



Putting Security First

'The Age of Insecurity' by Astra Taylor

James Chappel

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. James Chappel speaks of "security" as being "both a material reality and a subjective state," unlike equality or democracy. How do you experience security in your daily life? Is it different from how you experience equality or democracy? What happens when security, rather than equality or democracy, is placed at the center of our political and historical understanding?
2. Chappel and Taylor invoke the fourth grade as a critical time for entering a world of "dog-eat-dog competition" and "artificially scarce resources." What accounts for this observation, given that most kids gain social awareness later in their development? How have some of your childhood memories shaped your worldview?
3. Which events and developments in the past century strike you as gains in security? In insecurity? Do you believe insecurity is "the ghost in the machine" of capitalism?
4. How does insecurity undermine democracy? Would addressing security help resolve the crisis in democracy? How can we be better democratic agents now?
5. Existential security, a kind of security built through philosophy and religion, is criticized for being apolitical in its pursuit of self-care over "other-care." Yet Taylor insists that the political projects in pursuit of material security are inseparable from existential security. How can existential (in)security promote solidarity? How might philosophical or religious frameworks, like Pope Francis's "culture of encounter," challenge and politicize existential security?
6. Chappel argues that "a more just world with more security" would allow more interesting questions to arise. Which parts of this essay have provoked you to think more creatively about the problems facing our world? For example, instead of asking whether nature should have rights or not, Taylor asks how such rights would be applied to more challenging subjects like invasive species. Without the looming threat of insecurity, how might you think differently about the political issues closest to you?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

James T. Kloppenberg, "Is American Democracy Coming Apart?" April 2023:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/democracy-race-polarization-america-working-class-trump-kloppenber>

Anthony Annett, "A New Social Democracy?" July/August 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/delong-brad-economics-hayek-polanyi-history>

Katherine Lucky, "Changing Our Minds About Time" May 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/jenny-odell-saving-time-books-lucky-indigenous-nature>

Max Foley-Keene, "A Toolkit, Not a Blueprint," October 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/allen-democracy-justice-danielle-foley-keene-dubois-rawls>

Susana Girón, "Living to Care," December 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/living-care>

David Graeber, *Debt*, Melville House, 2012

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*, Vintage Books, 1979