International
Theory

Security *qua* existential surviving (while becoming otherwise) through performative leaps of faith

Badredine Arfi (iD)

Department of Political Science, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA
Corresponding author. E-mail: barfi@ufl.edu

This paper analyzes the idea of 'ontological security' to make three arguments: (a) that to be secure in one's being is paradoxical in the sense that *to be is to survive while always becoming otherwise*, (b) that *to survive is to be anxious*, and (c) that to get attached to such a security of one's always becoming otherwise is to engage in *performative leaps of faith* in the security of one's existence. This framework is used to suggest a new interpretation of the security dilemma.

Most scholars of international security agree that physical survival is a key concern for actors. The literature on ontological security argues in addition that the *security of being*, which is cast as having a sense of temporal continuity and consistency of one's identity, is also a key concern. This delineation of security, while very useful, falls short of offering an adequate understanding of a deeper logic of survival that drives actors' concern for security. I address this issue in four steps.

First, I present a new theoretical formulation of actors' sense of their *security of being*. Underlying these ruminations is the key question of what it means to speak of *the security of being*. The idea is that one cannot theorize about one's sense of security of being without at the same time addressing one's movement toward death, or more generally always becoming otherwise. I propose that instead of conceptualizing ontological security as a sense of 'security of being' (or 'being's security'), we need to accept the idea that to feel secure in one's being is quite paradoxical since it means *to engage in everyday practices of surviving through a continual movement of always becoming otherwise*, which might end in death.

Second, scholars of ontological security have contended, since Laing (1990), that anxiety always accompanies feelings of ontological insecurity. Building on insights from Paul Tillich and Martin Heidegger on fear and anxiety, I argue, contra Laing and Giddens, that anxiety *always* accompanies the *security* (and insecurity) of existing *qua* always becoming otherwise. I specifically consider the connections between

survival and anxiety to argue that *to engage in everyday practices of surviving (qua always becoming otherwise) one has to be anxious.*

Third, I argue that the sense of one's security of existing (*qua* survival through always becoming otherwise) originates in *the impossibility of not experiencing* time and one's identity as *out of joint*. The out-of-jointness of our experience of time and self-identity makes the security of one's existence a disjointed everyday practice of surviving which assumes one of two forms. Firstly, the security of one's existence is experienced either as traces (of one's self) that have already receded into a past that therefore can never be experienced as a present. Secondly, it can be experienced as traces that have yet to come from a future which will never be experienced as a present. This means that one cannot pin down one's sense of temporal continuity of one's self-identity. *It is and can only remain unsettled* and *is* as such *unsettling.*

Fourth, using IR scholars' discussions of attachment to one' sense of ontological security as entry points, I argue that actors become attached to such unsettled and unsettling sense of security of existing through the mechanism of attachment to practices of everyday routines. I specifically argue that the *unsettling logic of one's security of existing* creates a possibility for actors to *performatively take a leap of faith* that their attachment to everyday routines of survival will procure them with a sense of security of their existence through a process which I call, following Derrida,[1] *originary performativity.* This performativity produces *simultaneously* actors' attachments to practices of everyday routines of survival *and* a feeling of security of their existence as always becoming otherwise.

The rest of the paper is organized into four sections. The first section presents a reflection on the issue of life/always becoming otherwise/death and makes the case for why we need to move away from the notion of 'security of being' to the notion of 'an everyday practice of survival *qua* always becoming otherwise'. The section conceptually draws the connections between fear, anxiety, and security *qua* survival. The second section spells out the connections between the *out-of-jointness* of time and self-identity with the unsettling logic of the security of an actor's existence. The third section presents a discussion of security *qua* survival in terms of style of attachment to everyday practices to show that for an actor to feel secure in its existence entails *performatively taking a leap of faith* in the actor's attachment to everyday practices. The final section offers a new interpretation of the security dilemma.

Security *qua* surviving through anxiety

Security studies are often developed in terms of actors' physical survival.[2] A security dilemma arises, the argument goes, under a condition of anarchy wherein states find themselves in a world of self-help and wherein a state's efforts to secure itself end up creating insecurity for other states, thereby making security a zero-sum game. The security dilemma occurs in a world where states' defense has an advantage over offense and where offensive postures cannot be distinguished from defensive ones.[3]

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[1]Derrida 1989.

[2]Herz 1962, 3; Waltz 1979, 91–92; Huysmans 1998, 242; Steele 2008, 2–3; Lupovici 2012, 812.

[3]Jervis 1978.

The literature on ontological security argues that in addition to physical security, actors are also concerned about the security of their being which can sometimes take precedence over physical security.[4] This turns the traditional security dilemma into some sort of existential 'insurance policy' – a continuation of conflict can become the *raison d'être* of actors, that is, the reason for actors' survival not only physically but also in terms of what they are and stand for.

I argue that there is much more to the logic of survival than both the traditional school of security and ontological security theory allow for. Whereas I agree that survival is a primary concern of actors in international politics I add to it that *to be is to survive as always becoming otherwise*. Why?

To begin with, to speak of the security of a 'thing' or 'being' entails the possibility of insecurity of this 'thing' or 'being'. But what does the insecurity of 'being' mean? This question can be answered in two ways at least.

First, the insecurity of 'being' might mean that 'being' is always becoming otherwise. This renders the usual focus in ontological security theory on the security of 'being' quite problematic since we would have to speak of the security of an 'always becoming otherwise'. This would imply a sense of identity as an always becoming otherwise, that is, an identity which is never identical to itself. Facing this conundrum turns out to be a key reason why we need to rethink the approach of ontological security.

Second, the insecurity of 'being' might mean the threat of ceasing to be. This implies that the possibility of not-being is always already implicated in 'being'. Therefore, one has to consider simultaneously the possibilities of life AND death. This raises the very difficult issue of having an unmediated experience of actual death that Heidegger terms as the possible impossible.[5] Why? Because both physical security and ontological security approaches presuppose that the analyst (or more generally the other) can be in the shoes of the actor concerned with security and thus be able to understand in an unmediated way the experience of death. This is no easy question. As a first cut, we can delineate for the sake of analysis two different scenarios depending on whether one is considering the death of an individual person or a collective actor.

Whether there are qualitative differences between collective death and the death of an individual is a very complex question since it crucially depends on how one defines death. Individual persons can experience many types of death other than physical/biological death (e.g., symbolic or cultural death). A collectivity, such as a social movement or a nation, can experience symbolic or cultural death too and hence be worried about its mortality and survival. Collectivities do not face a biological death (i.e., separate from a biological death of all their individual members) but they can still experience a physical death as the complete collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union illustrates. Abulof's study of the mortality of nations is very illustrative when considering the security and survival of nations. He explains that '[m]ortality here does not equal death, but signifies the awareness of the inevitability, availability, and indeterminacy of death'.[6] Existential survival is

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[4]Mitzen 2006, 341.
[5]See Berenskoetter 2020 for a similar discussion.
[6]Abulof 2015, 3.

continuously at stake since their members 'deeply doubt their symbolic immortality'.[7]

Our individual experience of death is always mediated through an experience of death of an 'other', from which we conclude that we inexorably are beings-toward-death, in spite of the fact that we can never know when death will arrive. However, as far as my subjective experience is concerned, I am effectively immortal because I do not experience my death which would then confirm to me that I was a mortal – I cannot experience 'my death while being alive'. There will never be any way for me to experientially know my death or its moment as a 'now' event. Hence the aporia: I go inexorably toward death without a phenomenological experience of death. My witnessing of my own death is always already yet to come, incomplete, and too early even if I die, and precisely when I die. I am always already arriving too early to my death which prohibits me from completely witnessing the arrival of my death. Yet, while still alive, the necessity of becoming-toward-death consumes us at every single moment of our life, inexorably leading us to death while still being alive. At every moment, we are but surviving the asymmetric race between 'being' and death, with death advancing toward us while 'being' retreating away from us at every moment within which we are still alive. The only way to stop and exorcise being haunted by death is for the actor to end its life, that is, succumbing to death and making it actual. The actor's sense of temporal continuity as a living person is therefore nothing but *a survival within this condition, always becoming otherwise at every instant of its life.* Conversely, the actor's survival defines a border which is demarcated, and demarcating life, from death while at the same time connecting life to death; the latter is constitutive of the possibility of the former. The actor is always living on this border between life and death, and yet it is precisely because the actor is on the life side of the border that the actor is *surviving* on the border between life and death. *The security of the actor is as such an existential survival*, always already temporary.

The most fundamentally constitutive everyday routine of an actor's life the actor's continuous and inexorable passage in time is an existentially routinized movement of surviving the specter of the possibility of death which haunts the actor's life, continuously arriving with its arrival deferred until the actor actually dies. Yet this everyday routinized movement of surviving, which affirms the actor's life, is what inexorably constitutes the very condition of the actor's death, of constituting the actor as becoming-toward-death. The actor does not survive to not die. The actor is existentially surviving because the actor is always becoming otherwise. For the actor *to feel secure in its existence is to experience that it is surviving while always becoming otherwise.*

Should the actor therefore be *anxious* to be in such existential condition? Would the actor not be anxious if it were to survive while not becoming otherwise? However, if the actor were to survive while not becoming otherwise, this would mean that the actor is not surviving anymore. It would mean that the actor has crossed the border of life–death to the side of death. How can the actor then be (or not be) anxious since the actor will not be alive anymore? To be anxious, the actor has to be alive, that is, to be anxious, the actor has to be in a routinized

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[7]Ibid., 8. See Hom and Steele 2020 for a more elaborate discussion.

surviving mode which is always haunted by the specter of the possibility of death. For the actor: to be is to survive; and to be anxious, the actor has to be surviving.

What about the reverse? I argue that *not only* to be anxious the actor has to be surviving, but *also* to be surviving the actor *must* (in a phenomenological sense) be anxious. This runs counter to the position in the literature on ontological security which argues that actors seek to alleviate anxiety through ontological security.[8] I develop this argument by examining next the notion of anxiety.

We often speak of anxiety and fear together. The notion of fear plays an important role in the study and practice of international security, as the emphasis put on Hobbesian fear evidences.[9] There is however a conceptual as well as existential difference between fear and anxiety. According to Heidegger, '[t]he only threatening which can be "fearsome" and which gets discovered in fear, always comes from entities within-the-world'.[10] For Tillich, 'fear … has a definite object …, which can be faced, analyzed, attacked, endured'.[11] In contrast, 'anxiety', for Tillich, 'has no object, or rather, in a paradoxical phrase, its object is the negation of every object'.[12] As he put it, 'anxiety in its nakedness, is always the anxiety of ultimate nonbeing'.[13] As put by Heidegger, '[t]hat in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens it is *nowhere*. Anxiety "does not know" what that in the face of which it is anxious is'.[14] Such a condition of anxiety 'cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself'.[15] As argued earlier, one can only be in a state of survival. According to Tillich and Heidegger, anxiety is an existential condition. I thus suggest that this implies that the security of an actor's existence *qua* everyday practice of surviving is always – existentially – accompanied with anxiety. The actor cannot be secure in its existence if it is not surviving while being anxious. 'To be' means to survive in a continuous state of anxiety.

Yet this does not explicate the source of actors' anxiety. Noting with Heidegger that '[i]n anxiety one feels "*unsettled*"',[16] I ask: what is it in an actor's experience that existentially makes it feel the unsettledness of its existential security? The answer, I argue, lies in the (widely accepted) definition of ontological security as an experience of 'temporal continuity'.[17]

Experiencing time and the unsettledness of existential security

Students of ontological security relate an actor's existential anxiety to a lack of experiencing temporal continuity and consistency in the actor's sense of identity.[18]

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[8]Laing 1990, 39; Giddens 1991, 37–39. Berenskoetter 2020 raises a similar set of questions.

[9]Williams 2005, 25. See Rumelili 2020 for an elaborate discussion of Hobbes on fear and anxiety.

[10]Heidegger 2001, 230.

[11]Tillich 1952, 36.

[12]*Ibid.*

[13]Ibid., 38

[14]Heidegger 2001, 231.

[15]Tillich 1952, 39.

[16]Heidegger 2001, 233.

[17]My proposal is very different not only from Berenskoetter 2020 and Hom and Steele 2020 in this Symposium but also from most of the IR literature on the topic of time and temporality.

[18]Laing 1990, 42.

Conversely, an individual with 'a firm core of ontological security' is one whose '*identity* and autonomy are never in question; as a *continuum in time*'.[19] This understanding of ontological security has been extended to collectivities, such as ethnic groups and nations. As thoroughly explicated by Abulof, nations (and other types of collectivities) can fear (at least) symbolic extinction, sometimes even more, going all the way down to physical extinction, thereby remaining in a state of existential anxiety. Abulof argues that '[e]thnic ontological security thus transpires through historical continuity and societal unity; its demise, through acute challenges to both'.[20] One can indeed say that in most of the literature, a sense of temporal continuity is essential for both individuals' and collectivities' sense of ontological security.

Scholars are therefore taking for granted how we *experience time* and *identity*. They presuppose a notion of time based on the idea that we experience time as a *jointed seque*nce of consecutive past, present, and future 'nows'. Likewise, in speaking of identity, they presuppose that we experience *identity as identical to itself*. Therefore, raising the question of whether such concepts of time and identity are adequate for such a conceptualization is an important issue.

I argue, first, that 'our experience of time is out joint' and that 'we experience identity as not identical to itself', and, second, that this forces us to approach existential security through logical impossibilities such as 'being both false and true' and 'being neither false nor true'.

To explicate this argument, let us go back to the theme of survival. A taken-for-granted presupposition is that at the most basic level, the actor survives from one past moment of time (from a past 'now') into a current moment of time (in a present 'now'), and the actor is engaged in a surviving movement which might continue onto a coming moment of time (to a future 'now'). This prompts the question: *What* did survive from the actor's past to the actor's present? And *what* is passed onto the actor's future, if the actor does have a future? Is the actor an *entity* that survived from the past and is then surviving toward the future? If that were the case, this would imply that the actor is present to itself at any moment in time, that is, the actor lives in and experience its auto-presence. Should this be true now, it will have to be true at any instant of time that the actor is still alive. If that were the case, then the actor will be present at the instant of time at which its death occurs; the actor will witness the experience of its death. However, this is not possible because the actor has to be alive, as argued earlier, to witness its own death.

This means that the actor cannot witness its death even when the actor assumes that it is always auto-present in its life as a becoming-toward-death. Auto-presence ends before death in a sort of a 'little' death before (the actor's ultimate) death. Does the actor then die twice? Shouldn't the little death be also preceded with another even little 'little' death? We thus end up facing a regressive conundrum (much like the Zeno paradox). Why? Because if the actor can be present at its own little death, as part of the movement toward the 'ultimate' death, then this would

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[19]Abulof, 41, emphasis added.
[20]Abulof, 36.

mean the actor does not die the first time. The conundrum continues likewise for a second-order little death.

Moreover, being auto-present means that the actor can instantly experience its own presence during the passing of time. This means that the actor can experience differentially a current 'now of its auto-presence' from a past 'now of its auto-presence' and from a yet to come 'now of its auto-presence'. Is this possible? The answer is no because it takes time to experience the passing of time. It takes time to experience a current 'now', which means that we would have to have two dissociated but co-present and coterminous 'nows'; an impossibility which Aristotle noted a long time ago. Instead, the actor can possibly experience any 'now' only as a 'now' that has already receded into the past, or as a 'now' that is yet to come from the future. What the actor thus experiences is the trace of a past 'now' or the expectation of a future 'now' which is yet to be experienced, and when it (the future 'now') is experienced, it can only be so after it has already passed, that is, it is experienced as the trace of a 'now' that has already receded into the past.

If the actor cannot pin down any moment of time, any present 'now', how can the actor be auto-present since such a presencing of the self to itself is a movement in time and the latter is out of joint? Because the actor's experience of time is out of joint, its auto-presence is either an experience of traces of its 'presence' in a past 'now' or an experience of an expectation of a trace of its 'presence' in a future 'now' if the actor ever persists long enough to see it come through. The actor's auto-presence, the actor's presence to itself, is thus out of joint.[21] The actor's auto-presence, that is, its self-witnessing, is a movement of traces which are either traces of a past 'self' which has receded into the past or traces *qua* expectations of a future 'self' which is yet to come. The actor's existence is therefore a movement of always becoming otherwise through oncoming–outgoing traces that *survive as* disjointed experiences. Therefore, *the actor's sense of existence is and can only remain unsettled*, that is, always becoming otherwise.

But how do actors become attached to a feeling of existential security, even though the latter is and can only remain unsettled as always becoming otherwise? This, as I argue next, comes via attachment to routines, an attachment which is anchored in *performative leaps of faith*.

Routines and performative leaps of faith

There is a widespread belief that daily routines stabilize and provide a sense of certainty about other actors and the world.[22] 'Actors … vary in … their mode of attachment: some actors rigidly repeat routines, while others participate more reflexively'.[23] This understanding of routinized practices must be supplemented with the fact that routinized practices and routinization are always already undergoing changes as they are repeated and re-enacted even when it *looks like* they provide anchors for stability.

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[21]Derrida 1982, 13.
[22]Mitzen 2006, 341.
[23]Ibid., 343.

There is a double movement which is always already unfolding within the process of routinization. On the one hand, we have the conventional process of routinization which constitutes 'the habitual, taken-for-granted character of the vast bulk of the activities of day-to-day social life'.[24] On the other hand, this process is necessarily bound to a process of unsettling which undermines the habitual taken-for-granted character of the content of the routines. This unsettling is the result of a combination of two factors.

First, the time that it takes to enact a routine is, as argued earlier, out of joint. Second, the re-enactment or reiteration of the acts or practices that constitute a routine necessarily brings change to these acts and practices and henceforth unsettles the very acts and practices themselves. There is no routine without repetition, and any repetition necessarily comes with change because contexts (of routines) are necessarily historically conditioned. The necessarily historical nature of routines more or less undermines the routine-ness of routines as such. This raises the question of how people become attached to routines anyway. Accepting Giddens' argument that routines and routinization are pervasive in societal life, Mitzen argues that one needs to explain why they contribute differently to ontological security. She suggests that there is a basic trust which determines how the individual approaches the routines and is essential for maintaining his/her sense of existential security. Building on insights from Willmott,[25] Mitzen argues[26] that

> With healthy basic trust the individual's attitude toward routines is reflexive, in the sense that she can take a critical distance toward them …. the individual does not treat routines as ends in themselves or consciously direct her action toward maintaining them. Instead she takes for granted – trusts – the stability of the environment as she pursues other goals … In contrast, the individual with rigid or maladaptive basic trust is unable to maintain distance from her routines. She treats routines as ends in themselves rather than as a means toward realizing her goals.

The idea of healthy and maladaptive basic trust is insightful. However, I find it theoretically more productive to keep Willmott's concept of attachment based on the notions of *reflexive attachment* when the actor can take critical distance toward routines and *rigid attachment* when the actor compulsively clings to routines.

Therefore, should routines incur serious disruptions, we will be faced with two scenarios. First is the case of existential security which would correspond to a reflexive attachment to routines wherein the actor takes critical attitudes toward routines and considers them as means to an end. Second is the case of existential security which would correspond to a rigid attachment wherein the actor compulsively clings to routines, taking them as goals in themselves. Let us examine closely this delineation.

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[24]Giddens 1984, 376.
[25]Willmott 1986.
[26]Mitzen 2006, 350.

Routines do necessarily have a 'performative aspect', which, for Feldman and Pentland,[27] 'embodies the specific actions, by specific people, at specific times and places, that bring the routine to life'. The performative aspect of routines is a good place where we can examine the kind of performativity involved in reflexive and rigid attachments.

Doing so shows that there is a three-part circularity unfolding in routines. First, as stated by Mitzen, '[o]ntological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time … in order to realize a sense of agency'.[28] This implies that ontological security is the possibility condition for agency.[29] Second, the would-be agent is presupposed to be able to take a critical distance toward routines. Third, the routines are expected to provide an anchor for the would-be emergent sense of experiencing oneself as ontologically secure. This seeming circularity is not however a weakness in the argument but rather a strength if adequately conceptualized. To achieve this, we need to go beyond the conventional notion of performativity understood in the sense of speech-act theory (à la Austin and Searle).

Let us note first that when actors take a critical distance toward routines, this very act necessarily constitutes the possibility condition of the routines. In performing the act of 'taking a critical distance toward routines', the actors are, intentionally or not, enacting the conditions under which the routines become a possibility, if not necessarily an actuality. The actors are performatively creating the possibility conditions for routines. The would-be sense of existential security and the conditions of possibility of the routines would thus simultaneously emerge. The would-be agent performatively lifts itself from its own bootstraps, so to speak, so as to feel existentially secure. This is a performative act which, while being performed, creates its own condition of possibility.

Derrida[30] calls this *originary performativity* based on the key insight that the context of performativity is not an external condition of possibility of the performative act. Rather, the very occurring of the performative act necessarily ruptures the context itself to be a performative act as such. The performative act is thus conceptualized in terms of the more 'general problem of the possibility of inaugural acts, acts that create something new'.[31] An *inaugural act* narrates itself and as such transforms/engenders the very context of its narration, thereby making the narration and the act one and the same thing.[32] Originary performativity *qua* inaugural interpretation thus works by lifting 'itself by its own bootstraps'.[33] The performative *coup de force* would thus have succeeded in the act of founding what in retrospect is taken as its presuppositions, an *après coup* retroactive self-legitimation.

We would therefore say that an actor acts to secure itself through a performative *coup de force* of what *in retrospect* is posited as a reflexive attachment. For Giddens,

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[27]Feldman and Pentland 2003, 94.

[28]Mitzen 2006, 342.

[29]Berenskoetter 2020 and I agree that in certain respects it would be better conceptually to speak of *becoming* rather than *being*.

[30]Derrida 2002.

[31]Culler 2000, 509–10.

[32]Derrida 1994, 51.

[33]Miller 2001, 124.

an ontologically secure actor can sustain a continuous auto-biographical narrative. Therefore, the *après coup* act produces an attachment to routines in the form of an interpretive narrative which grounds such a sense of existential security. The interpretative narrative legitimates the 'success' of the act while being part of the performative act itself. Originary performativity is a perfectly productive tautology which performatively produces *simultaneously* reflexive attachment *and* a sense of existential security, where the former (reflexive attachment) is the condition of felicity (or possibility) of the latter (existential security).

We can see here how the unsettledness of always becoming otherwise is indeed a feature of originary performativity of the duo of existential security/routines (the latter approached via reflexive attachment). There is no 'ground' beneath existential security and no 'ground' beneath routines. The reflexivity of actors in repeating routines is an originary performativity which acts – *qua* inaugural interpretation – to create *simultaneously* a reflexive attachment *and* a sense of existential security.

What about the case where the routines constitute the 'identity' of the actor who thus cannot take a critical distance toward the routines? According to Giddens, '[r]outine activities … are never just carried out in an automatic way', and 'a blind commitment to established routines … is a sign of neurotic compulsion'.[34] Taken together, these two positions entail that a rigid attachment can neither be an automatic following of routines nor can it be a blind commitment to established routines. Rather, it can only be an 'as if' rigid attachment where 'as if' is to be taken in Giddens' sense in that a rigid attachment is made *as if* the environment is free of 'the prospect of being overwhelmed by anxieties', whereas in fact the attachment 'entails a commitment that is a "leap into the unknown"'.[35]

I argue that taking a leap into the unknown by compulsively or rigidly being attached to routines means *taking a leap of faith* that attachment to the routines is enough for addressing the existential question – unsettledness of always becoming otherwise – and thus for going on with life. In the case of rigid attachment, the actors would respond to such situations by putting their faith in the routines. *Rigid attachment is therefore based on a leap of faith*, which means an originary performativity that acts – *qua* inaugural interpretation – to produce *simultaneously* an attachment based on a leap of faith *and* a sense of existential security. The inaugural interpretation of leap-of-faith-driven attachment is in terms of faith in the routines as ends in themselves, whereas the inaugural interpretation of reflexive attachment is an interpretation in terms of a critical rationalization of the routines as a means to certain ends.

We have thus arrived at a seeming opposition between a critical rationalization for adhering to routines and a leap-of-faith-driven clinging to routines; have we? I argue that critical rationalization of adhering to routines is also grounded in *a leap of faith in the process of critical rationalization*. One can however ponder: How can this last actor 'go on' when engaged in a critical assessment of routines as but one possible means to an end? Can this actor not adhere to any routine at all and still maintain a sense of existential security? Isn't engaging in a critical assessment of the routines in itself a 'routine' of critical assessment whenever need be? What

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[34]Giddens 1991, 39, 40.
[35]Ibid., 37, 41; Arfi 2012, 143–50.

assurances does the actor possess when engaging in critical assessment of routines that this would not jeopardize completely her/his sense of existential security? Isn't then an actor engaged in critical assessment of his/her attachment to routines a source of existential insecurity?

The answer: The actor *must*[36] be taking a leap of faith that the process of critical assessment will eventually produce a sense of existential security and this is why the actor takes the risk of engaging into it. The actor does not have any assurances that the critical assessment would eventually lead to a sense of existential security. In fact, the actor proceeds *as if* it is certain of a favorable outcome – that is, existential security – while knowing very well that it indeed is a working assumption. Therefore, although the two situations of reflexive and rigid attachment are different in terms of their styles of attachment to routines, *each actor ends up performatively taking a leap of faith* that one's specific way of attachment does procure a sense of existential security. While getting attached to some routines, the actor, in this very act, is *simultaneously* performatively taking a leap of faith that this is making it feel existentially secure. In this process, the feeling of existential security and the act of getting attached to routines *are not causally connected*. What connects them is the leap of faith in the routines. However, the leap of faith is not taken consciously; rather, it is embedded in the performance of the very act of getting attached to routines; it is performative in nature. Therefore, *on the one hand*, there is no causal connection between the attachment to routines and existential security, and, yet, *on the other hand*, the act of attachment to routines is 'indirectly' linked to a feeling of existential security through the performative leap of faith in the routines, with the *proviso* that the 'performative' is embedded in the act of attachment to routines itself.

In making this argument, my emphasis is on the *leaping qua performative* and *not* on faith as such. A *leap* of faith is resorted to in the absence of knowledge about the future and sometimes even the present, and is always taken *as if* it were certain as there are no guarantees of certainty since it is not a deterministic process. Nor is a leap of faith based on a belief that can be verified. Rather, a leap of faith is a sort of conviction and commitment beyond what either knowledge or belief can offer or lead to. The kind of performative leap of faith that I am discussing here is similar to what Derrida calls 'the performative experience of an elementary act of faith'.[37]

There is in here a connection to Huysmans' discussion of ontological security as 'a strategy of managing the limits of reflexivity' and thus a strategy for dealing with an epistemological fear of not knowing.[38] Ontological security, for him, is an 'ordering strategy of security' which is supposed to 'postpone the limits of reflexivity as far as possible by accumulating truth about how the world works'.[39] Whereas I agree with the gist of these statements, they still fall short in answering the ultimate question: after we postpone the limits of reflexivity as far as possible through knowledge accumulation, how do we ultimately decide to act while knowing very well that we cannot completely eradicate the indeterminacy about the unknown,

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[36]'Must' is used in a phenomenological not normative or moral sense.
[37]Derrida 2002, 80–81.
[38]Huysmans 1998, 242.
[39]Ibid., 245.

which is precisely the condition of modernity that Huysmans speaks of? The answer is: we performatively take a leap of faith.

Two important questions emerge at this point: First, what does speaking of a performative leap of faith mean empirically? Second, can an IR actor *in a conscious way* performatively take a leap of faith?[40] Addressing these two issues has two aspects to it. A first aspect is the most general one, that is, for any actor, and the second aspect is the specific case of IR actors.

In the general case, the answer is yes such as when someone says in a marriage ceremony when asked to take such and such as a spouse he/she responds: 'I do', knowing very well that this is creating the emotional-socio-moral-legal bond of marriage. The act of marriage is anchored in intentionality, which is, according to John Searle, the case for every speech act, including performative ones. This is disputed by Derrida who argues that speech acts are much more anchored in citationality and iterability and go beyond anyone's intentionality. That is: there is always embedded in any speech act the possibility of a disconnect between the original intentionality of the speaker and the speech act. If words act, as put by Austin, their purviews are beyond the intention and control of the original speaker.

In the specific case of IR actors, one can cite the example of the so-called brinkmanship where a state leader engages in an extremely risky foreign policy while hoping that such a policy would not take the country over the cliff. In this case, taking a leap of faith means engaging in a course of action which is not based on *knowns* but rather on *unknowns* (or, arguably, even *unknowables*) while hoping that one's leaping forward into the unknown is not catastrophic.[41]

Surviving while 'always becoming otherwise' in IR

To briefly illustrate the arguments developed in this paper, this section discusses how to cast the security dilemma within the framework of this paper.

I begin by focusing on Mitzen's innovative reinterpretation in terms of her notion of ontological security. What Mitzen essentially does is to reduce the logic of the security dilemma to that of knowledge about assurances on one's identity. On her reading, the security dilemma results from the problem of knowledge or uncertainty on actors' present and future intentions. She argues that attachment to routines, which perpetuate physical insecurity, suppresses uncertainty and makes the world knowable and this explains why actors cannot learn their way out of the dilemma.[42]

A key point here is that she postulates a causal link between attachment to routines and the lifting of uncertainty (about the other's intentions). This, as she argues, is mutually confirmed by the actors involved in the security dilemma as they mutually attribute aggressive intentions to one another. Actors engage in

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[40]I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for raising these two questions.

[41]This is reminiscent to, but in an important way different from, what Mitzen and Schweller call *acting based on misplaced certainty* with the latter defined 'as a situation where a decision maker has eliminated uncertainty prematurely' (Mitzen and Schweller 2011, 21). I cannot push this line of comparison further due to a lack of space.

[42]Mitzen 2006, 353–54.

mutually self-fulfilling prophecies since the latter lift uncertainty and make the world knowable, which stabilizes their respective senses of ontological security.

I think that what actually happens is that the actors act *as if* they were making the world knowable. They have no way of verifying this as-if assumption; they postulate that it must be true. Why? Because verifying that the world is indeed knowable requires knowledge, and a lack thereof is precisely at the origin of the problem. The as-if postulation is thus beyond knowledge. This suggests that what the actors do is in fact take a leap of faith that their attachment to routines makes the world knowable. However, this is not the end of the story: I do not think that the taking of a leap of faith is done consciously but rather performatively. When the actors engage in a self-fulfilling prophecy that being attached to routines (of physical insecurity) makes the world knowable and hence gives them a sense of existential security, this in itself presupposes a leap of faith that the self-prophecies do indeed make the world more knowable and hence procure a sense of existential security. The presupposition is embedded in the very performance of the act (of self-fulfilling prophecy); the presupposition is performatively embedded in the act of engaging in self-fulfilling prophecies about making the world knowable through physical insecurity. Therefore, from the perspective of this paper, the dynamic of the security dilemma is such that:

(a) the actors are engaged in securing their senses of existence by *surviving while always becoming otherwise*, that is, by engaging in routines of physical insecurity,

(b) the actors are *surviving while remaining anxious* since the as-if postulation of a knowable world is an assumption which is heteronomous to knowledge, and

(c) the actors get attached to routines of physical insecurity while being performatively engaged in *leaps of faith* that they are securing their existence.

Given this perspective, I argue that the so-called 'security dilemma' is still a sea of indeterminacy since the original idea that the actors seek security through insecurity measures is operative on the basis of an 'as-if' postulation.

To elaborate this point, let me go back to the widely-accepted formulation of the security dilemma, that is, a state's efforts to secure itself end up creating insecurity for other states, thereby making security a zero-sum game. According to my formulation, the state is securing its sense of existence *qua* survival while engaging in routines of physical insecurity – this is what I call (a) in the previous paragraph. Does this lift the security dilemma? No according to what I call (b) in the previous paragraph since (b) means that states are acting only 'as-if' they know that they are securing their sense of existence (this part is missing in Mitzen's argument). What states are in fact doing is taking a performative leap of faith that they are securing their survival while always becoming otherwise by engaging in physical insecurity.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me summarize the key amendments/reconfigurations to Ontological Security *qua* Theory that this paper calls for.

First, we should move away from using 'ontological' as a descriptive and rather adopt either 'existential' or perhaps even 'ontic' – that is, we should speak of 'existential security' or 'ontic security'.

Second, we should refrain from characterizing 'existential security' as the security of 'being'. Rather, we should seek to zoom in on the unfolding and enfolding of the process of surviving while always ineluctably becoming otherwise.

Third, we need to move away from thinking of anxiety as a source of existential insecurity; rather, anxiety is an attribute of life and the manifestation of belonging to the life side of the life–death border.

Fourth, we should move away from the 'vulgar' (to use a Heideggerian term) understandings of 'time' and 'identity' and focus instead on the *aporias* that always already accompany the unfolding and enfolding of surviving while always becoming otherwise; aporias that come from the constitutive disjointedness of time.

Fifth, we need to pay serious attention to the performativity that undergirds the practices and discourses of existential security/insecurity. Specifically: that (individual and collective) actors are able to develop and sustain a sense of existential security has to do with developing and maintaining a performative leap of faith that they are indeed existentially secure.

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