* and has been complicit in the production of the resilient subject. By contrast, Evans seeks to construct a 'Foucauldian-inspired critique of liberal terror' (66), which must study both the 'micro-physics of power' or 'the political problem of life itself', and the 'macro-fields of political formation', which he reads as 'the architectures of life-world systems' (67). Following Didier Bigo, he understands security as a Foucauldian 'dispositif', an apparatus, characterised by biopolitical dynamics of *circulation* (56).

In Chapter 3, Evans endorses Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid modernity' thesis, claiming that 'complexity thinking' has replaced 'Newtonian thinking' and that this shift has 'radicalized our understanding of self-organization' (71). Complexity is not, according to Evans, just a metaphor, but a complete new life science (72). Evans notes that understandings of life as complex and emergent have had a major impact on strategic thought in liberal states, which responded by trying to anticipate, 'model and mediate' with regard to '*radically undecidable singularities*' (73). Risk and danger thus become absolutely central to the liberal way of life. Here Evans draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's writings on virtuality, potentiality and the plane of immanence (85), and Dillon and Reid's argument about life continuously 'becoming-

dangerous' to itself (87), to argue that 'radical uncertainty' and 'ontological emergence' have come to underpin biopolitical security practices (91).

A provocation here would be to say that Evans tends to 'believe the hype' that liberalism (or more specifically neoliberalism) produces about itself. In doing so, he risks complicity in the reproduction of the very social formations and practices he sets out to critique. Indeed, in counterposing liberalism to the 'far right and left' (81), Evans even seems to accept the neutrality and plurality of liberal regimes. This raises questions for the liberal analytics of such poststructuralist scholarship. Stories being told of radical, *liquefying*, changes to production, consumption, exchange, work and class rarely reflect either the shape of the structures that enable and constrain these processes, or the actual experience of people engaged in them.

Chapter 4 addresses the moral basis for liberal terror. Here, Evans shows how liberal security governance today remains premised on a deeply Kantian understanding of the capacity for evil inherent to human free will (115). He also notes that the rise of neoliberal theorists like Friedrich von Hayek in the twentieth century helped to (re)moralise markets so that risk and uncertainty became the key to realising human freedom (123-125).

In Chapter 5, Evans maps the shape and dynamics of our present security constellation. Using the term 'Desnex' ('development-security-environment nexus', coined by Evans and Mark Duffield<sup>13</sup>), he notes that a crucial aspect of liberal terror has been the weaving of ecological concerns into the notion of security, 'such that the destiny and very survivability of all life is wagered on the successes/failures of liberal political strategies' (140). In this 'all-inclusive' context, sovereignty becomes 'nodal' (following Hardt and Negri) to the extent that 'bounded forms of order become purely contingent' (146-147). And in this new biopolitical order, characterised by flux and flow around networks of nodal sovereignty, *circulation* has become what Schmitt famously called the '*nomos* of the earth' (156-157).

Evans begins his concluding chapter, 'The Event Horizon', by attempting to envisage what a worker in the World Trade Center would have felt as they registered that a plane in the sky was actually about to crash into their office. Presumptuously attributing to these unfortunate individuals 'a sense of *disorientation*', 'a sense of *untimeliness*', 'a sense of *distance*' and 'a sense of *duration*', Evans suggests that this moment can be understood as an 'event horizon' of catastrophe (166). If the liberal

---

<sup>13</sup> Brad Evans and Mark Duffield, "Biospheric Security" in *A Threat Against Europe?* (Antwerp: VUB Press, 2011).

security paradigm is today limited to the catastrophic event horizon, this is realised in programmes of 'pre-emptive governance' that place terror 'at the heart of all eventualities' (173). It is in this context that the political imaginary has been 'colonized' by 'hyper-paranoiac' visions of unforeseeable catastrophic events (195). So, while *Liberal Terror* shares much in common with *The Liberal Way of War*, in terms of its analysis of the modalities and instantiations of contemporary liberal biopower, it nevertheless adds much to the debate, not least this central position of a 'moralising' Kantianism that Evans identifies as the very enabling discourse that 'allows biopolitical practices to take hold' (198).

Conor Gearty's *Liberty and Security* consists of a meditation on two of the key essentially contested political concepts of our time. Against what he sees as a 'neo-democratic' tendency to decouple these two terms from a notion of universality, Gearty argues that we must 'recover and re-energise true universalism in the way that we use these terms' (4). In doing so, he seeks to engage three cognate political concepts and practices as 'important allies': democracy, the rule of law and human rights (5).

In Chapter 2, Gearty begins his conceptual analysis with Hobbes' conception of liberty, defined as 'a capacity to act or to forebear from acting, which capacity leads naturally to deliberation as between rival paths' (7). Hobbes' liberty is problematic for Gearty because it allows for citizens of 'despotic' states to be formally 'free'; if they choose not to do something through fear of sovereign violence, they nevertheless *choose* (10). Tellingly, Gearty's identification with one of Hobbes' ideological enemies, the Leveller movement, relies on a peculiarly liberal, universalist discursive recontextualisation of the latter's central tenets. To achieve this identification, Gearty draws an absolute equivalence between the Levellers' commitment to an equal legal system for the 'safety and well being of the people' and his own, re-phrased, 'vision of security ('safety') and liberty ('well being') which is for all ('the people')' (10). Whether 'security' does or does not signify more than 'safety' is clearly debatable (though Dillon, Reid and Evans have all argued convincingly that it does), but 'liberty' is surely not the same as 'well being' (the latter being imbricated with notions of 'health'); and whereas for the Levellers 'the people' was a fairly exclusive category, Gearty's 'all' is a properly universal, *global* concept.

An opportunity thus presents itself to read Gearty 'through' Dillon and Reid, and Evans, in at least two ways. On the one hand we can see that Gearty's universalism is in fact underpinned by the sort of 'all-inclusive' Kantian

cosmopolitan impetus Evans laments as the very moral foundation of 'liberal terror'. On the other hand, his equation of 'liberty' with 'well being' implies a biopolitical worldview of the sort Dillon and Reid exemplify in *The Liberal Way of War*. Indeed, biopolitical and liberal teleological language pervades Gearty's text; for example, he later frames Hobbes' ideas as a 'contamination' of the 'liberty-security discourse' that impinged on the 'progress towards democracy' (13).

Gearty is primarily concerned with the gap between theory and practice. He seeks to highlight and explain a 'mismatch between the theory of universal liberty and its obviously selective practice' (17) and to do this he engages his three cognate principles; democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Gearty argues that 'neo-democracy' – the pseudo-democratic form wherein democratic language looms large but democratic practices are increasingly eroded or threatened – has emerged partly as a consequence of the neoliberal revolution (28). It is this context, combined with the 9/11 attacks, that, in Gearty's view, has allowed for a 'narrow version of liberty and security' to become the norm (29).

Chapter 3 is concerned with the ways in which security (defined as the 'narrow' defence of the state) has risen to predominance over concerns for liberty. Here Gearty develops some convincing arguments based on changes to and interpretations of international laws and norms. Specifically, he highlights the significance of Security Council (SC) Resolution 1373, which came into force weeks after the 9/11 attacks and 'required all countries to act in various ways against terrorism' (30). Particularly problematic, as we will see below, was the inauguration, in Paragraph 6, of the 'Counter-Terrorism Committee' (CTC). The remainder of Chapter 3 deals with the legally and politically problematic use of 'blacklists', an extension of the 'sanction weapon' so popular in the 1990s (36), which, in the post-9/11 period, allows the targeting of particular individuals and groups, in the hope of avoiding harm to wider populations. Though Gearty doesn't go so far, these 'smart sanctions' can be understood as a biopolitical technology (after Dillon, Reid and Evans), controlling dangerous *circulations* of individuals, finance and technology, and complementing 'surgical' drone strikes in securing a resilient human species against emergent networked threats. Using examples, Gearty shows how blacklists are enigmatic and unequal measures that reproduce a form of pre-democratic 'selective liberty' that is 'no longer explicit as it was in – say – John Locke's day' (41). Thus whereas legal opinion and discourse is ostensibly united in its support of universal democracy, human rights and the (equal) rule of law, in practice an international legal institution

(the UN) has been complicit in eroding these principles, such that the 'right thing to do' is to 'abolish the whole system' (44).

Chapter 4, 'The Enemy Within', looks at how the selective application of this post-9/11 international normative and legal apparatus by particular states has justified repressive and anti-democratic measures. The CTC, Gearty finds, has provided the very justificatory language in which countries like Belarus, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan are now able to frame 'practices in criminal law enforcement that had earlier drawn stinging criticism from the human rights arm of the UN' (51). 'War on Terror' is sometimes invoked as a shield from international oversight and criticism of vicious state repression of all subversive elements.

Chapter 5 looks at how the US and UK have drifted into neo-democracy. Again, the focus is on legislative shifts. The US Patriot Act, Gearty suggests, was actually a 'relatively restrained' piece of legislation. Gearty's book went to press before the extent of post-9/11 National Security Agency (NSA) spying was made public by the whistleblower Edward Snowden. But the fact that the NSA's notorious 'PRISM' programme for the wholesale monitoring and harvesting of internet communications was based on the legal framework of the 2008 amendments to the lesser-known Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) lends credibility to Gearty's argument here. Even more troubling were the various 'black holes' that were created (79). These locations – such as the Bagram Theater internment facility and the Guantanamo Bay detention facility – were created and operated outside of the normal juridical order. Less public controversy followed the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001, the immediate British response to 9/11 (89). Yet provisions for the indefinite detention without charge of suspected 'international terrorists', were used to detain at Belmarsh prison non-UK nationals who could neither be easily deported nor allowed to remain free in the eyes of the authorities. Gearty argues that while this 'hyper-legislation' is at least formally universal (in the sense of being equally applicable to all), in *practice* these laws are designed to deal with predominantly Muslim 'others' (94).

Building on this, Chapter 6 is a brief expansion on the theme of the spreading Islamophobia in the post-9/11, neo-democratic West. And here, Gearty comes close to Dillon, Reid and Evans. He notes that the growth of neo-democracy has relied upon 'tough actions' that are thought necessary to 'defend democracy against its enemies', and he specifies the danger of this problem in a way that resonates with the descriptions of liberal biopolitics discussed earlier in this essay:

The line can easily be adopted that if left uncontrolled, this hostile liberty will destroy us – our culture; our values; our way of life – and so it has to be resisted (97).

This statement echoes the argument that the very emergent nature of human life, but especially of human ‘liberty’, is what renders it so dangerous and in need of careful (and often lethal) management. To be free, we must constantly be vigilant and ready to kill the dangerous anomalies our very freedom produces, in what amounts to an emergence-security feedback loop. As Gearty notes at the end of Chapter 6, this purview is increasingly being expanded to include dangerous types of speech (106). It is not necessary to do political violence any longer to be rendered a ‘terrorist’ in the eyes of the law, but merely to ‘support’ such violence, if only verbally. *Liberty and Security* concludes with a vehement condemnation of the emerging ‘neo-democratic’ order.

Whereas *The Liberal Way of War* and *Liberal Terror* are concerned with the vicissitudes of contemporary, violent, strands of liberal universalism, one cannot escape the sense that Gearty’s book, sympathetic as it is to both liberalism and universalism, tends to sentimentalise a great ‘democratic’ epoch that never was. In a style analogous to that of the Marxists who employ in their critique of contemporary neoliberalism a romanticised imaginary of the post-war ‘welfare state’ as a harmonious compromise between capital and labour, Gearty conjures a vision of a time when democracy was ‘on the right track’, while the post-9/11 order has derailed its progressive trajectory. Gearty’s optimism with regard to the potential for liberty, and especially security, to be resuscitated or reanimated as critical emancipatory concepts betrays a naïvete, since it is precisely these concepts (and their universal intent) that has been central to producing the ‘resilient’ post-political order he seemingly abhors.

A key problem of *Liberty and Security* is that which, at least in Gearty’s view, is its greatest strength; the refusal to be caught up in definitional rows around these key political concepts, in favour of focusing on their ‘remit’, and a corollary – and rather uncritical – enthusiasm for ‘true universalism’. What is missed here is that, in the messy, intersecting and overlapping realities that constitute social and political practices, there never has existed a single ‘universal’. Universalism is a form of philosophical idealism, and the trap to which it consistently falls prey is that of being unable to reflect or explain any real social practice, past, present or future.

Now, for Gearty, this is clearly a problem – wouldn't the world be a very obviously better place if all people were to be afforded the same basic rights and liberties, the same standard of 'human' security? A key point that Dillon and Reid and Evans make, in different ways, is that it is precisely this yearning for the universal that is complicit in the production of the oppressive and sinister apparatuses of what Gearty would call 'neo-democratic' political life. What is the 'War on Terror', if not a universalist project that on the one hand seeks to 'spread' liberal democratic values and constitutions and, on the other hand, (re)produces and amplifies the sorts of vicious cultural 'othering' that allows for the erosion of civil liberties and the introduction of a continuous state of emergency.

However, Gearty identifies as crucial to the new Western security constellation a factor that is missed by Dillon and Reid and only marginally of interest to Evans: the emergence of the neoliberal state. What renders informationalisation, as Dillon and Reid describe it, a relevant or useful art of government for the present era? Surely any answer to this question would need to account for the 'neoliberal revolution' by which the entire Western liberal democratic state model, and the discourses and practices that sustain it, have come to be underpinned by 'market' thinking. Rendering political problems as problems of 'codes' and 'risks', susceptible to mathematical reasoning and solutions<sup>14</sup> is an important step to allowing such problems to be governed or 'managed' in market-like ways. The rewriting of 'security' as 'resilience' in recent years has been about remodelling the political in the shape of the (imagined, idealised) market. The change that all three texts under review touch upon, but none of which fully grasps is the transition from security as an object of government to security as an increasingly individualised and self-governing domain, created in the image of the market.

Given the prevalence of discussions of neoliberalism in analyses of Western modes of government or 'ways of rule' in recent years, it is surprising that the literature on liberal ways of war is almost entirely bereft of this theme. And if we understand, as Foucault does,<sup>15</sup> neoliberalism to have taken root in the ways of *rule* inherent to Western states more as a 'governmentality' than a 'biopolitics', then we should surely anticipate a correlative 'governmentalised' way of *war*. Resilience can

---

<sup>14</sup> Louise Amoore has written extensively and eloquently on this, including: "Algorithmic War: Everyday geographies of the War on Terror", *Antipode* 41:1 (2009): 49-69.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008).



be understood precisely as a technology through which this neoliberal way of war is instantiated.<sup>16</sup>

### **Notes on contributor**

Ben Whitham is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Reading, where his doctoral research is funded under the Leverhulme Trust Major Research Programme, 'The Liberal Way of War: Strategy, Ideology, Representations'.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Jonathan Joseph, "Resilience as embedded neoliberalism", *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1:1 (2013): 38-52.