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SYMPOSIUM

Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics: thinking with and beyond Giddens

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Research on ontological security in world politics has mushroomed since the early 2000s but seems to have reached an impasse. Ontological security is a conceptual lens for understanding subjectivity that focuses on the management of anxiety in self-constitution. Building especially on Giddens, IR scholars have emphasized how this translates to a need for cognitive consistency and biographical continuity – a security of 'being.' A criticism has been its so-called 'status quo bias,' a perceived tilt toward theorizing investment in the existing social order. To some, an ontological security lens both offers social theoretic foundations for a realist worldview and lacks resources to conceptualize alternatives. We disagree. Through this symposium, we address that critique and suggest pathways forward by focusing on the thematic of anxiety. Distinguishing between anxiety and fear, we note that anxiety manifests in different emotions and leaves room for a range of political possibilities. Early ontological security scholarship relied heavily on readings of Giddens, which potentially accounts for its bias. This symposium re-opens the question of the relationship between anxiety and subjectivity from the perspective of ontological security, thinking with and beyond Giddens. Three contributions re-think anxiety in ontological security drawing on existentialist philosophy; two address limitations of Giddens' approach.

Keywords: ontological security; anxiety; subjectivity; fear; Giddens

Since the early 2000s, international relations (IR) research on ontological security in world politics has mushroomed; but lately, it has seemed to reach something of an impasse. Ontological security is a conceptual lens for understanding subjectivity, originating in psychoanalysis (Laing 1990) and sociology (Giddens 1991 and 2004), which focuses on the management of anxiety in the constitution of the self. Building especially on Giddens, many IR scholars have emphasized how this translates to a need for cognitive consistency and biographical continuity – a security of 'being' – especially in a world shaken with the dislocations of late modernity. A persistent critique of the approach is what could be called its 'status quo bias', that is, a perceived tilt toward theorizing investment in the status quo.[1] Since investment in the status quo can translate to fear of change, ontological security needs seem to underwrite vulnerability to a politics

[1]For example, Rossdale 2015; Lebow 2016; Guzzini 2017; Rumelili 2015a.

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of fear. Indeed, much scholarship on ontological security in world politics has focused empirically on conflict and security dynamics, leading to a sense that an ontological security lens seems both to offer social theoretic foundations for a realist worldview and to lack resources to conceptualize alternative possibilities.

We disagree. This symposium addresses that critique by homing in on the thematic of anxiety in the constitution of the subject. Conventional IR talks about fear more than anxiety, and the phenomena are analytically distinct. Fear is a basic emotion directed at a specified object that prompts an adaptive response: fight or flight. As Rathbun has argued, realist IR theory (implicitly) assumes that fear is the predominant emotion of anarchy.[2] For realists, uncertainty in anarchy leads states to fear one another's intentions, which helps account for the security dilemma and other logics of war. Anxiety, on the other hand, is less an emotion than a general psychic condition or mood, a 'fear of fear' or unease that can trigger a range of emotions and behaviors. This amorphousness of anxiety as opposed to fear, that is, its lack of a defined object, makes it more difficult to grasp causally, empirically, and conceptually as a social phenomenon. As we know from Bleiker and Hutchison's work, it is difficult enough to theorize the processes through which individual emotions become collective and political.[3] Yet there is a widespread supposition across several social sciences that anxiety and the emotions and behaviors it gives rise to have important social and political effects.[4]

Thus, while fear and anxiety can be difficult to disentangle in practice, the analytic difference is important. Unlike fear, which resolves in the two 'security' behaviors of fight or flight, anxiety is characterized by multifinality, admitting to a range of emotions, including excitement and anticipation, and a variety of behaviors, from compulsive repetition, to acting out, to paralysis, to entrepreneurship.[5] For example, Eklundh *et al.* propose two distinct anxiety logics, a security logic that closes down subjectivity and politics, and a resistance logic that makes room for social and political change.[6] In IR, Rumelili, in particular, has discussed the positive potential of anxiety.[7]

The question is, if anxiety has these different emotional and behavioral resolutions, then why does the ontological security lens feel weighted toward theorizing a conservative, even realist world? Are the anxieties of late modernity so severe and intense that we cannot imagine the political way forward? Our starting point is the hunch that part of the problem is rooted in the ontological security literature's overreliance on a particular reading of Giddens. Craib argues that Giddens' conception of agency ultimately rationalizes his structure, which means that *en route* from the psychoanalytic theory he draws on to the structurationism he produces, some key insights get 'flattened' to fit the larger theory.[8] Earlier ontological security scholarship in IR (including some of our own work), evidenced an understanding of the resolution of anxiety into an agency that roughly tracks with this 'flattening'

[2]Rathbun 2007.
[3]Bleiker and Hutchison 2014. Also, inter alia, Hall and Ross 2019; Crawford 2014; Mercer 2014.
[4]For example, Hunt 2009; Jackson and Everts 2010.
[5]Mitzen 2017.
[6]Eklundh et al. 2017.
[7]Rumelili 2015a, b.
[8]Craib 1998.

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diagnosis. But on reflection, that tilt has been as much empirical as theoretical, since most ontological security scholars explicitly discuss the fact that existential anxiety gives rise to a range of emotional and behavioral resolutions. Thus, while we do not deny the potential for the question of the subject to be 'closed down'[9] when viewed through an ontological – or any – security lens, we leave open the question of whether ontological security in general or reliance on Giddens specifically, *necessarily* leads us in this direction. Indeed, Giddens admits to a range of interpretations; and a swath of ontological security scholars, including ourselves, have found resources in his work. Nonetheless, ontological security studies are left in this tilted situation.

With this symposium, we re-open the question of the relationship between anxiety and subjectivity from the perspective of ontological security. Of particular importance is the extent to which an ontological security lens might foreclose the possibility of more open forms of subjectivity and the politics that might follow from and/or help promote them, or whether – alternatively – there are resources within an ontological security approach for thinking our way out of that impasse. Each contribution to this symposium brings anxiety back into locales where Giddens' theory occludes it. The first three re-think anxiety in ontological security drawing on existentialist philosophy, and the latter two directly tackle limitations of Giddens' approach. In this essay, we open conceptual space for those explorations. We outline the relationship between anxiety and ontological security, then diagnose the Giddensian tilt toward conservatism and fear and the kinds of politics that result.

The age of anxiety and the politics of fear

We care about anxiety because anxiety is on the rise,[10] and we care about it because it feels like 'anxiety theory'[11] accounts for a range of important political effects. But the phenomenon of anxiety can be hard to pin down. In conventional usage, anxiety refers to a sense or mood of unease, nervousness, or discomfort, associated with uncertainty and oriented toward the future. Anxiety can be a common, everyday feeling or state of mind: we might be anxious about an upcoming test, trip, or doctor appointment. But it also can be a personality condition or more serious mood disorder, as in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders' (DSM5) definition of generalized anxiety disorder as persistent, excessive worry that overwhelms a person and makes them unable to go about daily life. In many ways, anxiety is a personal, even idiosyncratic, condition – a psychological not a political phenomenon.

Yet since the mid-20th century, scholars and lay analysts have spoken in terms of an 'age of anxiety',[12] a period of generalized social 'edginess' or unease, brought about by environmental factors and existing on a collective scale. Much of the sociological literature on the politics of risk, the politics of belonging, and the existential effects of modernity and liberalization,[13] aims to understand anxiety as both a

[9]Rossdale 2015.
[10]Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen 2018; Eklundh et al. 2017.
[11]Hunt 2009.
[12]The term is coined by Auden in 1947 (2011).
[13]See, respectively, for example, Beck 2008, Bauman 2001, Giddens 1991, 2004; Huysmans 2006.

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social and a psychological construction. Whether linked to the significant deadly powers of nuclear weapons, pandemics, or climate change, the uncertain random violence of terrorism or cyber war, or the precariousness brought about by a weakening welfare state in conditions of globalization in the North, there is a widespread sense of loss of control and alienation, alongside more general feelings of cultural and/or national loss.[14] Sometimes collective anxiety is treated as an aggregate of individual anxiety – the age of anxiety here means more people are more likely to have this condition or disorder.[15] In other work, anxiety exists 'beyond the individual' in affective experiences that are collective through various social processes of transmission, contagion, or circulation.[16]

However anxiety is treated, though, as a collective phenomenon it is important to analysts of world politics because of its political effects. In particular, anxiety is widely associated with the politics of fear, that is, the manipulation and exploitation of publics by leaders to secure political goals. The politics of fear rationalizes government political action through appeals to safety and security, and the idea is that such appeals resonate deeply in an already anxious public. The idea that collective level anxiety could have conservative, reactionary political effects is not new. As Hunt develops, scholars from a range of disciplines have posited this link to account for outcomes such as authoritarianism, bourgeois anxiety, fascism, and social panics.[17]

Anxiety is prevalent again in contemporary analyses, where the idea that anxious publics readily become fearful publics is linked to three sorts of effects. First, feeling as if they face constant existential threats might lead publics to trade their own freedoms for the promise of absolute security. Rollo May warned of this slide toward authoritarianism and police states in his seminal *Meaning of Anxiety*.[18] Trends today are at least suggestive, with the increasing legitimation of non-democratic forms of rule and several countries' retrenchment from human rights commitments. Global freedom has declined for 13th straight year according to the US NGO Freedom House; and for the first time, de-democratization is a key force. Not only are non-democratic countries becoming more repressive, but democracies – Hungary, Poland, Serbia – are moving in that direction as well.[19]

Second, feeling the precariousness of their own condition might lead publics to be vulnerable to scapegoating and Othering, which can have domestic and/or international effects. Here, the state is called on to protect the fearful citizenry from the threat of these internal and/or external others. Investing in national security can help people feel secure by identifying and responding to specific fears, in other words, by creating knowable threats whose risks can be assessed. Political strategies to address these fears include repressive political exclusions; ethno-separatism; and

[14]Kinnvall 2016, 2018.

[15]For example, May 1950, 1977; Albertson and Gadarian 2015.

[16]For contagion, see for example, Hall and Ross 2015; Bartholomew and Victor 2004. For circulation, see for example, Solomon 2012, 2017a, b.

[17]Hunt 2009. For authoritarianism, see for example, May 1950; Neumann 1957. For bourgeois anxiety, see for example, Gay 1993. For fascism, see for example, Smelser 1962. For social panics, see for example, Ungar 2001.

[18]May 1950, 1977.

[19]Keating 2019.

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policies aimed to protect territorial integrity, such as building walls, policing borders, and investing in weapons and security personnel. A politics of fear, then, leaves publics vulnerable to political repression and conflict in the name of safety and security.

Third, 'risk society'[20] often is interpreted as referring to the organization of whole societies according to a logic of fear.[21] National and international security strategies, designed to identify, rank, and prioritize fears, aim explicitly to minimize exposure to risk and thus keep populations safe. Risk society is a conservative society, whose overall purpose is to provide the 'comfort and reassurance' of eradicating fears while deterring the 'risk' of new thinking and experimentation.[22]

But anxiety and fear are different. Both are strongly aversive, uncomfortable affect states that individuals tend to seek to avoid or resolve. But the fact that anxiety is a 'diffuse, unpleasant and vague sense of apprehension' that exists prior to and relatively independent of any given actual threat object makes it trickier to manipulate.[23] Fear's attributes, however – the fact that it has a defined object and suggests a temporal urgency for responding – make it attractive politically. The combination of identification and urgency replaces uncertainty. From here, leaders have an answer: they can promise a total cure of eradicating the known danger.

The problem is that a politics of fear leaves the underlying anxiety entirely unattended. As Robin develops in his micro-politics of fear, fear is an emergency mode of decision-making, where actors face the extreme choice of how to avoid the existential threat.[24] The urgency of fear can amount to a suspending of important aspects of one's perception of self, possibly even those aspects of one's sense of self that, ultimately, make life worth living in the first place. Too heavy investment in a politics of fear, in other words, can make or maintain a profound sense of ontological insecurity. Indeed, one way to interpret the policy moves noted above is that they tend to be framed in the language of physical security – protecting citizens' lives by building walls and keeping dangers out – when what is needed is ontological security, a security of subjectivity, or of 'who' the collective 'we' are.[25] The integrity of that collective subject is not necessarily best maintained via traditional security practices. The inability of these strategies to contain or resolve the underlying sense of threat suggests that a politics of fear masks more than addresses the public mood.

Ontological security and existential anxiety

The conceptual core of ontological security is the focus on the relational constitution of the self in the context of anxiety. The idea is that social actors like to feel as if they are stable and continuous in time, in order to realize a sense of agency. Anxiety is one factor that makes self-stability difficult to come by and to sustain. This is not

[20] Beck 2008.
[21] cf. Cash 2016.
[22] Eklundh et al. 2017, 4–5.
[23] Sadock et al. 2015.
[24] Robin 2006.
[25] Mitzen 2006a, b; Rumelili 2015a, b.

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so much the psychological anxiety of the DSM-5 as the existential anxiety of psychoanalytic theory and existential philosophy, referring to a particular unease associated with the awareness of the human mortality and the ultimate meaninglessness of human life, which invades the very core of our being. When we are confronted with existential anxiety we are vulnerable to feeling ontologically insecure. A sense that the future will be unlike the past in ways we can hardly conceive of, much less control, plays into the tendency to seek security and safety in the everyday, what Giddens has called routines, or in other practices that hold existential anxiety at bay, such as maintaining coherent autobiographical narratives. To feel ontologically secure is, in Giddens' words, 'to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses'.[26] Thus, managing existential anxiety is at the heart of ontological security-seeking.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this is the anxiety associated with primary differentiation, as the infant discovers it is separate from the caregiver. Awareness of separateness means the infant can no longer be certain its needs will be met, or that it will not be harmed, and so on. In Lacanian terms, ontological anxiety results from the split between the inner world of the infant and the symbolic order that pre-exists it. The inability to re-experience the moment of birth results in a constant lack (a lack of certainty, stable identity and a full sense of self), that can only be (temporarily) healed through imaginations of wholeness and autonomy.[27] Whether theorized by Lacan, Freud, Klein, Winnicott, or others, this primary anxiety is fundamental to the subject and a constant animus of action.[28]

We also can get at this anxiety by appealing to the human capacity for free will, which lends social life a structural indeterminacy. Structural indeterminacy is captured by the notion of Keynesian uncertainty.[29] On the one hand, free will makes possible the technological innovations, novel practices, and surprising choices that mean the future can never be predicted with certainty. Yet, on the other hand, such indeterminacy also leaves room for utter disaster. As May interprets Kierkegaard, '[o]ne has anxiety because it is possible to create – creating one's self, willing to be one's self, as well as creating in all the innumerable daily activities (and these are two phases of the same process). One would have no anxiety if there were no possibility whatever'.[30] From an existentialist perspective, whether rooted in Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Tillich, or others, awareness of the fundamental contingency of human existence gives rise to the anxiety that life is ultimately meaningless. If humans are not headed anywhere in particular, and cannot control the future, then how do we think about or structure our choices to bring meaning to our lives? In Browning's words, 'seen from this perspective, anxiety cannot be eliminated; it stalks us constantly, threatening to overpower us and leave us floundering in despair and helplessness if we fail to keep it at bay'.[31]

[26] Giddens 1991, 47.
[27] Kinnvall 2012, 2018; Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen 2018.
[28] Cash 2017; Eberle 2019; Epstein et al. 2018; Mitzen 2018.
[29] Dequech 2000; Mitzen and Schweller 2011, 25.
[30] May 1950, 1977, 39.
[31] Browning 2018, 246.

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The point, for now, is that this anxiety is always here and always a problem that must be managed; it is part of the human condition. This suggests that there is no perfect state of ontological security – anxiety always threatens to break through. An ontological security perspective posits subjects who are constantly seeking this always elusive state of perfect security. One might say, with Browning that subjects are ontological insecurity avoiders rather than security seekers.[32]

The ubiquity of existential anxiety also suggests that ontological security-seeking/insecurity-avoiding practices are ever-present and ongoing, a constant, un-self-conscious aspect of daily life. This is true at the individual level, where existential anxiety tends to remain outside of awareness altogether. At the same time, even if not available to conscious thought, anxiety awareness is embedded in practical consciousness or in the unconscious; and what manifests in social and political behavior are the routines, practices and narratives of everyday life that hold its awareness at bay – the symbolic order to speak with Lacan. At a societal level, ontological security is provided through the cultural and institutional constructs, or everyday narratives, that provide the foundation for individual and group interaction. As stories, they take the shape of narrative engagement,[33] which describes how members of a society engage with collective stories of what it means to inhabit a particular political entity, be it a nation-state, a resistance movement, or a political party.

Existential anxiety *per se* is not a potent political force, but its behavioral resolutions may well be. Consider catastrophic or traumatic events like 9/11, the financial and migration crises, or more recently Covid-19, which disrupt both the sense that tomorrow will be like today and the confidence that existing political and social institutions can protect us. Such events can thrust existential questions into conscious awareness, potentially overrunning subjects with emotion and affect that are difficult to organize and control. This is when existential anxiety can burst onto the political scene. Ontological insecurity refers to such a state of disruption, where subjects have lost their stabilizing anchor, their ability to sustain a linear narrative through which they can answer questions about doing, acting, and being.

From this moment of breakdown, there are two broad possibilities. First, without the practical resources to manage those questions, subjects readily become ontological insecure, which can translate to a motivation to restore feelings of certainty, the feeling of having those answers. One way to do that is through securitizations of subjectivity, which describes a process of transposing existential anxieties into identifiable objects of fear.[34] It refers to adopting or falling back on simplified definitions of the world in terms of Us and Them, where the illusion of a consistent, unitary identification supplies narrative anchorage. As Kinnvall has shown, anxiety in the face of globalization can be seen as a root cause of nationalisms in which some Others are constituted as existential threats. This, in turn, can lead to the rise of far-right parties and even violence. Recreating a past in terms of a singular, often linear, reading of the nation, history, culture and people has become

[32]Browning 2018. See also Cash 2020.
[33]Hammack and Pilecki 2012.
[34]Kinnvall 2004.

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a common response to such insecurities. Such narratives impede the ability to move beyond securitized subjectivities.[35]

However, and second, insofar as existential anxiety dislodges old certainties, the subsequent ontological insecurity potentially opens up political space, whether for resistance or new thinking. While political crises can be paralyzing, the experience of such events is also bound up with the human capacity for generating and choosing between alternative possibilities. In other words, anxiety and discomfort are preconditions for creative change. The capacity to embrace anxiety and 'dwell in [its] ambivalence' is crucial for imagining how apparently stable identities and subjectivities can transform.[36] It, therefore, is a precondition for realizing alternative possibilities. This is the positive potential we find in some ontological security work.[37]

The positive potential also has been conceptualized in different ways. For example, Keynes long ago linked uncertainty and the anxiety it prompts to the possibility and necessity of 'animal spirits', the entrepreneurial energy that is a vital need in a capitalist economy. Animal spirits capture the sense in which individuals vary in their tolerance for awareness of fundamental uncertainty; and for some, it is a spur to experiment and change.[38] More recently, Eklundh et al. developed 'anxious' society as the next step beyond risk society.[39] It is risk society without the reassurance that the status quo can be maintained. Anxious society signifies a society on constant alert, despite having no identifiable objective existential threat. Instead, there is the constant presence of the possibility of that threat, and with it, the sense that government cannot fully protect the people and that danger resides in the everyday. But this is not necessarily bad, because it moves populations away from the false comfort of risk society: 'while more terrifying and at times no doubt more exposed to authoritarian practices, the logic of anxiety can also lead to a positive change precisely because its politics is not one of the future but that of present'.[40] What is important is that anxiety in our very core about who we are, or the awareness of deep uncertainty and sense of trepidation facing the future, is the common engine of all of these possibilities. In other words, the politics of fear and paralysis are rooted in similar prior conditions of anxiety as the politics of creativity and resistance.

Taking these together, existential anxiety is generalized and diffuse. It is also, in social scientific terms, a constant and not a variable. Yet it can lead to a range of behavioral and political outcomes, conservative and revolutionary, driven by fear or by hope. From here, we could say that existential anxiety is a phenomenon that is characterized by multifinality, where the same cause can result in many different effects.[41] Whichever the outcome, either way, it is clear that from an ontological security perspective, the management of existential anxiety appears as a fundamental need and ongoing political practice. Anxiety, then, is politically

[35]Andrews et al. 2015; Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011; cf. Gadarian and Albertson 2014.
[36]Cash 2016.
[37]For example, Mitzen 2006b; Rumelili 2015a, b; Solomon 2017a; cf. Guzzini 2017, 432–3.
[38]Knight 1965 1921; Mitzen and Schweller 2011, 30.
[39]Eklundh et al. 2017.
[40]Ibid., 5.
[41]Mitzen 2017.

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important for what it makes possible in both negative and positive senses, while its multifinality is a key challenge associated with studying its political effects.

In sum, when we think about subjectivity from the perspective of ontological security it throws us into a field where anxiety is central to the constitution of the subject and, by extension, to social institutions and patterns of conflict and cooperation. Scholars thus need a better understanding of the dynamics of individual and collective anxiety.

Ontological security in world politics: anchored in Giddens, tilted toward fear

Despite the multifinality just described, the literature on ontological security in world politics manifests two tendencies. Much of the scholarship is anchored in Giddens' theorization; and much is tilted toward accounting for securitization processes, the politics of fear, and behaviors such as persistent conflict. Reliance on Giddens has been a good thing in many ways, but it limits the understanding of ontological security.

Reading Giddens especially in light of his historical diagnoses readily results in pessimism about the trajectory of (international) politics in late modernity. One reason for this seeming inevitability could be found in his treatment of anxiety. Giddens' social theory begins with anxiety, but he theorizes its resolution in a way that to some extent shortchanges both agent and structure. For one, Giddens' belief in individual reflexivity is rooted in assumptions that social agents are in command of some implicit knowledge and self-understanding regardless of their social and political context. In other words, Giddens does not fully contextualize self and others as inherent in structural and psychological power relations; nor does his self-monitoring, reflexive self accommodate the fact that individuals engage in multiple subjective identifications as experienced in unconscious fantasy or repressed desire and thought.[42] Second, and somewhat contradictory to the first, Giddens theory of structuration entails subjects that are invested in structure in a particular way, giving themselves wholly over to it. The agent gets conflated with structure, an over-socialized passionate rule-follower.[43]

Some ontological security scholarship in IR that builds on Giddens focused on fitting the pursuit of ontological security into the conventional IR frameworks of realist, liberal, and constructivist thought about anarchy.[44] This scholarship proceeds from one of two premises. For some, Giddens' intersubjective notion of self is applied to states. Here, states, like individuals, are concerned with maintaining a consistent notion of self to enhance their ontological security in relations with other states – the exogenous approach.[45] Other scholars treat the state as a provider of ontological security for its citizens and argue that state representatives seek to fulfil particular notions of self-identity as they define it – the intra-subjective or endogenous approach.[46] These have in common Giddens' understanding of self-

[42]Kinnvall 2017.
[43]For example, Archer 1982; King 2010; Craib 1998.
[44]cf. Huysmans 1998.
[45]Mitzen 2006a, b; Zarakol 2010; Browning and Joenniemi 2013; Greve 2018.
[46]Steele 2005, 2008; Krolikowski 2008.

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identity, although in the first place the emphasis is on Giddens' notion of intersubjectivity and routines while in the latter it is on the importance of upholding consistent biographical narratives.

Those who proceed from a state-centric perspective, treating states as subjects, also tend to be concerned with finding a place for ontological security in relation to the realist and liberal conceptions of identity in IR theory. Fitting ontological security into the disciplinary frameworks and debates was facilitated by the fact that Giddens' theory of structuration played a formative role in conventional constructivist theorizing.[47] Here we see a ready fit with the realist world, where anarchy, fear, and the security dilemma are intertwined. Much realist IR scholarship assumes that the structural uncertainty of anarchy gives rise to fear.[48] The automaticity of fear as an emotion, that is, the fact that at the individual level fear produces the response of fight or flight makes this emotion well-suited for a realist paradigm in which material and biological causes dominate analyses. The securitization of subjectivity also has been interpreted to fit readily with the realist worldview, potentially providing social theoretic underpinnings to security dilemmas, enduring rivalries, and the difficulties of sustaining peace processes.[49]

But even work that has not been wedded to the IR debates draws on Giddens' diagnosis of modernity. Some scholarship has focused on what it means for any individual or group to be concerned with ontological security and *in*security.[50] Although this work emphasizes intersubjectivity, autobiographical narratives, and psychological underpinnings, it does not fully depart from Giddens' notion of self. The society-based literature tends to be more concerned with interruptions and crises, moments when (collective) identity becomes increasingly essentialized and Others more clearly defined. In line with Giddens, then, the tendency is to stress security-as-being. These scholars treat Giddens on his own terms, highlighting the causes of ontological insecurities in the dynamics of globalization. Here we also see a tilt toward associating ontological security-seeking with conservative, reactionary political effects.

Not all ontological security scholarship fits into these two boxes. While this symposium is motivated by the diagnosis of an impasse, this is perhaps too strong of a claim for what is an increasingly pluralistic research community. Some ontological security scholarship focuses on, for example, shame and humiliation as emotional outgrowths of existential anxiety.[51] Others have treated Giddens' oversocialized subject as a springboard for analysis, examining friendship and security communities from the inside.[52] Still others have picked up on the positive potential of anxiety, focusing on peace processes and international institutions.[53] Finally, not all ontological security scholarship is entirely rooted

[47]For example, Wendt 1987; Hollis and Smith 1991.

[48]For example, Tang 2008; Herz 1962; Rathbun 2007.

[49]For example, Mitzen 2006a, b; Rumelili 2015a, b; Rumelili and Çelik 2017; Lupovici 2012; Rossdale 2015.

[50]For example, Kinnvall 2004, 2006; Croft 2012a, b; Krolikowski 2008.

[51]Steele 2008; Zarakol 2010.

[52]Berenskoetter and Giegerich 2010; Greve 2018.

[53]Rumelili 2015a, b; Mitzen 2006b.

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in Giddens' theory of the subject in the first place.[54] Still, it is fair to say that the bulk of ontological security scholarship in IR draws heavily on Giddens and tilts toward focusing on themes of securitization of subjectivity, politics of fear, and attachment or regression to conflict. So it is difficult to escape the conclusion that ontological security seems to provide social theoretic underpinnings for profound international political pessimism. Perhaps this is because, as Tillich puts it, '[a]nxiety strives to become fear because fear can be met with courage'.[55] In other words, perhaps it is inherent to existential anxiety that its eruption prompts fear. But, on the other hand, and returning to the multifinality of anxiety, there is reason to believe otherwise.

The symposium: thinking with and beyond Giddens

Each of the five contributions to this symposium troubles the link from anxiety to fear, revisiting, questioning, and in some cases leaving behind assumptions in Giddens, in order to more fully develop a dynamic conception of ontological (in) security that does not stop at the border of the conscious or the obvious. After all, existential anxiety is rooted in the human awareness of the openness and indeterminacy of the social world, which translates to a simultaneous awareness that things could always be otherwise. There is no inherent meaning or aim to human life that leaves us simultaneously confronted with great hope and profound despair. Each contribution to this symposium digs deeper into that moment of awareness, in order to gain traction on how existential anxiety resolves into an orientation to action. This is not to suggest we need to leave Giddens behind. But the ontological security lens is more than an(other) application of Giddens to IR; and this symposium is an invitation to think both with and beyond Giddens. The first three contributions draw on resources in existentialist philosophy, especially Heidegger, Tillich, and Kierkegaard, to further unpack the relationship between anxiety and ontological (in)security. These contributions return us to the experiential moment of confronting existential anxiety, which Giddens quickly closes down. Each offers a different take on the possibility of radical agency and change in world politics.[56]

Rumelili (2020) builds on the argument of her recent book, which develops the positive potential of anxiety in post-conflict situations to permit the formation of non-conflictual identities. Here, Rumelili offers a reading of Hobbes, drawing on recent interpretations of *Leviathan* to identify anxiety as a constitutive condition for IR theory. Rumelili then takes an ontological security lens, informed particularly by Tillich and Kierkegaard, to develop how anxiety emerges in the margins and at the interstices of power, authority, and discourse. Rumelili shows how understanding existential anxiety is essential for analyzing individual and collective ontological insecurities in play in conflict; and emphasizes how an agency-directed approach towards anxiety and ontological security can provide a holistic account of patterns of continuity and change in world politics.

[54]For example, Solomon 2015, 2017a, b; Chernobrov 2016; Kinnvall 2018; Mitzen 2018.
[55]Tillich 2014, 37 (quoted in Browning 2018, 249).
[56]See also Browning 2018 and Browning 2017.

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Berenskoetter (2020) argues that while focusing on anxiety widens the range of behaviors that ontological security scholarship can address, that focus alone does not necessarily permit account of radical agency. This is because extant work focuses on one dominant aspect of what he calls the anxiety paradox, the fleeing from freedom's possibilities. Drawing on Heidegger's theorization of existential anxiety, Berenskoetter offers a way forward by focusing on the temporal dimension of being. Berenskoetter asks, 'how do humans … attempt to extend themselves beyond 'their' time by re-inscribing their existence into a temporal order outside human intervention'? They do so, he argues, through mechanisms such as quantitative measures, routine practices, and narratives, which in various ways respond to one side of the anxiety paradox. He then outlines two ways for thinking about radical or emancipatory agency, which entails either suspending or embracing anxiety.

Both Rumelili and Berenskoetter offer space for thinking through the positive potential of anxiety. Arfi (2020) brings the focus back to the terrain of conflict and violence. Drawing on Tillich and Kierkegaard, Arfi characterizes the existentially anxious moment and its overcoming through what he calls a performative leap of faith, then applies the argument to the security dilemma. Arfi argues that to be secure in one's being is to be surviving while dying, and to be surviving is to be fundamentally anxious. Similar to previous ontological security scholarship, Arfi stresses the centrality of imaginary narratives in security attachments. But revising Giddens' discussion of routines, and informed by Derrida, Arfi adds a performative dimension by maintaining that the attachment to routines makes the world knowable, but only through taking a leap of faith and thus procuring a sense of ontological security – or in this author's words: 'ontic security'. From here, Arfi argues that the security dilemma is not really a dilemma at all since there is no opposition between security and insecurity. While Arfi does not fully venture into the unconscious, he is careful to point out that anxiety cannot be fully fathomed in the sphere of the conscious.

The final two essays bring anxiety 'back in' to locales where Giddens' theory occludes it. John Cash focuses attention squarely on the unconscious. Cash offers a critical reading of Giddens, highlighting how Giddens' relative neglect of unconscious processes leaves the impression that psychic integrity can only be maintained by fully inhabiting the currently established role-identity and mentality. There simply is no alternative, other than chaos. In such conditions, it becomes difficult to think about radical or emancipatory agency – what would be the resources for generating such impulses? Many IR appropriations of ontological security more or less implicitly repeat Giddens' bracketing. Scholars tend to assume that subjectivity requires that our awareness of existential anxiety is suppressed from discursive to practical consciousness; this suppression leaves the human person, potentially the group or state, vulnerable to being exposed to utter chaos and dread if day-to-day routines of life break down. After calling attention to the starkness of the alternatives – embrace the order or face utter chaos – Cash draws on psychoanalytic theory to bring unconscious processes (back) in. Subjects are not defined by their social roles, and in fact, do not seek one stable identity. Rather, subjects are decentered and full of emotional ambivalence. The unconscious plays an important role in the dynamics of subjecthood. This suggests that when the ontological security of social institutions such as states is threatened, a range of eclipsed or repressed cultural forms is activated, with their attendant political discourses. Cultural fields

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provide alternative – but limited and mainly unconscious – responses to conditions of anxiety. Acknowledging both that alternative cultural forms exist and that psychic integrity is not inconsistent with change allows for questions to emerge about the relationship between anxiety and the cultural fields or narratives that proscribe action and limit imaginaries. The upshot is that existential anxiety, even if it leads to ontological insecurity, does not leave actors without resources. It does not force a securitization or render inevitable the vulnerability to a politics of fear.

Like Cash, Andrew Hom and Brent Steele (2020) contest the simple socialization story where ontological security needs to do little more than account for passionate socialization. They focus analytic attention on the production of anarchy or the Third Image. Against the realist assumption that the condition of anarchy gives rise to fear, which is the driving emotion in world politics,[57] and rather than posit an alternative emotion or normative structure,[58] Hom and Steele argue that anarchy is constitutively a realm of anxiety. Drawing on narrative theory, Hom and Steele propose that actors constitute themselves through stories that relate themselves to others and the environments of their action. The centrality of others' self-constitution is widely incorporated into constructivist theorizing. But the environment of action, which is just as crucial, has received less attention. Hom and Steele develop how the international is constituted as the environment of action by states in their individual stories. This means, first, that the international system must come into being without the help of constitutive others, which makes it a novel experiment in political imagination. Second, insofar as it exists via the stories of many states, international anarchy is produced as an irreducible multiplicity. Hom and Steele propose that this anarchic Self be interpreted as an agency in its own right, rather than merely as an agent's wider environment. Anarchy is a collective agential project, albeit one that is decentered and thus embodies the anxiety of the subjects. Like Cash, Hom and Steele encourage us to leave behind the simple subjects of world politics, self-constituted states with neat biographical narratives and routines, passionately attaching themselves to realist or other cultures of anarchy. For Cash, there are alternative cultural fields to prevailing structures; for Hom and Steele, multiplicity means that the international itself is ripe for the agentic moment, in which emotional configurations other than fear are always possible.

Pulling this together, the symposium furthers our understanding of ontological security as a conceptual lens by homing in on existential anxiety. It furthers our understanding of how ontological security bears on questions and concerns of IR as a discipline, such as the security dilemma (Arfi), anarchy (Cash, Hom and Steele), and the potential for change (Berenskoetter, Rumelili). It contributes to a number of internal debates among ontological security scholars by troubling the tight link between Giddens' social theory and the conceptual issue of the constitution of subjectivity in the face of anxiety. Most importantly, this symposium provides resources for thinking our way out of the politics of fear. Ontological security arguments can seem to tilt toward offering diagnoses of, even rationalizations for, the politics of fear and persistence of enduring conflict. By linking that tilt to specific readings of Giddens' theory and then offering five distinct counterpoints,

[57] Rathbun 2007.

[58] cf. Wendt 1999.

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this symposium helps shift the analytical focus away from too strong an identification with ontological security as a 'security of being' – something individuals can possess or have – towards an understanding of ontological security that emphasizes a 'security of becoming'. Drawing on different social theories but engaging the thematic of existential anxiety and the constitution of the political subject, each contribution in its own way shows how the ontological insecurities people experience often require a 'leap in faith' toward an imagined secure future, and that the leap is not a one-shot event but a constant process of always wanting. As such, even granting that anxiety readily resolves into fear, these critical, reconstructive interventions show that this is not the end of the story. The politics of fear is not inevitable and it is not a dead end.

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