International
Theory

Psychoanalysis, cultures of anarchy, and ontological insecurity

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When ontological insecurity looms, what comes next? Is chaos the sole alternative to the maintenance of established role-identities and routines? Or is there a more complex set of possible responses to the dread threat of ontological insecurity? The principal approach to ontological security in International Relations (IR) relies unduly on Giddens' account. Consequently, this approach fails to adequately capture both the variety of ways in which coherent and continuous identities can be maintained and the variety of ways in which the available cultural repertoire can support ontological security differently when challenged. Typically, ontological security is re-established, prior to collapse, through re-balancing of the cultural repertoire to give broader scope to an alternative cultural form and the qualitatively different practices it organizes. Due to misrecognition, this reorganization may proceed without disturbing the ontological security of states-in-interaction. Unconscious processes, encoded into cultural forms, are integral to such variable defenses against ontological insecurity. A re-conceptualization that regards Wendt's cultures of anarchy, and their qualitatively different modes of relating, as dynamically co-present within cultural repertoires, but with potentially variable weightings, complements this approach to ontological in/security.

Over the past several years, the concept of ontological security has found its way into International Relations (IR) theory, where it has provided a valuable means of expanding understandings of what is involved and what is at stake in the achievement or maintenance of security within and between states. Anthony Giddens' depiction of ontological security has formed the basis of this development.[1] In particular, Giddens' account of how chaos haunts the ontological security of individuals has subsequently been extended to the analysis of international relations between states, particularly in the ground-breaking work of Mitzen and Steele.[2] For both, the embeddedness of a state's adherence to its role-identity can be best

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[1]Giddens 1984, 1991.
[2]Mitzen 2006a, b; Steele 2005, 2008.

understood as the effect of the disorientation and chaos that disruptions to established role-identities and their self-affirming routines and mentalities would generate. It is on this basis that attachments to role-identities, mentalities, and routines are formed and, thereafter, deepened over time and in relation to the reciprocal practices, mentalities and role-identities of other interacting states. On the basis of reiterated practices that become routine, a shared culture of anarchy is established and internalized.

In this account, in order to maintain a coherent identity and a set of routines and mentalities that reaffirm that identity, state institutions develop a tendency to relate to other states and other groups and institutions in a quite specific way. This specific mode of interaction establishes a quite particular culture of anarchy with particular qualitative characteristics that, in turn, organize the reciprocal construction of self and other and the norms of legitimacy for the proper exercise of power, authority, and violence. Following Wendt, we could say that they adhere to either Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian modes of interaction, and over time, these modes of interaction become more deeply internalized, thereby both organizing and constraining that relationship.[3]

Despite its many strengths, this approach to ontological security relies unduly on Giddens' account and, especially, his limited incorporation of unconscious processes.[4] By regarding chaos as the sole alternative to the maintenance of practices that support an established role-identity, this approach also fails to adequately capture both the variety of ways in which coherent and continuous identities can be maintained and the variety of ways in which the available cultural repertoire can support ontological security differently when it is challenged. Rather than collapse into chaos, the characteristic response when ontological security is threatened is activation or intensification within the broader cultural repertoire of an alternative cultural form, with its attendant political discourses and the alternative routine practices it organizes.[5] Typically, ontological security is re-established, prior to collapse into chaos, through the re-balancing of the cultural repertoire in order to give broader scope to the newly activated and qualitatively different cultural form. As I will develop below, due to misrecognition, this reorganization of the cultural repertoire may proceed without arousing cognitive or emotional dissonance and without disturbing the ontological security of the states-in-interaction.

To re-establish ontological security by activating or broadening the scope of a qualitatively different cultural form is also to reconfigure the qualitative characteristics of the state's role-identity and its relations to salient other states. This follows from the fact that each cultural form within the cultural field encodes specific ways

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[3]Wendt 1999.

[4]Giddens 1984, 1990, 1991.

[5]To explain my usage, a *cultural form* is a particular qualitatively distinct culture (of anarchy). Wendt's Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian cultures of anarchy are pertinent ways of characterizing different cultural forms. A *cultural repertoire* is the particular set of cultural forms that are available to corporate agents, such as states. However, some of these forms may be marginalized at any particular time. Yet, they remain available and, through a re-balancing of the cultural repertoire, may be drawn more fully into supporting the ontological security of states-in-interaction, with significant effects on the characteristics of the relationship. A *cultural field* is the full set of cultural forms and attendant discourses present within any field of interaction and communication and is the source from which cultural repertoires are drawn.

of thinking, feeling, and relating to self and other (including collective selves and others) and to issues of power, authority, and violence. Moreover, rather than the simple shift from one culture of anarchy to another, such qualitative shifts may involve the reconfiguration and re-balancing of a cultural repertoire that already incorporates more than one culture of anarchy and that draws upon one or another of these cultural forms both serially and simultaneously. For instance, such a re-balancing might involve more frequent and significant reliance on a previously marginalized Hobbesian culture, while at the same time, the interacting states continue to draw upon a Lockean culture for their preferred form of self-recognition.

Contrary to Wendt's implication that one or another culture of anarchy organizes the relations between particular states at any one time, especially when deeply internalized, I am proposing a more dynamic and hybrid account of the co-presence of competing cultures of anarchy within the one cultural repertoire, with weightings that may themselves change in response to assessments and circumstances. The cultural repertoire that interacting states draw upon is typically a dynamic and hybrid admixture of, at least, Hobbesian and Lockean cultures of anarchy in which the weighting, or performative presence, of one as against the other varies according to assessments and circumstances. For instance, the Hobbesian culture may be marginalized and delegitimized within a repertoire dominated by the Lockean culture, yet, may still be present as a minor reality whose range and weighting may be expanded at a moment of crisis. Such a re-weighting of the cultural repertoire, in which the Hobbesian culture becomes more prominent, presents a means of maintaining ontological security differently, rather than falling into chaos. Significantly, the alternative in which a cultural repertoire re-weights itself toward the greater presence and legitimacy of Lockean or even Kantian cultural components is also a possibility.

A major analytical pay-off from focusing on the ontological security of states-in-interaction is the recognition that the anxiety-induced pressure to maintain ontological security may trump the need and desire to maintain physical, economic, or strategic security. As Jennifer Mitzen puts it with regard to conflict that maintains ontological security: 'conflict may benefit a state's identity even as it threatens its body'.[6] This argument is most compelling in cases of intractable conflict in which established enmities and the practices and mentalities that promote conflict generate a vicious cycle from which zero-sum or negative-sum outcomes emerge. In these circumstances, the ontological security that is achieved by adhering to a friend–enemy construction of self and other can perpetuate a conflict that has perverse and destructive effects on the parties involved. However, my argument is that even when ontological security is maintained through identification with zero- or negative-sum practices and friend–enemy mentalities, the broader cultural repertoire will characteristically also include cultural forms that defend against ontological insecurity differently. These alternative cultural forms may be marginalized, but typically they remain available, either within the established cultural repertoire or within the broader cultural field. The co-presence of more than one culture of anarchy, within a hybrid cultural repertoire, highlights that chaos,

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[6]Mitzen 2006b, 365.

while always possible, may be defended against through a re-balancing of the cultural repertoire that brings to the fore a previously restricted and qualitatively distinct alternative. That alternative cultural repertoire may be more fully weighted with Hobbesian forms, but it may also be more fully weighted with Lockean or even Kantian forms. Securitization is not the only way to resist ontological insecurity. Contemporary Northern Ireland is one society where a re-weighting of the cultural repertoire by Lockean forms – introduced and strengthened by decades of concerted and conflicted political action – has established the legitimacy and propriety of alternative cultural supports and routine practices that organize social relations differently. Friend–enemy (or Hobbesian) formations have been partially, but not thoroughly, displaced, by adversary-neighbor (or Lockean) formations that support ontological security in a qualitatively distinct way, although not without some haunting after-effects.[7]

In what follows, I will draw out some of the implications of the above observations; in particular, with regard to this process of revalorizing an alternative cultural form available within the broader cultural repertoire, rather than falling into chaos. I take as one of my starting points Alexander Wendt's opinion that 'the role that unconscious processes play in international politics is something that needs to be considered more systematically, not dismissed out of hand'.[8] I also note that Wendt's subsequent turn to quantum theory has involved certain shifts in his own position that interestingly overlap with some major aspects of psychoanalytic theory, despite his newer reservations about the Freudian unconscious, which he mistakenly characterizes as solely 'something repressed'.[9] In particular, via quantum theory Wendt posits a 'collective unconscious' marked by an 'entanglement' between culture and identity[10]; from a psychoanalytic perspective, an entanglement that moves from individuals to shared cultures via identifications. However, in a significant modification of his earlier argument, cultures themselves are now understood as less deterministic, even though 'the radical indeterminacy of a quantum world does not change the fundamental point that anarchy is what states make of it'. This conclusion builds on the recognition that 'although cultures make some outcomes more likely than others', 'uncertainty cannot be reduced beyond a certain point, *no matter how much learning states do*'.[11] My own way of making a similar point is to emphasize the dynamic capacity of unconscious processes to reconfigure the internal organization of the cultural repertoire that states-in-interaction draw upon when the threat of ontological insecurity emerges within the relationship(s).

To develop these and some related arguments, I will draw upon psychoanalytic theory in a manner that integrates it into social and political theory. Cynthia Burack summarizes the principal features of what she terms 'psychoanalytic political theory' as follows:

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[7]Cash 2017.
[8]Wendt 1999, 278.
[9]Wendt 2006, 198.
[10]*Ibid.*, 200–01.
[11]*Ibid.*, 212, emphasis added.

> Group psychoanalysis – (as developed by 'psychoanalytic political theorists') –
> provides a method of theorizing discourse as expressing defenses, emotions
> (such as fear, anxiety, guilt, love, and rage) and interpersonal issues (such as
> dependence, trust, trauma, vulnerability, mourning, conflict and relations to
> authority) that are inscribed in group discourses.[12]

As this summary highlights, a particular virtue of psychoanalysis is its concern
with emotions as well as cognitions and with psychic defense mechanisms that
organize both thoughts and emotions in ways that defend against anxiety and onto-
logical insecurity. The great strength of psychoanalysis is that it provides an account
of human subjects as passionate subjects capable of reasoning, but always subject to
the distortions of rationalization. A further step in my argument is to recognize that
the psychic processes highlighted by Burack are also deeply inscribed or encoded in
cultural forms. That step is a crucial feature of my argument developed below.

Foregrounding ontological insecurity

When ontological security is threatened, what comes next? That is the central ques-
tion I will address as it opens onto a more complex understanding of how onto-
logical security may be re-established via alternative cultural supports. For
individuals, what comes next depends on their psychological resilience, of course,
but also the cultural supports they can draw upon. In *The Divided Self*, Ronald
Laing focused on institutions, such as the family, the school, and the hospital,
and how the cultures and practices of these institutions affected individual subjects
by either supporting or damaging them. Sometimes, attempts to establish onto-
logical security fail, with disastrous consequences. Giddens explains this well
when he writes, '(o)n the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects
of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. And this chaos is not just disorgan-
ization, but a loss of the sense of the very reality of things and of other persons'.
What is at stake is the maintenance or collapse of 'time, space, continuity and iden-
tity' and 'the prospect of being overwhelmed by anxieties that reach to the very
roots of our coherent sense of being in the world'.[13]

The chapter in *The Divided Self* in which the double-sided concept of onto-
logical in/security is most directly addressed is actually titled 'Ontological
Insecurity'. In accord with my argument, this emphasis foregrounds the need to
defend against ontological insecurity by whatever means available. By way of con-
trast, in the main, the IR literature, following Giddens, foregrounds the concept of
ontological security and the stability of role-identities and routines. This emphasis
has contributed to an unduly static account of how ontological insecurity may be
defended against. Laing writes:

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[12]Burack 2004, 61.

[13]Giddens 1991, 36–37. Samuel Beckett's '*Waiting for Godot*' presents a powerful rendition of collapse
into ontological insecurity, but also of momentary revival as the principal characters, Didi and Gogo, strug-
gle to maintain their ontological security within a thoroughly exhausted cultural field. To defend against the
collapse of 'time, space, continuity and identity', they improvise a cultural repertoire out of disjointed seg-
ments of the Western tradition and thereby construct a defense for the moment against a pervasive exist-
ential anxiety. See Cash 2009.

This study is concerned with the issues involved where there is the partial or almost complete absence of the assurances derived from an existential position of what I shall call primary ontological security: with anxieties and dangers that I shall suggest arise only in terms of primary ontological insecurity; *and with the consequent attempts to deal with such anxieties and dangers.*[14]

In effect, this raises my leading question: what comes next? Laing graphically depicts the loss of self and addresses the ways in which his 'patients' defended against this loss. 'James', 'David', 'Mrs. D', 'Peter', and the unnamed little girl who quelled her fears when regularly walking home through a park, by 'blending with the landscape' and thereby losing 'her autonomous identity' to the extent that she regarded herself as invisible and, hence, safe, all struggled valiantly to defend against ontological insecurity by embracing their very vulnerability as a defense. As Laing puts this: 'The most general expression of this principle is that when the risk is loss of being, the defence is to lapse into a state of non-being with, however, all the time the inner reservation that this lapsing into non-being is just a game, just pretending'. The problem, however, is that 'the individual may find that the pretence has been in the pretending and that, in a more real way than he had bargained for, he has actually lapsed into that very state of non-being he has so much dreaded …'.[15]

The desperate defenses Laing's subjects deployed highlight that ontological insecurity is so intolerable that it must be defended against by whatever means available. The same motivations apply to state actors. They, too, through their agents drawing upon the available cultural repertoire, are motivated to maintain a coherent sense of the state as an actor within the international field and to avoid the collapse of 'time, space, continuity, and identity'. Fortunately, they usually succeed. Hence, the vital question becomes: how is that successful defense against the fall into the chaos of ontological insecurity achieved? In most cases, states-in-interaction have available a complex cultural repertoire that they can mutually draw upon. When ontological insecurity threatens, typically the cultural repertoire is modified through a re-weighting of its constituent cultures of anarchy, enabling a qualitatively different mode of defense. A previously marginalized cultural form, along with the unconscious mechanisms it encodes, gains a greater presence. Rather than a thorough-going shift from one culture of anarchy to another, instead, the available cultural repertoire is re-balanced so that the weighting or performative presence of one as against another of its constituent cultures of anarchy is altered, drawing the previously minor form into greater prominence. Hence the presumption that states-in-interaction are restricted to an established culture of anarchy and adhere to established role-identities and routine practices in order to avoid chaos is seriously misleading. It is not an either/or dilemma as, typically, the cultural repertoire of the interacting states is a hybrid admixture that potentially supports several alternative defenses against ontological insecurity.

[14]Laing 1970, 39), emphasis added.
[15]*Ibid.*, 111.

Ontological *insecurity* as a common concern of this symposium

While the other four articles in this symposium draw principally on existential rather than psychoanalytic approaches, their arguments open productively onto my proposed shifting of emphasis toward ontological *insecurity*. In particular, Berenskoetter quite explicitly rejects an emphasis on '*having* ontological security' as 'a precondition for action' and advocates a focus on '*seeking* ontological security' while recognizing that 'seeking' is an ongoing process that turns 'to constructs that provide a sense of temporal continuity/stability'.[16] In my argument, this turn to 'constructs' within the cultural repertoire, such as ideologies, discourses, norms, and narratives, is exactly how the ontological insecurity of states-in-interaction is defended against. Furthermore, all these culturally-mediated constructs have a variety of unconscious mechanisms encoded into them and these are drawn upon by states, via their agents, as they act within the international arena. Hence, significantly, we can add to the 'mechanisms' of numbers, practices, and narratives highlighted by Berenskoetter, a variety of psychological mechanisms of defense against anxiety that are integral to psychoanalytic theory. These defense mechanisms, as characterized by Klein, all defend against anxiety, but in qualitatively distinct ways.[17] The defenses of splitting, projection, and projective identification characteristic of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position construct a world of part-objects and are unable to contain ambivalence and acknowledge complexity. Instead, they construct a split world organized by the friend–enemy distinction and feed a vicious cycle of a zero-sum or negative-sum relationship. They are intrinsic to a Hobbesian culture of anarchy.

The qualitatively different depressive position, as characterized by Klein, constructs a world of complex whole objects, or others, that are multidimensional and that may be negotiated with. Due to this capacity to construct a world of complex whole others and to contain rather than split the ambivalence that such constructions inevitably involve, the defense mechanisms that are relied on within this Lockean culture of anarchy defend against anxiety through what Klein identifies as reparative and potentially transformative processes in which the other is engaged with as like the self (hence, ambivalence is contained rather than split) and in which their relationship is one of mutual recognition, even if as adversaries (but not as enemies). Should this relationship begin to falter as the mutuality of recognition dissolves, manic defenses come into play in an attempt to gain omnipotent control of the situation; or there is a slide in which splitting and projection and friend–enemy constructions gain predominance.

The achievement of this capacity to dwell in ambivalence is also foundational for the establishment and maintenance of defenses against ontological insecurity that draw on a Kantian culture of anarchy. Klein's depressive position can also support the further extension of mutual and reciprocal self-regard into a mutually other-regarding culture and mentality. Such a cultural transformation would support reconciliation with those otherwise repressed aspects of self and others; mutually

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sublimating them for so long as this Kantian culture of anarchy remains predominant.[18]

An emphasis on ontological insecurity is also evident in Arfi's argument regarding what comes next, when next is an always pressing moment demanding a performative 'leap of faith'. However, a focus on the qualitative characteristics of the culturally organized routines that are leapt into can usefully extend this argument. This is evident if we focus on the way both rigid and reflexive attachments to routines are characterized as different forms of a common process in which ontological insecurity is defended against by '*each actor… performatively taking a leap of faith* that one's specific way of attachment does procure a sense of existential security'.[19] This leap of faith argument addresses the complexities of time, reiteration, and retroactive effects and highlights the necessity of leaping into the routines that defend against ontological insecurity, while reiterating them, perhaps with a difference. Hence, it nicely captures the profound psychological need to keep ontological insecurity at bay, as the actor must necessarily take the leap in order to 'survive'. In contrast to my own argument, what Arfi fails to adequately address, I believe, are the qualitative characteristics of the culturally organized role-identities, discourses, practices, and routines that are leapt into, as well as the retroactive effects that this has upon the actor or subject with regard to supporting reflexive as against rigid attachments.

While emphasizing ontological security for first and second image accounts, Hom and Steele also recognize that the international is best addressed through a focus on its heightened exposure to ontological insecurity 'as its baseline'.[20] Similarly, for Rumelili, anxiety is a 'constitutive condition' of any social contract, including that between states.[21]

The collective cultural unconscious

As already indicated, Giddens' account of ontological security warrants close attention, as this has been drawn upon by Mitzen, Steele, and, thereafter, by many others working on the ontological security of states-in-interaction. Significantly, Giddens draws directly on psychoanalytic theory, but in a way that fails to take due account of unconscious processes within the structuration process itself. While the unconscious serves as the fundamental support of the structuration process, it does not have a dynamic role in organizing the repertoire of rules that both enable and constrain that process. Rather, it has a prior role in establishing, or failing to establish, the psychic capacity for ontological security of the individual actor; a capacity that enables that actor to participate successfully and creatively in the routines of everyday life. It does so by grounding, or, alternatively, failing to establish, the actor's capacities for trust, autonomy, and initiative.[22] For Giddens, the unconscious is present within the social as the mere pre-history of the individual actor.

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[18]In *Nations Without Nationalism* and *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva 1991; 1993 develops an argument that broadly converges with this sketch of what we might term the Kantian cultural unconscious. Also, see Cash 2016.

[19]Arfi 2020, under section 'Ontological *insecurity* as a common concern of this symposium'.

[20]Hom and Steele 2020.

[21]Rumelili 2020.

[22]Giddens 1991.

This is a very unsatisfactory account of the relationship between the unconscious and the social, as is evident in the stark distinction Giddens makes between routine and critical situations. Routine situations are organized by the specific rules that are embedded in particular institutional and social settings. These constitute the field of structuration and rely upon the knowledgeability of individuals at the levels of practical and discursive consciousness. Unconscious processes are not present within these routines. Critical situations, however, occur 'in circumstances of radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalised routines'.[23] When faced with such an overwhelming threat to their ontological security, individuals may be said to have fallen out of culture and into nature. They regress into a culturally unmediated psychological state in which primitive psychic defense mechanisms against anxiety predominate. These primitive defense mechanisms are understood as having only an individual location; they have no place within the structuration process itself, nor in the cultural repertoire of any institution. There is nothing akin to Habermas' account of ideology as systematically distorted communication in which unconscious processes, encoded within the cultural tradition, shape and distort intersubjective communication. As Habermas writes in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Freud 'understands cultural tradition as the collective unconscious, censored in varying measure and turned outwards…'.[24] Habermas conceptualizes such cultural formations as compromise formations in which some desires and antipathies are excommunicated from the participants' awareness, yet produce effects due to their unconscious presence and the way in which that presence organizes, distorts, and circumscribes communication, identity, and agency. This 'collective unconscious' encoded into the cultural tradition has no equivalent in Giddens, despite Giddens' otherwise heavy reliance on psychoanalytic theory.

This emphasis upon the presence of unconscious processes encoded within cultural formations is consistent with Wendt's account of his three cultures of anarchy. This is most evident in his characterization of the Hobbesian culture, where he addresses the self-validating effects of 'projective identification' and the defense mechanisms of splitting and projection that drive that process.[25] Wendt proposes a 'third mechanism' of projective identification that consolidates a Hobbesian culture through the mutual projection of enmity onto the other, in order to displace 'unwanted feelings about the self'. While more circumscribed than my own argument, Wendt's argument makes a broadly similar point about 'collective representations'; namely that unconscious processes (in this instance, splitting, projection, and projective identification) shift from the micro-level to become a 'property of the system' that leads individual actors to 'feel compelled to represent all others as enemies'. However, while opening onto what may best be termed a specific cultural unconscious, this explanation fails to also address the broader role that unconscious processes play across the three cultures of anarchy and with regard to ontological insecurity.

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[23]Giddens 1984, 61.
[24]Habermas 1971, 282.
[25]Wendt 1999, 276–77.

Wendt's argument regarding internalization is also consistent with psychoanalytic accounts of the organization of subjectivity and intersubjectivity generated by identification with cultural norms.[26] Freud laid out the basis for this argument in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.[27] In that study of both organized institutions such as the Church and the Army and of emergent groups or masses sharing an identity for the moment, Freud draws attention to the processes of identification with a cultural norm, sometimes embodied in a leader, that affects both subjectivity and 'social relationships'. To quote from *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud's interest in this regard is in 'the manner in which the relationships of men to one another, their social relationships, are regulated – relationships which affect a person as a neighbor, as a source of help, as another person's sexual object, as a member of a family and of a State'.[28] Freud makes a related point in '*Mourning and Melancholia*' where identification is prompted by 'reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on'.[29] The great psychoanalytic theorist of groups, Wilfred Bion, and his colleagues within the Tavistock tradition, particularly Elliott Jaques and Isabel Menzies Lyth, highlight a similar point through their emphasis on how the cultures of institutions organize identifications and defenses and 'regulate' relationships.

A case study of how unconscious defenses against anxiety are encoded within the culture of an institution and reiterated by its members as they perform their role-identity may help to illustrate aspects of the above argument. In what is now regarded as a classic study, Menzies Lyth investigated how nurses working within a major London hospital were required to draw on the collective cultural defense system of that institution's nursing service in order to defend against the manifold anxieties inherent in the tasks of caring for ill and dying patients. Only behaviors and mentalities organized by a restricted set of unconscious defense mechanisms of splitting and projection were recognized as proper. More complex psychic processes were marginalized, with the effect that a more mature working-through of anxiety, grief, and desire was inhibited. Nurses were required to accommodate to this role-identity and its preferred practices and psychic defenses, or be seen to fail – to be a bad nurse. As Menzies Lyth puts it (and notice the close parallel to Wendt's argument about collective representations discussed above), 'we came to realize that the complaints (about junior and senior nurses) stem from a collusive system of denial, splitting and projection that is culturally acceptable to – indeed, *culturally required* of – nurses'.[30] Here we have an exemplary instance of how a cultural repertoire, predominantly encoded with psychic mechanisms of splitting and projection, organizes role-identities, practices, emotions, and social relations in order to support the ontological security of nurses who regularly have to deal with anxiety-provoking situations. In this social institution, the dominant cultural form and its legitimated practices and mentalities, organized by its 'required'

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[26]See the discussion of 'psychoanalytic social theorists, who stress the ambivalent nature of all internalizations because of the fear of "deindividuation"' on page 306.

[27]Freud 1959.

[28]Freud 1972, 32.

[29]Freud 2006, 310.

[30]Menzies Lyth 1988, 57, emphasis added.

unconscious defenses, carried strong implications for subjectivity and sociality. Similarly, cultural repertoires of states-in-interaction encode psychic defenses that are valorized as the proper way to resist ontological insecurity. Those acting for and as the state, by virtue of the prevailing cultural repertoire that they are motivated to draw upon in order to be recognized as competent agents, reiterate the culturally-encoded psychic defenses, in an ongoing process of structuration that may sometimes reiterate with a difference and alter the weighting of the cultural repertoire. The Trump Presidency has clearly re-balanced the cultural repertoire of the United States in its international relations, by valorizing an increased reliance on discourses that encode the psychic processes of splitting, projection, and projective identification. Of course, this has not been without internal and external resistance.

What comes next: falling out or cultural reconfiguration?

In her ground-breaking work on the ontological security of states in interaction, Mitzen adapts Giddens' approach to this new setting by 'scaling up' from individuals to states.[31] Due to its significance as a principal reference point for most subsequent work on ontological security in IR, and also due to its admirable clarity and precision, below I briefly explore pertinent aspects of Mitzen's early work. In 'Ontological Security in World Politics', Mitzen follows Giddens' argument very closely when arguing that 'agency requires a stable cognitive environment' and that 'deep (cognitive) uncertainty renders the actor's identity insecure'.[32] She adds:

> Giddens argues that all social actors intrinsically know that behind the routines of daily life, 'chaos lurks'. Constant awareness of such chaos would generate tremendous anxiety, making it extremely difficult to reconcile competing threats and take any action at all.[33]

In order to avoid these disabling outcomes, established role-identities and their cultural supports and routines are adhered to; for some 'rigidly', while for others 'reflexively'.[34] Hence, in certain circumstances, the need to maintain ontological security may trump physical, strategic, or economic security needs.

As already argued, this Giddens-derived approach fails to adequately incorporate unconscious processes. It operates with a far too restricted understanding of human subjectivity and the ways in which human subjects draw upon and negotiate a complex and hybrid cultural repertoire. Much of this follows from its conceptualization of the human subject as a centered subject, cognitively and emotionally invested in adherence to established role-identities and routines. This argument about passionate attachments has its virtues, but its failure to incorporate both the decenteredness of the human subject and the internal differentiation of cultural repertoires leads it to misconstrue what typically follows when ontological security is threatened. A fuller incorporation of psychoanalytic theory introduces a more complex account of

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[31]Mitzen 2006b, 351–53.
[32]*Ibid.*, 342.
[33]*Ibid.*, 346.
[34]*Ibid.*, 343.

human subjectivity that extends beyond Giddens' concerns with the cocooned centeredness of the human subject as an ontologically secure agent. While psychoanalysis recognizes that human subjects need to maintain a sense of a coherent identity that is centered, consistent, and continues through time and changing circumstances, psychoanalysis also regards this as a misrecognition in which the unconscious is occluded and yet produces significant effects. Freud's argument that 'the ego is not master in its own house', although due to its narcissism it imagines itself as such, Klein's account of the ego's capacity to split and project itself and its objects and thereby re-position itself in order to survive, and Lacan's account of the mirror-stage, the formation of the ego or 'I', and how this 'I' is captured within the inertia of an imaginary relation and therefore is blind to the 'other scene' of the unconscious[35]: such misrecognition, defensive re-positioning and other fundamental aspects of psychoanalytic theory highlight that ontological security is quite consistent with an understanding of the human subject as decentered. Indeed, the capacity to defend against ontological insecurity relies on such misrecognition, as it supports the imaginary sense of self as continuous across any actual discontinuities of narratives, mentalities, and practices that follow from a reconfiguration of the cultural repertoire drawn upon to defend against ontological insecurity.

The mistake made by IR scholars who rely unduly on Giddens' account of ontological security is that they too readily equate the maintenance of psychic integrity (in order to avoid the fall into chaos) with the maintenance of a currently established role-identity and its accompanying mentality, supported by a particular culture of anarchy. They fail to adequately recognize two inter-related dimensions of the need and desire to maintain ontological security. First, the ego, when threatened with dissolution, will resort to extreme defenses such as splitting itself and projecting internal aspects onto others in order to hold onto a degree of integration. In particular, Kleinian theory, with its account of paranoid-schizoid defenses against anxiety, provides a detailed account of the ego's desperate desire to maintain some degree of coherence in the face of threats to its integrity, even when this involves a reorganization of the psyche itself.[36] To characterize this dynamic capacity for psychic reorganization in order to defend against intense anxiety, Klein developed the concept of psychic positions, rather than stages, as 'positions' better captures the dynamic flexibility of these unconscious processes. Positions can be entered and exited in a flexible process of what I term re-positioning.

Second, complex cultural repertoires drawn upon by states-in-interaction typically contain alternative cultural forms that enable cultural and psychic reorganization, while also preserving the imaginary self-recognition of each state as centered and coherent, even as they shift to qualitatively different positions. Such reconfigurations can maintain the imaginary self-recognition of states-in-interaction as centered and coherent because the cultural repertoire drawn upon is typically composed of an amalgam of cultural forms that, across their range, contain qualitatively distinct ways of defending against anxiety. This hybrid amalgam can be re-weighted to promote previously marginalized discourses and their encoded defenses, thereby avoiding the fall into chaos by valorizing qualitatively different ways of interacting.

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[35]Freud 1961; Klein 1975; Lacan 1988.
[36]Klein 1948, 1975.

Cognitive and emotional dissonance is avoided due to unconscious processes of misrecognition in which states can transform their role-identity and the way they relate to relevant others while, at the same time, each (mis)-recognizing itself and its role-identity as continuous across this transition. These effects are the product of unconscious processes and can be analyzed through Freud's account of the ego, Lacan's account of imaginary misrecognition, and Klein's account of psychic positions.[37] Such an account is consistent across psychoanalytic traditions.[38]

Conclusion

In their foundational work on ontological security, both Mitzen and Steele assume that socialization or internalization processes operate in ways that are consistent with Wendt's understanding of how any of the three cultures – Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian – can move from operating as an external demand to becoming an internalized norm that motivates agency due to its intrinsic valuation by the actor.[39] This account of the movement from the first to the third degree of internalization has several strengths. However, it suffers from the limitation of many socialization arguments, in that the further internalization proceeds (toward the third degree) the less dynamic and the more determinate a state's likely range of responses become. As Wendt puts it: 'It is Realists who should think that cultural change is easy, not constructivists, because the more deeply shared ideas are internalized – the more they "matter" – the stickier the structure they constitute will be'.[40] This argument captures a central aspect of the process, but, as Wendt recognizes in his subsequent quantum theory argument about 'radical indeterminacy' quoted above, identities are never as closed as this implies. While one form of being and relating may have become 'second-nature', this does not remove the availability of alternate forms that may come into operation as circumstances change. The relevance of this is that a socialization-to-type argument that excludes or restricts the scope of unconscious processes within the cultural repertoire unduly constrains the dynamism of identities and relations.

This returns us to my leading question: what typically happens when a state's ontological security is profoundly challenged? What comes next? Does its ontological security collapse and chaos prevail? Or are alternative cultural forms, or reconfigured cultural repertoires, resorted to? Raising this question allows us to highlight both the strengths and limitations of the arguments developed by Mitzen and Steele in their early, foundational work in this area and, following them, by many others. Their recognition that states have a desire to maintain ontological security contains the possibility that ontological security may trump physical, economic, or strategic security. This is where the theory takes on

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[37]Freud 1959, 1960; Lacan 1988; Klein 1948, 1975.

[38]Sucharov 2005, 27 addresses the co-presence of different cultural forms that are available within a cultural repertoire when she proposes that 'every society maintains not only a dominant (conscious) narrative, but an unconscious *counternarrative* as well, which the former has in part arisen to conceal'. While this captures the prospect of misrecognition, it lacks the dynamic complexity and the ongoing capacity for re-positioning and reconfiguration that I am attempting to address.

[39]Mitzen 2006a, b; Steele 2005, 2008; Wendt 1999.

[40]Wendt 1999, 255.

considerable practical significance. For instance, in Mitzen's example of Israel–Palestine after Oslo, trumping by the need to maintain ontological security had perverse effects in the continuation of the entrenched conflict. According to this account, both Israel and Palestine were would-be security seekers that could not convince themselves that they could trust the other sufficiently to themselves act according to their best intentions. While both parties regarded themselves as security seekers and wanted to act accordingly, 'neither was sure that the other was satiable'.[41] In turn, the other state, or proto-state, did not experience enough indications of the good intentions of its other to recognize it as a 'security seeker' rather than as 'greedy'. Consequently, both Israel and Palestine acted in ways that ran counter to their best intentions and their preferred conception of self. Over time, given their routine behavior, both internalized, or re-internalized, an understanding of themselves as greedy and, by continuing to act accordingly, they constituted themselves as a greedy-type state and were recognized as such by the other.

Even this brief summary of Mitzen's argument highlights that the approach I have outlined provides a better understanding of this unfolding decline back into a Hobbesian or greedy State relationship, while aspirations toward becoming Lockean security seekers were being trialed. It does so because it recognizes, firstly, the co-presence of qualitatively distinct cultural forms within the cultural repertoire established by the Israel–Palestine relationship. Secondly, the psychoanalytic account of human subjectivity as decentered supports an understanding of how this co-presence of cultural forms is incorporated into the identities of the two parties as they negotiate their way between relating as either security seekers, or as greedy. To phrase this in a Lacanian manner, at any moment in that on-going relationship, one or the other of these cultural forms may constitute the chain of signifiers that position the State-as-subject, while simultaneously mirroring back through the imaginary a coherent identity to each of the parties in interaction. That claim is consistent with, indeed relies upon, the larger argument that the cultural repertoire can support alternate ways of thinking, feeling, and relating and alternate norms regarding the proper exercise of power, authority, and violence.

Finally, my argument underlines the importance of ontological security as a significant factor in the relations between states, while it shifts the emphasis onto what comes next when ontological insecurity looms. Moreover, my focus on complex and hybrid cultural repertoires, linked with my more thorough-going incorporation of psychoanalytic theory, complicates the account of how ontological insecurity is avoided. No longer are states understood as caught in an either/or dilemma, where they either adhere to established routines and role-identities, even when that adherence tends to perpetuate conflict, or, as the dread alternative, they fall into chaos. Consistent with empirical observation, there are more options available, contained within the complexity of a hybrid cultural repertoire that states draw upon to organize their identities and international relations. Through unconscious processes of misrecognition and re-positioning, alternative modes of relating can be resorted to while maintaining a secure sense of a continuous and centered identity. These alternative modes bring to the fore previously recessed elements of the cultural repertoire that authorize different practices and new routines, yet, through

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[41]Mitzen 2006b, 356.

misrecognition, the coherence of state identities may be preserved while defending against ontological insecurity differently.

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