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Matyáš Maděra

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**Ontological security and anxiety:
establishing the conceptual link**

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Author: Bc. Matyáš Maděra

Supervisor: Aliaksei Kazharski, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the link between existential anxiety and ontological security. It first establishes both concepts through conceptual analysis and then further analyses their interaction. To illuminate this interaction, anxiety has been divided into conscious and unconscious forms based on an interpretation of Heidegger's work. Contrary to the common framing of anxiety as either a source or a result of ontological insecurity, it is established as primarily a revelatory emotion. Anxiety as an unconscious emotion always exists because it arises as a response to future possibilities, which never disappear entirely. However, increased ontological insecurity can make the individual more vulnerable to experiencing the emotion consciously, which can, in turn, worsen the condition. Throughout the conceptual analysis, the thesis also highlights the main criticisms, paradoxes, and other issues facing the field. It provides arguments against the transition of ontological security to a level of the state and against using anxiety as a concept that leads to some form of determined outcome. Lastly, because ontological security is defined as “the security of the self,” the thesis establishes this concept based on the theories of Kierkegaard and Giddens.

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá souvislost mezi existenciální úzkostí a ontologickou bezpečností. Nejprve jsou oba pojmy definovány prostřednictvím konceptuální analýzy, načež je dále analyzována jejich vazba. K osvětlení této interakce byla úzkost rozdělena na vědomou a nevědomou formu na základě interpretace Heideggerova díla. Na rozdíl od běžného pojetí úzkosti jako zdroje nebo následku ontologické nezabezpečnosti, v této práci je pojata především jako odhalující emoce. Úzkost jako nevědomá emoce je všudypřítomná, protože vzniká jako reakce na budoucí možnosti, které nikdy zcela nezaniknou. Zvýšená ontologická nezabezpečnost však může učinit jedince zranitelnějším vůči vědomému prožívání této emoce, což může naopak tento stav zhoršit. V průběhu konceptuální analýzy práce také upozorňuje na hlavní kritiky, paradoxy a další problémy, kterým tato oblast čelí. Argumentuje proti převedení ontologické bezpečnosti na úroveň státu a proti používání úzkosti jako konceptu, který vede k nějaké formě determinovaného výsledku. Na závěr, protože ontologická bezpečnost je definována jako „bezpečnost svého já,“ tento koncept je stanoven na základě teorií Kierkegaarda a Giddense.

Klíčová slova

Ontologická bezpečnost, Úzkost, Strach, Identita, Existencialismus, Konceptuální analýza, Personifikace státu

Keywords

Ontological security, Anxiety, Fear, Identity, Existentialism, Conceptual analysis, State personhood

Range of thesis: 114 656 symbols, including spaces

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague

Matyáš Maděra

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Institute of Political Studies

Master thesis proposal

Motivation

It has been my empirical observation for quite a while that there is a clear dissonance between how the Russian Federation (as a whole) perceives its own identity and role in international relations versus how they are framed/perceived by the rest of the world. With the Ukraine conflict, the Russian identity is and will be questioned even deeper. Its future is more uncertain than ever. With my interest in psychology and existentialist philosophy, I theorized this would lead to existential anxiety on a mass scale in Russia and stumbled upon the concept of ontological security. While there is a fair amount of literature on ontological insecurity in Russia, the role of the West in shaping the Russian identity dissonance is less explored. Because I'm not proficient in the Russian language, I decided to analyse the narratives about Russian identity in the West, specifically the EU. Therefore, the research question is, "How have popular European narratives framed the Russian identity, and how has it affected their ontological security?"

Literature Review

The selected literature primarily focuses on the key concepts discussed in the thesis. The goal is to establish a solid theoretical foundation based on the literature, which can then be used as a tool for the analysis in the second part of the essay. Most importantly, it will discuss the ontological in/security concept, how it relates to the psychological state of anxiety, and the underlying philosophical school of thought that connects the two, existentialism. Lastly, it will discuss the literature concerning Russian views of their identity and general notable works relating to Russia in the selected period. The goal is to contrast the Western narratives, which will be the primary focus of analysis, with the Russian ones.

The central author this essay will build upon is Rumelili (2020). In his article: "Integrating Anxiety into International Relations Theory: Hobbes, existentialism, and ontological security" he draws from philosophical ideas to highlight the importance of

ontological security. He argues that anxiety is not just a side issue but one of the main factors shaping political behaviour, including securitization. The article also discusses the different nature of anxiety and how they relate to the state. Krickel-Choi (2022) analyses these contradictory roles of anxiety in ontological security. Her work provides a great overview of both concepts and can be a gateway to more literature on the topic. The article includes a robust literature overview of the diverse ontological security field. In another article, Krickel-Choi (2021) also discusses the differences between the concepts of the self and identity, which she then uses to differentiate state identity and sovereignty (in the institutional sense) and their role in attaining ontological security. The differentiation between the state identity and its ruling institutions is especially important in the case of the Russian Federation.

Building on the works of Giddens (1991), who is one of the ontological security original founders and, therefore, a vital source for this thesis, Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020) also delve into the concept of anxiety, distinguishing it from fear, which is the more often utilized emotion in International Relations. Where they diverge from Giddens (1991) is the idea that ontological insecurity must inevitably lead to a politics of fear. Instead, they believe anxiety can bring forth radical brave changes, that wouldn't happen otherwise. Gustafson and Krickel-Choi (2020) on the other hand criticize other authors for the conceptual ambiguity between ontological security and anxiety because they are often used interchangeably. Apart from conceptual discussion, this article also provides a great historical analysis of the development in the ontological security field, tracing it back to its existentialist roots.

Chernobrov (2016) looks at the connection between ontological security and international crises. He concludes that irrational decisions are often made to retain a stable identity and that a positive view of oneself (in this case, the state in question) is the best way to achieve ontological security. A key notion this essay intends to build upon. Unlike other authors (e.g. Rumelili 2020) attempting to distinguish ontological security from physical security, Mitzen (2006) has developed a theory that connects the two. This is one of the most cited articles about ontological security. However, unlike the more recent articles above, it describes fear, not anxiety, as the primary cause of ontological insecurity, one of the primary contentions in the ontological security debate.

Browning (2018) focuses on Ontological security in the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation before the Ukrainian conflict. He argues that the EU preferred to stifle its geopolitical interests to accommodate the Russian ontological security. He notes that actors tend to prefer already played out and recognizable relationships/interactions between each other despite those leading to similar undesired outcomes. This puts him in the camp of authors who believe that ontological security leads states to stagnate in IR. In comparison Kazharski (2019) instead focuses on the idea of key historical moments that challenge the identity of a given state. He argues that every state is given an opportunity to either adapt to a new situation and forge a new identity or frame the event as traumatic. In the latter case the state identity becomes closed off, securitized and stagnant, in an attempt to never repeat such traumatic event. But the moment of insecurity also gives the state opportunity to grow and progress. The example dissected is the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its eventual framing by the Russian elites. For the purposes of this essay, the article is also useful in highlighting different Russian narratives about their own identity. Similarly, Prozorov (2006) agrees that the traumatic event of dissolving the Soviet Union gave rise to Russian conservatism. His article also highlights the different types of conservative discourses in Russia. Lastly Narozhna (2021) provides a bit of an opposite point of view, claiming that it was the western miss-recognition of the Russian identity, which drove it back to the conservative conflictual patterns. This is one of the few works that focuses on the role of the West in shaping the ontological security in Russia.

The literature on ontological security is extremely diverse, and the concept can be applied in wide variety of ways, to wide variety of issues. Because of its philosophical origins, there is also a certain degree of ambiguity. The literature is not entirely in agreement on where the primary emotion connected to ontological security is fear or anxiety, though more recent literature tends to argue it is the latter. Similarly, some authors argue ontological insecurity makes states become stagnant and rigid, while others claim that it can also radically push them and restructure their identity. While there appears to be relative consensus in the literature that the instability of Russian ontological security drove the country to be more conservative, there are disagreements about how this happened.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the nature of the primary concept this thesis will work with – ontological security, the essay will be conducted from constructivist ontological position. Ontological security is primarily driven by societal interactions. It is not based on objective reality, but rather how an identity is socially constructed and affected by social interactions. The goal is not to objectively discover who is to blame for dissonances in Russian identity or find the objective mechanical causes. It is to analyse the discourse in the West about the Russian identity, and then critically assess its impacts on Russian ontological security. When it comes to identity, both internal and external forces play a role in its shaping. In this case, the West is the primary outside actor who has the power to validate/question the Russian identity. When we study the emergence of ontological insecurity in a country, the focus cannot be only on the internal identity; it is also vital to explore the role of external actors, which this thesis will attempt.

Ontological security is also closely linked to the emotions of fear and anxiety, though the thesis will primarily focus on the latter by drawing from psychological research and theories. In ontological security, they are applied from the individual to the state and society level, which is why they also need to be discussed in this essay. Lastly, the ontological security background stems primarily from existentialist philosophy, which deserves a small amount of focus in the thesis to understand the concept's core ideas better.

Methodology

The method employed will be a discourse analysis. I have chosen discourse analysis over classical qualitative content analysis because the goal is not only to find and interpret the major discourses but also to assess their potential impacts critically. The research will be qualitative and will be conducted by analysing major news articles in the EU that discuss the Russian identity or Russian role in international relations.

There will be two objective criteria for the selection of these articles. The period for article selection will be from 2004 to 2014, ten years before the Ukraine crisis in Crimea. The thesis will focus on the build-up to the following conflict rather than the crisis itself. The second criterion is for these articles to be in English, which is limiting

when trying to understand more nuances outside primarily English-speaking countries—still, a better alternative than relying on other translatory means. The third and fourth criteria are subjective. Firstly, the news site has to be influential and reliable (BBC, Le Monde, etc.). Secondly, the articles have to be a good example of a major discourse about Russian identity. The aim is to represent at least 3 different influential discourses.

The texts will be analysed through the lenses of the ontological security concept. The focus will be on the ways in which these narratives differ from the Russian ones, challenge the Russian identity, or frame it in a specific way. Secondary focus will be on the reasons for why the identity is framed in this way, and what is the influence/consequences of these articles. The content analysis will focus on the text itself, but also the context in which it was written (e.g. Time period, specific events that may have influenced it, etc.).

Suggested thesis structure

- Introduction
- Theory
 - Existentialism and the root of ontological security
 - Ontological Security as an IR concept
 - Anxiety in international relations
 - Russia and its modern identity
- Methodology
 - Discourse analysis
 - Article selection and overview
- Analysis
 - Main narratives overview
 - Themes and narrative tools
 - Contrasts with Russian self-identification
 - Potential ontological security effects
- Discussion
- Conclusions

Preliminary core literature (Harvard style)

- Browning, C.S. (2018) 'Geostrategies, geopolitics and ontological security in the Eastern neighbourhood: The European Union and the "New Cold War"', *Political Geography*, 62, pp. 106–115. doi: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.10.009.
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Contents

INTRODUCTION	15
1. METHODOLOGY DEBATE: CONCEPT FORMATION AND THEORY BUILDING.....	17
2. THE CONCEPT OF ONTOLOGICAL (IN)SECURITY	21
2.1. THE FORMATION AND DISAPPEARANCE OF “THE SELF”	25
2.2. “THE SELF” AND IDENTITY	27
2.3. “THE SELF” IN A BODY	31
2.4. “THE SELF” AS “THE STATE”	33
3. THE CONCEPT OF ANXIETY	41
3.1. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EXISTENTIALIST APPROACHES TO ANXIETY ..	42
3.2. ANXIETY AS THE MECHANISM OF FREEDOM	43
3.3. ANXIETY AND FEAR	46
3.4. THE OBJECT OF ANXIETY	48
4. “THE SELF” AND ANXIETY.....	51
4.1. THE LEAP OF FAITH.....	52
4.2. COURAGE TO BE AND THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY	54
4.3. THE PROCESS OF REVELATION	57
4.4. EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AS A COLLECTIVE EMOTION.....	61
CONCLUSION	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65

Introduction

Anxiety, born out of the original sin, unleashed upon the world by the ultimate sin – the murder of God. With the religious structure disintegrating and the public subconscious increasingly plagued by apocalyptic imagery – dying earth, extinguishing sun, plague, flood, drought, and the ever-present looming threat of a nuclear night, where in such a time does the individual find the courage for a leap of faith?

Ontological security studies are a newly emerging yet steadily growing field that seeks to tackle these pressing questions of human existence. Where traditional security studies remain preoccupied with the symptoms of the condition called “The Age of Anxiety,” ontological security studies analyze the underlying causes. But these endeavors have not been without their problems. The field has been struggling with transferring intangible, objectless, fluid philosophical concepts into the schema of international relations.

The overarching objective of this thesis is to help establish a coherent ontological security theory that reflects the origins of the inquiry (Laing, Giddens, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Tillich, Sartre...) while addressing modern criticisms (Rossdale, Krickel-Choi, Lebow...). Because the criticisms are primarily centered around conceptual problems – the lack of coherence, clarity, and issues with transition to a higher level of analysis (from the individual to a state or international structure) – an in-depth concept analysis can address these concerns.

The conceptual link between anxiety and ontological (in)security is the culmination of the aforementioned problems. While there is a clear consensus that ontological insecurity is tied to anxiety, there is still ambiguity about how or why that is, which is not sufficiently explained even in the works of Laing and Giddens, the authors who inspired the field. This relation has only recently started being addressed in the literature but has yet to be explored sufficiently. While the original goal established in the proposal of this thesis was to analyze the relationship between ontological insecurity and anxiety in Russia, this idea was based on the impression that ontological

insecurity produces anxiety. However, after a deeper engagement with the literature, it became apparent that the relationship is far less clear and more complex. The conceptual ambiguity in this relationship is so prevalent that ontological insecurity is often used interchangeably with anxiety and given the same properties. Similarly, when it comes to ontological security, the arguments range from ontological security being a defense against anxiety, to anxiety being a product of ontological security seeking. Since the two concepts are not properly distinguished, directly analyzing this conceptual relation seems more logical than the original goal and is the primary focus of this thesis.

Therefore, the research question is: “How does ontological security interact with anxiety?” Answering this question should help alleviate the conceptual confusion and re-formulate the lost link. Or at least provide a unique conceptual approach. The question is tackled by conducting a conceptual analysis of both concepts, which is required to be able to establish the link. Because both are individual-level concepts applied to a state or discussed in relation to a state, a significant part of the analysis focuses on this transition. This helps provide further clarity and distinction because most of the conceptual nuance has been lost through this process. Because they are often attributed same functionality in International Relations, establishing the interaction between them also helps to differentiate them, as does analysing both in contrast. The interpretation of how these two concepts interact is primarily based on the insights from existentialist philosophy and its understanding of anxiety in relation to human existence. As such, the relation between the two concepts is established from the existentialist perspective, an approach further differentiated from the other perspectives on anxiety within this thesis.

1. Methodology debate: concept formation and theory building

According to a criteria Jaakkola (2020) highlights, this paper can be partially considered a theory synthesis, linking the ontological security literature with existential philosophy literature. While this link is not novel, and existential philosophy largely contributed to creating both key concepts, the reflection has been limited, and the link between the concepts is unclear (Rumelili, 2020; Krickel-Choi, 2022 a). A deeper reflection of the literature of origin has been identified as necessary in the field and, as such, beneficial to deepening the understanding of ontological security studies. In contrast to a literature review, the goal of theory synthesis is to highlight the different aspects of a concept and merge them into a unified entity. This can mean excluding certain parts that do not fit the overarching whole. However, this paper focuses on the relationship between two concepts. The fundamental goal of this essay is to re-formulate a link between ontological security and anxiety. In that way, it goes a step beyond a theory synthesis and has an aspect of a theory model in Jaakkola's (2020) criteria.

While addressing concept analysis as different from theory building, they are inseparable in reality. Every theory builds on a concept and requires a degree of analysis unless the concept it attempts to define does not yet exist (Berenskoetter, 2016). As such, the first step in building a theory is the clarification of its conceptual roots. Nuopponen (2010: 4) states concept analysis is “an activity where concepts, their characteristics, and relations to other concepts are clarified.” Conceptual works often do not derive arguments from data but synthesize and build upon existing theories.

To summarize the introduction, the goal is to expand the ontological security theory – by re-forming a tangible link with existential anxiety – using the method of conceptual analysis. As such, this discussion focuses primarily on concept analysis methodology rather than direct theory-building methods.

Bevir and Kedar (2008) highlight the two opposing strategies when approaching concept analysis and formation – materialist and post-materialist. An example of the materialist approach was developed by Gerring (1999), who used criteria such as field usefulness or familiarity. The general critique of the naturalist concept creation process is that it is over-reliant on strict methodology and lacks proper philosophical reflection of the conceptual roots. Anti-naturalist analyses instead focus on the meaning that is attributed to the concept. Its role is in the specific period and its ever-changing nature. The concept cannot be generalized because it is strictly tied to a specific time, place, and meaning. And is described in relation to the author himself.

Berenskoetter (2016) further divides concept analysis into historical, scientific, and critical strands (the post-material). The historical strand primarily traces a concept's linguistic roots from its creation to its disappearance—their interactions with prevalent sociopolitical structures, etc. While the scientific approach is more focused on how concepts interact with data, but still looks at the historical evolution of the concept's meaning. It treats concepts as something applicable through time (not only tied to a single period) but also monitors the changes in the formulation process. In that way, multiple reiterations of the concept can be confined into one and applied to many different cases.

The position taken in this thesis must be more nuanced. The reason is that the concept of anxiety is analyzed from the existentialist perspective. In this view, it is an integral part of human existence. It can be debated to what extent is the theory around anxiety a human construct, but the emotion itself is an undeniably integral part of being. The thesis presumes that, as such, it has at least some tangible properties applicable through different periods and circumstances. While the concept in existential literature is vague and abstract (which is not necessarily to its detriment; it is what makes it applicable to a plethora of theories), it presumably has objectively defined core features that can be generalized and interconnected between various authors. At the same time, it must also be highlighted that this understanding of anxiety distances the concept from naturalistic interpretations. It goes beyond the scientifically measurable traits of anxiety (Chapter 3.1.), although it attempts to reflect on them. Ontological security, while tied to the natural sciences through the work of Doctor Laing (1990), shares some of these

predispositions. It is still a concept that's mainly influenced by the existentialist perspective, despite some differences that are highlighted in this thesis (Chapter 3.3.).

Another caveat is that while applying the concept developed on the level of human experience to an entity like the state, it inevitably loses some of its properties. In essence, ontological insecurity and anxiety of the state are more of a mirage, a mirror image of the human experience projected onto the state (this is more explored in chapters 2.4 and 4.4.). So, while taking the materialist position and attempting to identify the concept of anxiety methodologically and from the scientific perspective of concept formation, this is done with the knowledge that during the process of applying this concept to a constructed entity of the state, its properties will inevitably change according to each case and reflection.

In summary, the argument is that existential anxiety is, at least to a degree, a naturalistically confined concept that can be observed across time and culture but loses that property once applied to an entity that does not share the same biological confinements. This stance also has to be clarified because while this thesis primarily uses the more naturalistically rooted scientific method of concept analysis, it works with and reflects some of the literature that addresses ontological security on the state level despite arguing mostly against this application. But it is subjected to critical scrutiny.

The analysis starts by following the development of ontological security and anxiety concepts and their changes over time. The beginning point for ontological security is the work of Doctor Laing (1990), and for existential anxiety, the work of Kierkegaard (1946). Going further back would be under-productive for this essay, as both authors serve as the inspiration for most of the following works.

Sartoris's conceptual differentiation (Collier & Levitsky, 1997) is applied by highlighting a core highly abstract concept and identifying more concrete subtypes. This step aligns with the existing literature, as some key authors differentiate between the primary types of both concepts. And it should help provide further clarity. To be more specific, ontological security can be differentiated by four key areas that produce it (chapter 2.) and anxiety by its "non-object" (Chapter 3.4.), manifestation (Chapter 3.4.), and group/individual experience (Chapter 4.4.). Sartori (Collier & Adcock) distinguishes dichotomous concepts (Either the concept applies to a case, or it does not)

from a graded approach or a scale in different terms. Ontological security will be approached as a scale rather than a dichotomy.

To clarify the step-by-step analysis process, I refer to Näsi's model (Nuopponen, 2010), which identifies four main analysis phases. The steps followed are interwoven but consist of creating a knowledge foundation. Secondly, an external analysis that distinguishes the concepts from other vital concepts. Thirdly, an internal analysis that compares contradicting interpretations and divides the concept into essential parts that constitute it. Fourthly, a conclusion that accepts some interpretations or produces a modified or entirely novel conception. It is not an exact step-by-step process. Näsi subscribes to the idea that each concept differs, and an exact step-by-step analysis manual is impossible. As such, it balances the materialistic approach of providing an identifiable system by retaining sufficient flexibility.

Where this thesis diverges from the scientific approach is the focus on real-world empirical cases. Instead, the concepts are treated as if they existed in the Platonic world of ideas, only occasionally referencing their real-world application. That is, rather than discussing how these concepts can be applied to a specific state. The thesis offers a debate about how they can be applied to a state in general terms. While this creates certain limitations, it also broadens the applicability beyond the existing constructs of this age. It balances the notion that any real-world application will inevitably change the concept, with the need to provide a clear, identifiable conception that can be reflected in such real-world cases.

2. The concept of ontological (in)security

The concept of ontological security primarily originates from Doctor Laing's (1990) work on Schizophrenia. It is a concept that was first developed when discussing the individual, then transferred to the social sphere through the works of Anthony Giddens (1991: 35-70), and only then moved to the conceptual level of the state. The concept of international relations differs from that of Laing (1990), but his work is the core building block of the conceptual core. Laing has coined the term ontological security because he has found trouble in approaching schizophrenia in the traditional psychotherapeutic ways. His approach is experimental and uses insights from existential philosophy. Rosedale (2015) observes that his work is essentially a political act (and should be seen as such) rather than merely a work of science. Because he is attempting to change how schizophrenics are seen and treated. This chapter highlights the inner workings and core ideas of ontological security. So that it's possible to identify how it interacts with the concept of anxiety in chapter 4. This requires an analysis of the roots of the theory. When discussing ontological security theory, most authors (e.g., Zarakol, 2016 or Rosher, 2021) refer to Laing (1990) as the source of the theory and to Giddens (1991), who moved the concept to the realm of sociology. As such, those two authors constitute the main focus of the analysis. This first chapter aims to demonstrate how ontological security operates in an extreme case and establish the theory's basics, which can serve as a springboard for deeper analysis.

The concept of "the self" and its interaction with the world is at the root of ontological security in Laing's (1990) work. The wider the gap between an external projection and an internally accepted self, the more insecure the individual becomes. Laing (1990: 17-120) demonstrates this in various cases of schizophrenics. What he determines as the central trait of an ontologically insecure being is the overwhelming alienation from the general experience of life. This otherness from everyone else leads to the desire to both reveal and conceal one's true self while creating feelings of vulnerability and exposure. Schizophrenia, which is often perceived as insanity, is therefore framed as identity disjunction. According to Laing (1990), public consent is

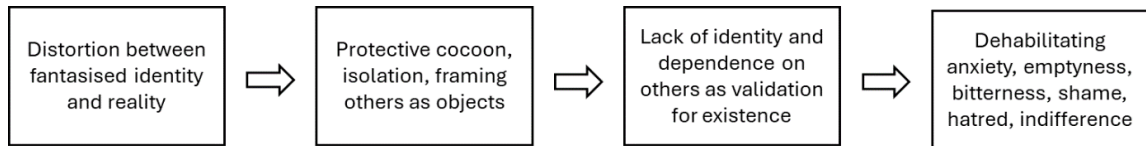
what determines the individual's sanity. If the patient claims he is Napoleon, the medical practitioner will see him as insane. If the patient sees the doctor as Napoleon, that will also apply. The schizophrenic is insecure in his personal self-identification because it is different from everyone else's experience of life. Where ordinary people may find joy in relating to others through ordinary interactions, such interactions pose a threat to the schizophrenic. Because even the most ordinary things are different from his perception, they threaten his unique identity. Here is where anxiety plays its first role in ontological security. Laing (1990) observes that a being for whom every single minor interaction with the world is a potential threat to his true self is bound to be engulfed by it.

To escape this perpetual condition, the individual enters what Giddens (1991) later frames as a protective cocoon. It seeks isolation, avoids love, and treats others as unliving beings, robots, and mechanical artifacts. It fears that the other beings will attain power over it and shape its inner identity. It fears losing control of itself, so it frames the other beings as lacking in autonomy. However, the more the individuality of the other is nullified, the more the need for the protective cocoon expands. Each denial of the other is the denial of "the self." The individual loses "the self" and becomes just an "it," a mechanical construction of its own. A core asset of "the self" is that it can only be shaped through interaction with the external world. "The self" cannot be shaped without the interference of "the other." The being with weak ontological security, therefore, has almost no self. It is essentially empty, and the emptiness is what it identifies with. The emptiness forms his self. But because it is nothing, it is non-existent even to itself. And so paradoxically, to exist, "it" needs someone who believes in its existence. Laing (1990) describes the schizophrenic's relations with others as parasitic in this way. Instead of a genuine relation to the other based on commonalities, there is a deep dependence. However, this relationship is fundamentally dual because the person who provides the existence is simultaneously a constant source of threat to that very existence. This could be framed as one of the main paradoxes of ontological security. The strife for protecting "the self" can lead to perpetuating its destruction.

In the protective cocoon, "the self," which is not yet "the self," is strictly separated from what is projected outwardly. These outward projections can be quite exhibitionistic to be noticed and retain their sense of existence, but they are strictly

separated from “the self.” Laing (1990) identifies a primary cause of this identity disconnection. By retaining its isolation and losing itself in thoughts, fantasies, and memories, which can never get exposed to the other and, therefore, the reality, “the self” never becomes anything materialized. The individual self retains an infinity of possibilities. He is nothing that is yet to become something. The mask, which he does not associate with, is the only aspect that ever gets under the scrutiny of others and the material world. This is irrelevant for the individual because he never associates himself with that part of his personality. He may instead view it as a threat to his “real” self but retain it as a tool for survival. The split allows him to retain the freedom to turn into anything despite the external material reality of his being. Therefore, the split between this fantasy and reality must be maintained. Otherwise, the individual suffers great humility. Because it was forced to subordinate itself to material necessity and become something less than the infinity of possibility it perceives itself as. But the more his real “self” indulges in fantasy and alienates itself from reality, the more it becomes a part of the fantasy instead of the material world. It never becomes anything and, as such, ceases, as Heidegger (1962) would put it, “being in the world.” An ontologically secure person is, in contrast to this, experiencing himself as real, alive, and in biographical continuity.

The results of ontological insecurity can become devastating for both the individual and his surroundings. With no constraints, “the self” is free to fantasize about anything and everything. Laing’s (1990) patients would even get to the point where they consciously imagined the death of “the self.” With no external check mechanisms, this death of “the self” turned into their reality, and they truly stopped being. They were all but for their body truly dead. The contrast of that emptiness and desolation in their inner world, with perceived happiness and warmth in others (magnified by the imagination), lead the individuals to envy and hatred, and finally, the desire to destroy all the good in the world. But other times, simple contempt, disgust, or indifference. Model 1 highlights the basic progression of ontological insecurity in the Laingian understanding.



Model 1: Progression to ontological insecurity through dissonance between “the self” and identity

There are two key issues with applying Laing's (1990) theory beyond its designated focus of schizophrenia. Gustafson and Krickel-Choi (2020) point out that Laing examines the extreme pathological cases of ontological insecurity. Both insecure and secure individuals experience anxiety; however, their main concern is the question of the degree to which it is debilitating. Laing's (1990) work, which focuses only on extreme cases, makes it hard to distinguish what would happen when an individual has only a partial, undeveloped, or otherwise limited sense of self. This is likely true with most cases that are referred to as ontologically insecure, which arguably includes collective entities such as the state. Yet his work reveals what is the true core of ontological insecurity. The most extreme case of ontological insecurity is losing or never attaining one's “self.”

The second problem of the Laingian (1990) approach is the limited application of ontological security. In this interpretation, ontological insecurity arises from the dissonance between self-identity and projected identities. But this vastly reduces the area of ontological security. As such, for the purposes of this essay, this should be viewed as one way ontological insecurities can arise, not the only one. Giddens (1991: 55) instead highlights four main existential dimensions: “Existence and being, Finitude and human life, Experience of others, and Continuity of self-identity.” According to Giddens (1991), the individual needs to have answers to all four questions to attain full existential security. For the first question, the nature of being is often organized by tradition, so the structure limits the number of future possibilities in the external social world, and so reduces anxiety. The second question tackles the uncertainty of subjective death, the unknowability of what one will experience by death. Religious and cultural ideas of the afterlife can limit those anxieties by clearly representing what comes after. The third question relates to the other questions. We can only perceive the bodies of other individuals, not their consciousnesses. But the other beings of this world are deeply connected to the creation of our own identity. To believe in our existence, we

need to believe in the existence of the other. The fourth question concerns the individual's own self in relation to identity, which is also the question Giddens (1991) and Laing (1990) primarily focus on. However, while the questions are interconnected and identity plays an important role in the latter two, anxiety is the central aspect of the first two questions.

Ontological security is most often defined as the “security of the self” instead of the body (Krickel-Choi, 2021 b: 9). This broader definition better encapsulates these four areas than the original definition of ontological security of experiencing the world as: “real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person” (Laing 1990: 39). There are more specified definitions which better reflect the broader application of ontological security such as: “Ontological security is the capacity to keep existential anxiety at bay and experience oneself as a whole, temporally continuous and purposeful subject with agency in a predictable and meaningful world populated by Others.” (Gellwitzki, 2022: 1004). But the self is such a broad and unique concept that it is impossible to encapsulate all the possible ways it might become insecure into one definition. As such, the broader definition, which can be further specified case by case, appears more appropriate. With the definition of ontological security of “the self,” “the self” is, as such, the concept around which the entire inquiry revolves. But the two key concepts that form “the self” and help it either lose or attain security are anxiety and identity. While all four areas highlighted by Giddens (1991) are interconnected, Existential anxiety is something experienced on a far broader spectrum of being. It does not only arise from identity dissonance. Rather than distinguishing ontological security into different types, it is best to distinguish between these four categories of areas that have the potential to make “the self” insecure. Inauthentic life is just as threatening to “the self” as it is to face one's finitude or inability to accept the authentic existence of other beings.

2.1. The formation and disappearance of “the self”

Giddens's (1991) theory provides an answer to resolving the problem of being ontologically insecure. It lies in routine, the reproduction of conscious acts, which the individual continually tries to maintain. This creates a defense against anxiety, which lies in opposition to the protective cocoon. The individual routinely follows a specific

path, limiting his possibility in the world. Instead of isolating “the self,” the strategy lies in exposing it to the outside world. Instead of seeking isolation to hold on to the infinite possibility of “the self,” the individual shapes it into a singular entity and exposes it externally to others. But Giddens (1991) warns about the danger of this practice. Blind dedication to routines may result from being unable to face future possibilities. As such, when the individual embraces one identity and hides from all the other potential modes of being, his self becomes fragile. It closes away from creativity and repeats a stagnant singular mode of being. A being closed off away from creativity never develops any moral meaning. The mastery of routines leads to accepting the external existence of reality. Ontological security is impossible without routines, but they must be controlled instead of binding the individual. This idea is based on control over Anxiety by Kierkegaard (1946) and Heidegger (1962). Anxiety can reveal the authentic self. “The self,” as such, needs a degree of insecurity in the face of future possibilities. If the individual closes himself away from the future possibilities of “the self,” then he risks that when a moment arises that derails his present mode of being, he will be left with nothing. No self and no future possibility. Security studies echo the idea that blind subordination to routine and binding oneself to a single unchanging identity is deeply problematic (e.g., Rosedale, 2015, or Browning and Joenniemi, 2016).

This highlights the two extreme poles of ontological security. One extreme is being nothing and having an infinitude of possibility; the other is committing to something so profoundly that one retains no possibility. Such an individual is undoubtedly more secure but can never evolve, progress, or improve himself. And if an event shakes his “self” so profoundly that he cannot ignore it, he suddenly finds himself on the other side of the pole, with no sense of “self” and deep ontological insecurity. A significant event challenging our contemporary identity can quickly derail the set identity. For Laing (1990) and Giddens (1991), ontological insecurity originates in this derailing moment. Laing describes it as happening during childhood, so the individual never develops “the self.” Giddens (1991) highlights that the event can also happen during life and derail the existing self.

If this concept were to be applied to the state level (as debated in Chapter 2.4.), the traumatic event can, occur at any period of the state's existence. Rosher (2021) uses the example of Brexit to argue how a significant event affects the national narratives

and causes ontological insecurity on the national scale, even in a long-established nation. Ontological insecurity can also appear within new or reformed national entities. For example, Shani (2017) and Cash and Kinnvall (2017) identify ontological insecurity in post-colonial countries. By having entirely new borders drawn, which ignored their biographical continuity, they were, in some cases, remade into entirely new countries – and, as such, have yet to establish any identity. Finally, Kazharski (2019) and Narozhna (2021) identified the problems with ontological insecurity in Russia, which went through both identity-derailing events in its biographical history and has arguably been reformed into a new collective entity with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

2.2. “The self” and identity

The distinction between “the self” and identity is crucial for conceptualizing ontological security. Laing (1990) uses the terms inseparably, distinguishing between real and false self, which is synonymous with real and false identity. In the past, ontological security has been seen as: “the security of the subject's identity.” This ties back to McSweeney's (1999: 74) understanding of ontological security, who argued that ontological security can be applied to the state level because: “Identity describes society, and society is constituted by identity.” However, Browning and Joenniemi (2016) criticize ontological security approaches precisely for being reduced to the question of identity. They argue that this results in identity preservation being put above the preservation of “the self.” Krickel-Choi (2022 b) provides a distinction between identity and “the self,” in which she clarifies that while both are a result of societal formation, “the self” is more akin to the personal experience of being, while identities are the different roles taken on in the world or stories individuals tell about themselves. Giddens (1991) creates a similar distinction. The inspiration for the term Ontological security comes from existentialist philosophy – concerned with being, not identity. Again, the confusion arises because Laing (1990) and Giddens (1991) focus primarily on the role of identity and its interaction with “the self.”

Giddens (1991) creates the concept of “self-identity,” which he distinguishes from regular identity. The blurring of “the self” and identity into a singular entity is still arguably present – but with a vital difference – the identity has to be experienced and

interpreted by the individual. For the purposes of clarity, it is better to simply refer to self-identify as “the self” to differentiate the two concepts further.

According to Giddens (1991), “the self” (or self-identity) is not made of traits; it is the bibliographic story of the person in time. It is a story as the individual experiences it. It is still a story like any other form of identity the person may embrace, but it is a core part of the existential experience of being. “The self” is not constituted only by what the person is in the present. His past modes of being play a part. The bibliographic experience provides the constraints for what is authentic. Therefore, the key distinction between “the self” and identity lies in the concept of “authenticity.” Heidegger (1962) says the true authentic self is often obscured. It is obscured by the outwardly projected identity, which may or may not be authentic. It may be a simple projection, or it may reflect the individual's sense of self. According to Laing (1990: 78-106), ontologically insecure individuals develop a false self, which results from trying to mimic the expectations others put on them. In one of his patients, it was the imposed will of his mother that created the false self.

As highlighted earlier in (Chapter 2.), an important part of identity formation is interaction with the external world. The individual is not the only actor who forms his identity. Taylor (1995: 32-33) argues, “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us.” The individual not only projects his identity outwardly, but others project their idea of his identity onto him. This projection can be based on biographical constraints but can also reflect other people's fantasies or future projections of what they want the individual to become. The projected identity can be the projection of the other, “the self,” or a mixture of both. The individual can become one of many possible identities, but he is not the only actor in that process. His past self – the biography of his life and competing interpretations of his self are the constraints. But if that outwardly projected identity is created for him by the will of others rather than his – it becomes inauthentic.

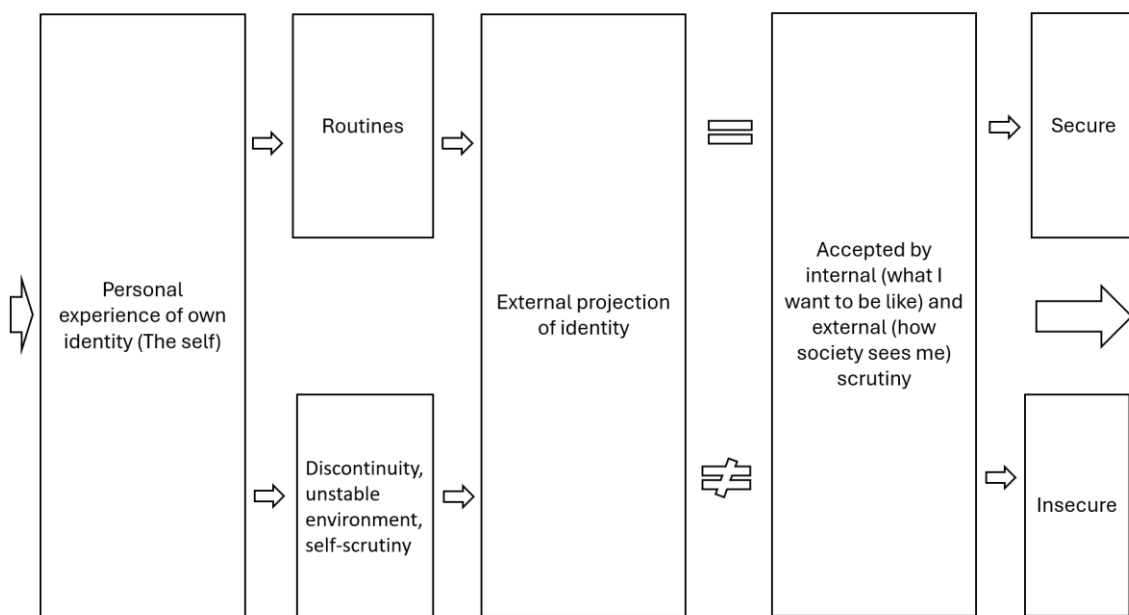
The caveat here is that the other can be metaphorically a projection of his future self. The individual may have an image of what he wants to become and embrace it as his identity. But because he is not yet what he wants to become, that identity is also a fantasy and therefore inauthentic. The issue with conflating “the self” with identity is

that this leaves ambiguity about how “the self” can be an actor in the creation of “the self.” Therefore, Kierkegaard (1954: 13) defines “the self” as: “A relation that relates itself to its own self.” He sees “the self” as something to be shaped from the infinitude of potential modes of being (Steele, 2013). The “what if” is an integral part of our biography and connects “the self” to anxiety, which comes only from the future (Kierkegaard 1946). Authenticity as the only distinction is, therefore, insufficient. “The self” is distinguished from identity by its ability to experience itself and, as such, relate to itself. It is unclear if an identity without consciousness can be considered “the self.” Because the consciousness of “the self” in the moment is required to communicate with “the self” in the future and to experience “the self” of the past.

Giddens (1991) maintains that “the self” is continually created over time. It doesn’t just exist; the individual has to be aware of it, sustain it, and shape it. Discontinuity, an environment full of changes and future possibilities, lack of self-appreciation, and constant scrutiny of “the self” are how the individual’s self is threatened and insecure. The individual biography, which is the substance of “the self,” must come from interacting with the world. The ability to maintain a narrative and sort the outside interactions and events into it is what maintains a strong sense of “the self”. Every identity is fragile, including the identity that the individual identifies with. Even a secure self is fragile because the individual holds it as the only identity among the infinite potentialities for his “self-identity.” But at the same time, it is durable because it endures in the face of that infinitude. It endures despite the constant attempts from the outside to alter it. An identity only becomes “the self” once faced with some of these trials. Until then, it is merely a possibility for “the self” or an inauthentic identity. Routines are how we maintain, shape, and connect “the self” with the outside world. If the individual does not “live out” his identity, it is inauthentic, and he feels disconnected from the world. To provide an illustrative example on the international level. A state that identifies itself as peaceful but engages in war at every opportunity puts itself in an ontologically insecure position by creating a disconnect between the identity it identifies itself with and its routine. That identity can, therefore, never authentically become “the self.”

Picture two highlights the process of identity formation. The process is simplified to highlight the primary aspects and differentiate between “the self,” the

identity we project, and the identity externally projected onto us. If the authentic self is externally projected through routines and accepted by other beings as real, ontological security strengthens. If the externally projected identity corresponds with what we want to be like, ontological security also strengthens. On the other hand, ontological insecurity arises if there is a disconnect between what the individual authentically perceives to be “the self” and the identity he externally projects or if his authentic projection is not externally accepted. The parts of the identity that survive the process of internal and external scrutiny become parts of the new self, and the process repeats itself.



Model 2: the process of forming “the self” and ontological security/insecurity.

What drives the individual to establish routines, or in other words, connect “the self with the outside world, are emotions. Specifically, Giddens (1991) highlights shame and guilt. Guilt results from the inability to achieve imagined goals or maintain codes of conduct. Shame is connected to identity in that we feel ashamed when hidden traits of our personality that do not correspond to the outward narrative we play are revealed. Kierkegaard (1946) argues that shame and guilt appear when the individual sins. In that moment, he both transgresses the code of conduct and, through the transgression, reveals a hidden truth about himself. Shame is a result of the individual projecting his identity inauthentically. Guilt results from an authentic projection that is either not accepted externally or by the ideal future the individual strives for.

2.3. “The self” in a body

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2., the concept of self is distinguished from the concept of the body. When the concept of Ontological security was first implemented at the state level through the works of McSweeney and later Steele (2014) and Mitzen (2006), it had to be distinguished from the prevailing concept of physical security. As such, the first ontological security areas about finitude and existence were either dismissed as part of physical security concerns or deemed inapplicable at the state level. As Krickel-Choi (2021 a) has put it, the mind was essentially disconnected from the body. However, she argues that these two modes of being (physical and ontological) are deeply interconnected. Laing (1990: 160-178) argued that “the self” being dislodged from the body is inevitably painful for the individual; “the self” yearns to be in the body yet fears being in the body as that exposes it to imminent threats. Giddens (1991) also identifies the tie between the material body and identity as vital. For example, the individual can control his appearance to be seen as relaxed. In that way, the body manufactures a protective barrier in social situations. Deviations in body language are seen as threatening because they distort the expected reality of the situation. The extent to which this outward “performance” correlates with the individual biographical story is essential for ontological security. If they are not at least correlated, then the individual feels like nothing of him is on display. He may then feel like events are not occurring to him, but some other person he has put on display—the disassociation between “the self” and the identity occurs. Routines foster this connection as the individual displays his traits for others to see. Ultimately, the material body is what makes “the self” outwardly projected.

Mitzen (2006) argues that the ontological security of the state can come in conflict with the physical security of the state. Similarly, Steele (2014) argues that states will pursue their ontological security needs despite their physical security needs. They divide the two concepts, even putting them in opposition to one another. Despite the interconnection between the body and mind, physical and ontological security cannot be considered the same concept. Rumelili (2013) warns against such efforts. She defines physical security as security from harm, threat, or danger. As such, the physical security threats are far more imminent and identifiable. Rumelili (2020), based on reading Hobbes, assigns the emotion of fear to physical security, where anxiety is linked with

ontological security. This basic distinction should be applied because, as discussed in Chapter 3.3., both emotions are deeply related. Just as anxiety is differentiated from fear, ontological security has to be differentiated from physical security – but the connection cannot be forgotten. Ontological security issues can lead to problems arising in the physical security realm and vice-versa.

Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020) note that when today's age is referred to as the “Age of Anxiety,” the imagery that arises is the uncertainty connected to terrorist attacks, nuclear weapons, or large-scale pandemics. These issues are both a concern for ontological security and physical security. They tackle our ontological security primarily because of the uncertainty. A nuclear catastrophe, a terrorist attack, or a pandemic can come from anywhere at any time. As such, they induce anxiety until a direct threat arises, which is when it turns to the domain of fear and physical security. The existence of nuclear weapons, even without being linked to a direct threat of their use, raises the question of being and the finitude of life. It raises it because the possibility of erasure becomes ever so closer and imminent, yet never fully materialized. Yet, it is not dependent only on identity; the individual may be authentic and still his self is under threat.

The apocalyptic imaginary associated with nuclear fallout or environmental problems is similar to that of Ragnarök or the biblical apocalypse. In those stories, they are counter-balanced by the answer of what comes after death. Be it Valhalla or Paradise. Such apocalyptic stories have been repeated throughout history, reflecting human anxiety about finitude. With no such answers available, how can the individual feel ontologically secure when faced with such destructive possible outcomes? The only present problem for him is that he is a being, which is surrounded by the possibility that it can, at any time, cease being. His identity, in that instance, becomes distant and irrelevant. What does it matter who he is when he is about to stop being? In that way, this strand of ontological insecurity still formulates an insecure identity. And identity in itself could be considered a coping mechanism to deal with the finitude of being (Lebow, 2016). An ontologically insecure existence is different from physical security but ranges beyond identity. The threat is not a manifested object, yet it is so close and oppressive that it suffocates (Heidegger, 1962: 231).

To conclude this entire chapter and tie it together, the definition of ontological security is the security of “the self,” which needs to be distinguished from identity. Some of the ways “the self” becomes insecure involve internal development and identity. The Laingian disassociation between “the self” and projected identity is the epitome of these issues, but the concept should not be limited to it. It has to tackle all four questions Giddens (1991) presents and go beyond them. “The self” is insecure in a plethora of instances when its existence is endangered, questioned, unaccepted, unbearable, discontinued, or has yet to manifest. In those states of existence, negative emotions such as anxiety, but not limited to anxiety, arise. Existence, or being in the world, is deeply tied to but different from living as a body. Physical security may lead to ontological security and vice-versa, but there is a clear distinction. A slight diversion from the modern ontological security literature is to view ontological security as a scale. It is not a condition that can be cured or obtained. Rather, it is an omnipresent condition that can increase or lessen. It is not a utilitarian or moral scale because higher ontological security may not necessarily be better, although some authors argue that the best spot might be in the middle (Kierkegaard, 1946; Giddens, 1991; May, 1950). Learning to face anxiety and using it for creative endeavors.

And lastly, “the self,” as argued, is a form of identity but, at the same time, goes beyond it. The authentic self is what survives the endless process of scrutinizing our biographical story through dialogue with the other and the future self. If nothing is put up for scrutiny, nothing is created, or nothing survives the scrutiny – and the individual instead uses the projection of others as his self, then the being finds itself at the neurotic edge of ontological insecurity. The past, the future, and the present experiences of “the self” all play an important part in forming “the self.” *This process of creation of “the self” continues until the moment the being stops being – in death* (Berenskötter, 2020).

2.4. “The self” as “the state”

So far, the concept of “the self” has primarily been discussed on the conceptual level of the individual. However, there have been attempts to move it to the national level of analysis, and Chapter 2. discusses some of the avenues of ontological security application at the state level. There are two major critiques of this application.

Rossdale (2015) criticizes the concept of ontological security from post-material lenses – a feminist perspective inspired by the work of Butler and Harraway. The critique first tackles the issue of having ontological security as a political goal to be achieved. This critique is shared by Browning (2016), who argues that while attaining ontological security is positive, how states secure it should be scrutinized. It can reinforce particular versions of identity, leading states to prolong conflicts rather than ending them to retain stable identity.

Rossdale (2015) also claims that the interconnectedness of individual identity to the primary narratives of the state and the way it shapes the individual are precisely the interactions that should be viewed in a critical light. She maintains that the inconsistencies, differences, and individual disconnections from the overarching narrative create the path to enlightenment. They give the sense of what is morally right and what should be stood for, as well the ways the individual is entangled and contributes to the issues the state creates. A broader critique of the ontological security framework she poses is that because it places other concepts, like political resistance, as reactions to achieve ontological security, it marginalizes these approaches, which she deems should be at the center of inquiry. Lebow (2016: 41) presents a similar argument. He criticizes ontological security studies for claiming that something like a coherent state identity exists or has any tangible limiting tendencies, including bibliography. He is also critical of the notion that ontological security reduces anxiety, which he identifies as an unfounded claim. He maintains that: “States do not have emotions, so the agents in question must be people” – an argument further debated in Chapter 4.4. He recommends that ontological security is only applied to specific groups or left to individuals' devices. In summary, there is an opposition in the literature between what Gricius (2023) coins as relational (state and individual) and reflexive (state as the individual) approaches.

The critique is primarily aimed at the initial attempts to apply ontological security to explain state interactions. When the concept was first analyzed on the level of the state, McSweeney (1999: 77) argued that identity, “the image we want to have of ourselves and the correlative image we want to construct for others,” is limited by empirical history. Collective identity does not emerge by itself; it is shaped by the narratives of politicians, scientists, commentators, writers, artists, and countless others

who argue about the specific aspect of identity with other interpretations. They create the prevailing narratives and shape the connective picture for a shared identity. It is an act that's both a choice and a result of scrutiny and circumstance. In that way, it is not dissimilar to "the self." He concludes that while, in reality, states are not human unitary actors, the decision-making process is conducted by human actors. Because of that, states can be treated as such for analysis. This view highlighted the role of internal actors in forming the state's identity. However, there is also an external approach to forming state identity. Mitzen (2006) maintains that identity is shaped by social situations with other actors (In this case, other states), while Steele (2014) rather highlights the role of constructed narratives about oneself in this process – a bridging view because a narrative can be constructed by both internal and external actors.

Mitzen (2006) echoes the critique that states may not want to escape security dilemmas because even dangerous routines provide ontological security. In her view, ontological security is achieved by routine interactions with other states to form their identity. Therefore, ontological security through this lens explains the enduring rivalries or long irrational conflicts between states. However, it does not explain the difference in outcomes independently; other factors must be considered. States create routines differently, but all actors fear deep uncertainty as a threat to their identity. Therefore, the actor must create an environment where endless anxiety-generating uncertainty is limited – a routine structure on the international level.

Based on Giddens' (1991) work, Steele (2014) also highlights shame as something states seek to prevent at any cost. Shame briefly stops the state's sense of security because the sense of self is severed in shame. After all, it reveals the hidden traits that do not fit the narrative. Actors' identity depends on the international society; however, "actors might not be able to "free" themselves from inter-national context, but they can free their Selves from routines which ultimately damage their self-identity" (Steele, 2014: 5). This is why the search for ontological security must be scrutinized. States may not be able to control how they are viewed in the international setting. However, they can engage in routines reinforcing a different self-image. This is why seeking ontological security is not necessarily desirable; often, it may be better for the state to expose itself to ontologically insecure moments. To change flawed dynamics or stagnant parts of itself.

But while the argument for state identity is persuasive, to what extent is this identity similar to that of a human being? As argued in Chapter 2., ontological security is tied to “the self.” Steele (2014), at first, does not provide a particularly persuasive account for attributing certain human qualities to the state. He notes that he does it because this is practically a staple practice within the field of International Relations. And that most grand theories attribute a certain level of emotion to each particular state. In his view (Steele, 2014: 18): “because they represent their state, state agents ‘are the state.’” They share the moral responsibility for the state's actions and have the means to control how it conducts itself – a similar view to McSweeney (1999). But the difference is that they both control the state while simultaneously being controlled by it. Rather than the leader's ontological problems and insecurities, what matters here is how they view their nation's identity within the constraints of international relations. The narrative gives the state its characteristics, makes it distinguishable from others, and, in that way, personifies it. The continuous interpretation of its historical identity by inner actors gives the state its ontological security.

Mitzen (2006), instead, argues that states can be treated as humans only while they seek ontological security because of how individual identities interact with the state. To retain a stable identity, the individual will attach himself to a group identity that provides this stability. So, if the group identity, in this case of the state, is threatened, the individuals in the society also lose their stability. Therefore, the state is not an individual but acts as if it were one. Just as it does in terms of seeking physical security. The problem with framing the state in this way is that it obscures the distinction between the narrative and the ruling entity of individuals – which is exactly what Rosedale (2015) criticizes. Aware of the interaction between the ruling body and the overarching narrative, Steele (2014) conflates them into one to simplify the analysis. However, as the critique has argued, this distinction is vital. The entity that is the state influences the individual parts of itself, just as they form and shape it. Furthermore, as McSweeney argues, even if the ruling entity may have the most influence, many other actors within the state shape its identity. For example, Hermanowicz and Morgan (1999) identify how rituals serve as tools to create and preserve collective identities and values. When these internal rituals change, so does the collective identity of the entity as a

whole. This means routines conducted by the mass population inside the state contribute to forming the over-arching identity.

To go one step further, Rosher (2021) argues that narratives are created based on memories and bibliography, which lead to routine reproduction. But on the national level, the memories of the past generations transcend to the new ones, who may not have lived in the same era in which those events occurred. The state identity, therefore, reaches even beyond the present body of the individuals. Rosher (2021) highlights how memories are a building block for the narratives that form “the self” and, therefore, ontological security. When speaking about critical events, individuals will note “We experienced” despite not experiencing the event personally. Such collective memories could potentially become the core of national ontological security. The past mode of being for the state seems to play a role in creating its identity, despite the criticisms from Lebow (2016) that actors can simply ignore the past. There does appear to be some level of constraints. Herb and Kaplan (1999: 9-25) highlight that every state does not only have a bibliographical history and a shared sense of belonging but also a shared goal or sense of unfulfilled destiny. Like the individual, the state entity shares some form of past and future modes of being, which shape its biography.

As such, the state has physical security because it has a body (its territory in the most basic sense (Krickel-Choi, 2022 b)) and an identity attributed to it externally – based on how it is experienced and shaped by others (other states or its population). The state has physical constraints and a form of projected identity. But is that sufficient for it to have a true self – in the sense that it experiences itself?

The one way to view the state as a being – is to view it as a collective organism. This has become somewhat of a taboo due to its association with fascism. Alexander Wendt (2004) – who is critical of skepticism towards the idea of state personhood, concludes that a state as a singular conscious being is unlikely to exist. However, it is possible to think of the state as a collective of minds. It can be thought of as an organic structure, like a beehive. There are ways in which it resembles an organism. It has an inside structure that works to ensure its survival. It pushes the individuals towards actions with the clear goal of sustaining itself. It has a degree of autonomy with a

robust, organized inside structure, which assures its function. But it lacks reproductive capabilities and other aspects of a living being.

The true problem lies in the question of collective consciousness. Does anything like that exist for the state? The first major obstacle in answering this question is a massive lack of understanding regarding individual consciousness. Wendt (2004) echoes the notion that it is not enough for “the self” to have a narrative; the narrative also has to be experienced by the constituted unit – consciousness has to be present. States in IR are often talked about as if they experience emotions. But this is a simplification. The sum of many individuals is experiencing said emotion within the state (chapter 2.4.). Because the state is not a living organism, it is non-material, and any form of singular consciousness would be emitted non-physically, which is impossible to witness or prove. Rather, the collection of individuals would have to be framed as a body part, an organ that experiences on behalf of the state. In Kierkegaardian terms, the collective population of the state could be the relation – “which relates itself to its own self,” that self, in this case, being “the state”.

Kierkegaard (1941: 295-296) maintains that: “Generally speaking, consciousness, i.e. consciousness of self, is the decisive criterion of the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will the more self. A man who has no will at all is no self; the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has also.” For Kierkegaard (1941), “the self” is not something the individual is born with rather, it is created through a process (a view shared by Giddens, 1991). He becomes the self. One has to “will” to be “the self” and most importantly, through “devotion” one can also give himself away.

Laing (1990: 78-94) maintains that a projected identity can threaten the ontologically insecure self. The projected identity can become the bibliographical story, which becomes the new self. As such, being both an individual and a greater part of a collective entity creates tension between the two modes of being. For the collective self to genuinely emerge, devotion would be a requirement. Giving away the individual self and being willing to become part of a greater whole. Collective consciousness implies that the group is conscious of being “the self.” The experience of individuals on behalf of the state in the present day would be closer to collective unconsciousness (which is

enough for anxiety to emerge, as explained in Chapter 4.2) – the individual is mostly unaware of experiencing anything on behalf of the state. The experience of the state has meaning to the individual because he, as part of the entity, relates events to himself. This relationship would have to be reversed for the state's collective consciousness to emerge. The individual experience would only have meaning insofar as experiences relate to the state's concerns.

As Wendt (2004) highlighted, the attempts to shape the state into a living collective entity in the past have been catastrophic. However, even ideologies like nationalism (Berenskötter, 2020) can be considered examples of emerging consciousness on the collective level. The argument present in this essay is, therefore, not that having “a self” is not possible for the state, but rather, most states in their present form (at least in the West with its individualistic tradition) are not beings in the world. They are not capable of attributing themselves to their own self. The state has actors that shape it. It can act and has a bibliography and an identity, but it cannot experience itself. Those external actors desire a future for it and may or may not bind themselves by the state's bibliography when they aim to achieve it. In the same way, the state cannot experience ontological insecurity; it can only be attributed to its identity externally. The identity projected onto it from external sources can still create ontological insecurity for the population. The bibliographical narrative of the state is something that the individuals within it use to provide a background for their own bibliographical story. As such, holes in that grand narrative of the state create holes in the individual's being. To echo Rossdale's (2015) critique, the field of ontological security should focus on the state primarily as an actor that influences the ontological security of the individual. While some authors maintain that both relational and reflexive approaches are viable tools in ontological security (Rumelili, 2014), blurring the distinction between the state and the individual is problematic. It has the potential to create ontological insecurity in itself by taking away the individual agency. As a cog in the machine that is the state, the individual loses his self and becomes an “it,” while the state gains a conscious self through the collective experience of the unified population. From the existentialist perspective, *unless we “will” to be the state, it has no self, no security of “the self.”*

Despite this argument, ontological security cannot be limited to the relationship between the individual and the state. Hom and Steele (2020) argue that the most uncertainty is at the international level, where anarchy remains. The being is a being in the world, and the world reaches beyond the state. Anxiety-inducing issues such as the Islamic state, world pandemics, and nuclear proliferation – as highlighted in Chapter 2.3. – go beyond this relationship.

3. The concept of anxiety

There is a substantial lack of clarity in the field when defining the concept of anxiety and its connection to ontological security. Despite being one of the key concepts in the field, the term anxiety is often used interchangeably with the state of ontological insecurity or even fear (Krickel-Choi, 2022 a). For example, Onursai and Adisonmez (2022:64) define anxiety as a “future-oriented and long-acting response to an unknown threat.” However, even abstract definitions like this are rather rare in the literature. Instead of providing over-arching definitions, most authors (e.g., Rumelili, 2020, 2021, or Berenskötter, 2020) highlight particular characteristics of anxiety by drawing on existentialist authors. This paints a far more complex picture of anxiety but makes the concept hard to pinpoint and apply. Lastly, there are authors, for example, Browning (2017), who analyze a particular kind of anxiety – for example, death anxiety. These works usually draw on Tillich (1952), who distinguishes anxiety into categories.

While none of these approaches are wrong, very little emphasis has been put on the differences between the original existentialist literature and its interpretation by Laing and Giddens. Rather than looking at anxiety as something that has evolved and changed, authors combine multiple approaches or focus only on one specific author. And while the existentialist theory is complementary, there are major differences even between the key authors. Many of the general issues cannot be entirely remedied. Anxiety, by its nature, is a rather vague concept, and there are three main different approaches to it – each starkly different. The existentialist, the psychological, and the Lacanian. In this thesis, while applying a specific existentialist approach to anxiety, drawing on a combination of multiple authors, Kierkegaard (1946, 1941, 1954), Heidegger (1962), Tillich (1952), and Sartre (1992), this approach will be contrasted with other interpretations of anxiety and highlight the key differences between the authors. This should at least help address the conceptual confusion – while providing a more unified existentialist theory on anxiety.

Gustafson and Krickel-Choi (2020: 878) highlight three questions that must be answered to clarify the relation: “Are anxiety and ontological insecurity synonymous?

Or does anxiety lead to ontological insecurity? Is ontological insecurity a particular kind of anxiety?” The way they tackle the questions about conceptual ambiguity is by distinguishing anxiety between normal and neurotic, which was a distinction removed by Giddens (1991), who argued that all anxiety is, in its nature, neurotic. They argue that it is usual for states to avoid anxiety-generating situations, but once this becomes excessive or repeated starts causing debilitating neurotic anxiety. Which may happen when the general anxiety is not tackled adequately. This distinction between neurotic and general anxiety originates in Freud. Although Gustafson and Krickel-Choi (2020) apply the theory of Rollo May (1950), Giddens (1991) primarily refers to Freud when developing his conception of anxiety. But from the existential perspective, this distinction is insufficient. It only differentiates the concept by the outcome. The difference between normal and neurotic anxiety is that one is, in its nature, paralyzing. Heidegger (1962) is critical of psychology for primarily focusing on the outwardly emitted physiological aspects of anxiety instead of the direct experience of it.

3.1. The contrast between psychological and existentialist approaches to anxiety

Within psychology as a field in itself, there are several different approaches and theories on anxiety. The psychoanalytical theory stems from Freud and distinguishes anxiety by the inputs that lead to it. The divide is between normal anxiety (which arises from real possible threats), neurotic anxiety (which originates from imagined threats and can contribute to panic attacks), and anxiety attained by trauma at birth. The behaviorist theory instead considers anxiety to be learned behavior, usually in response to a traumatic event. Physiological theories are concerned with the biological/natural origins of anxiety. They study the brain to see what causes anxiety and how the process operates. Lastly, cognitive system theories observe the thinking patterns inside the brain, memorization, and other aspects. These theories explain why people higher in trait anxiety are more prone to emotional feelings of anxiety, which can be, for example, attributed to storing more worries in their long-term memory (Strongman 1995). At first, psychology viewed anxiety only as a reaction to a looming threat from both internal and external sources. The conceptualization of anxiety as a personality trait, with certain people being more prone to feeling anxiety than others, only appeared later (Spielberger, 1966). As such, anxiety has three aspects to it in psychology—a part of the

personality, an emotion, and a set of medical disorders (Eysenck 2014). However, the most common interpretation of anxiety in psychology is to conceptualize it as the dread of the unknown. Rachman (2019: 22) defines it as: “an unsettling anticipation of a threatening but formless event, a feeling of uneasy suspense.” The emphasis is that it arises from an unknown threat or innate unconscious fear.

The philosophical existentialist approach is more theoretical. It does not concern itself with the biological functions of anxiety within our bodies. Instead, it goes right to the core of the concept – the experience. An example of this difference is pain (Mercer, 2014). Even if a scientist can perfectly observe the process that should be causing the pain, pain does not exist unless it is experienced. The core of emotion is not the bodily process that creates the emotion but the experience itself. The experience goes beyond the material world and engages with the metaphysical. The existential approach to anxiety does not focus on the outwardly visible aspects but on the state of mind – something that cannot be objectively observed.

Laing (1990: 34) provides another argument for why it is impossible to only confine to objectively observable behavior regarding ontological security. Once the therapist creates a relationship with his patient, he inevitably creates interpretations and conclusions. Because of the dialogical nature of “the self:” “What the schizophrenic is to us determines very considerably what we are to him, and hence his actions.” – a fairly constructivist view for its time.

3.2. Anxiety as the mechanism of freedom

Anxiety has been initially applied to ontological security studies as an emotion that causes paralysis rather than generates action. Because of this simplification, much of ontological security has become bogged down in the debate about the deterministic relation between anxiety and state action. Which has become a deeply divisive issue in the field (Krickel-Choi, 2022 a). The question of how anxiety and ontological security are related is at the background of the debate, which instead centers around the impact of anxiety.

Does it paralyze the state and make it hide in its protective cocoon, does it make the state stick to strict routines to remedy anxiety, or does anxiety lead to breaking away

from destructive routines by revealing possibilities leading to change and creativity? In the more recent literature, there seems to be a consensus that anxiety generates both paralysis and innovation – an argument that was originally laid out by Giddens (1991; chapter 2.1.).

Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020: 241) highlight that while the response to fear has only two options: “fight or flight,” anxiety leads to a multitude of outcomes despite similar causes. After all, anxiety is tied to freedom. The state may not have the same agency in enacting change as individuals, but the individuals who control the state's actions do. According to Flockhart (2016), change is at the core of constructivism, and while difficult for state actors, it is possible. Leaders inside the state can choose a new course. Berenskötter (2020) argues that radical change – such as revolutions, also needs to be implemented into Ontological security, and Kazharski (2019) argues that to present certain events as traumas is also a choice. The actors within the states have a plethora of tools to change the course of a state. Be it revolution, protests, policies, speeches, etc. And the same tools can be used to maintain destructive routines. As such, this anxiety dilemma does reflect on the level of the state. As long as freedom exists to enact any change.

Why anxiety cannot be used for determining the outcome is established by Kierkegaard (1946) and his work “The Concept of Dread (Anxiety)¹” – the foundation of existential anxiety theory. Anxiety in Kierkegaard (1946) is strictly tied to religion through the example of hereditary sin. Once Adam was given free will, he had humanity's first choice. To eat or not to eat from God's forbidden tree. He had no understanding of the outcome of whatever choice he would make. And this is exactly the moment anxiety appears. On a crossroads between different futures. Once the individual has the free will to make his own decisions: “The possibility of freedom announces itself in dread” (Kierkegaard, 1946: 66).

Anxiety appears when a man stands on the edge of a cliff with the options to either jump or not to jump. It is precisely this emphasis on freedom that makes

¹ Translations of Kierkegaard differ, but anxiety, dread, or angst are the same concept. The original word used in Danish is Angest.

existential anxiety important for the study of international relations. If states are capable of change, or instead, if external actors are capable of changing the state, there is an aspect of a choice.

When faced with a choice, one is also faced with the possible outcomes of that choice – hence the unpredictability anxiety creates by revealing possibility. Anxiety reveals the potential outcomes of the choice. This is why the differentiation between the feeling of anxiety and the response to anxiety (which is often blurred in the psychological literature (Pine and LeDoux, 2016)) is vital.

In the face of anxiety, the response is different every time because the state of anxiety reveals different future outcomes. During this process, the individual projects himself upon different possibilities of being in the world. It reminds the individual of his freedom and potential. It shows him the possibilities for authentic existence. The authentic self, which often remains hidden, is revealed through confrontation with anxiety. According to Heidegger (1962: 232): “it individualizes – by showing these potential possibilities of being in the world, as one is anxious about this, and “anxiety throws Dasein² back upon that which it is anxious about – its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world.”

There is no deterministic relation between anxiety and its outcome; rather, anxiety is the mechanism that reveals different outcomes as possible. It is the anathema of determinism. Kierkegaard (1946: 38) maintains that: “dread is freedom’s reality as possibility for possibility.” The unknowability of the answer to the question of how possibility is possible is what produces anxiety in the first place. Structure and routine reduce anxiety because they limit the number of possibilities the individual faces in the world (As explored in Chapter 2.1.). Freedom, which allows for possibility, also allows for anxiety. Kierkegaard (1946: 96) maintains that: “In the degree that he discovers freedom, in that same degree does the dread of guilt in the condition of possibility impend over him.” The less freedom the individual has, the less possible futures appear.

² There is no exact English equivalent for the term Dasein. It is a core word of Being and Time, which revolves around it. It is similar to “the self,” but “the self” is somewhere. Heidegger’s (1962) descriptive interpretation of Dasein is as “being in the world” (Stapleton, 2009). It is a term that attempts to capture the full nature of being.

The structure, morality, and routines create the confines of freedom – and reduce anxiety.

3.3. Anxiety and fear

To distinguish between the role of anxiety and ontological security, a distinction between anxiety and fear has to be established. One of the reasons conceptual ambiguities about anxiety exist in the present literature can be traced back to Laing (1990). Rather, Laing uses the terms dread, fear, and anxiety somewhat interchangeably. While he identifies three forms of anxiety that schizophrenics face, from the existentialist perspective, those are more akin to fear. For example, the dread of engulfment involves dreading relatedness to others or itself. However, as such, the anxiety has an object. Rather, the three categories of anxiety correlate to sets of fears the individual experiences – even if those appear to him only in unconsciousness.

Giddens (1991), who draws inspiration primarily from the Freudian understanding of anxiety, defines it as a: “fear that has lost its object.” It is an unconscious response to internal threats. It is an “unconsciously organized state of fear” created by tensions and shaped by our emotions. He maintains that while anxiety can be experienced consciously, the individual is aware of what he is anxious about, and so it is not true anxiety but rather fear. Some of the conceptual confusion arises from the fact that while both authors inspire their theory with existentialist thinkers, their understanding of anxiety is more rooted in the psychological tradition. It is conceptualized as an emotional response to an unknown threat rather than a future possibility.

Therefore, the definition Giddens (1991) provides is problematic from the existentialist perspective. Anxiety as a concept exists because of its distinction from fear, which is a distinction Giddens (1991) blurs. Anxiety cannot be organized because of its infinitude. It appears because of the unknowability of future possibilities, which even the subconscious cannot know and cannot organize. Giddens (1991) maintains that the inner structure of fear is without object because it has never been experienced. It is a structure in the subconscious that is innate in us. However, that still makes it a structure that exists, although the individual may be unaware of it. That is not to say such a structure

does not exist, but it is not anxiety. The more likely interaction is that the subconscious projects an inner unconscious hierarchy of fear onto future possibilities, giving them at least a partial shape – as a coping mechanism. Just like conscious fear – it makes anxiety tangible, and it creates constraints on the possibilities.

Tillich (1952: 36-40) highlights this interaction between fear and anxiety. They are interconnected but do not only follow each other; they exist beside each other. Anxiety remains unknowable even if the void is filled with imaginaries of what the unknowable might look like. In anxiety, there is no specific situation the individual can tackle to escape anxiety. Therefore, human beings instead strive to manifest anxiety into a shape, which makes it an object of fear, and fear as something that exists can be dealt with. Met with courage. But this is a vain process because the fear as such is both a tool to deal with anxiety and also a symptom of it. If one fear is tackled, another one appears shortly after; if no fear is present, anxiety only strengthens. This is why the ontologically insecure being is engulfed by both fear and anxiety and why some authors (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2020; Rumelili, 2020) identify the transformation of anxiety into fear as a motivator for state action. The primal drive to shape the unknown – which is ultimately only a temporary solution. Rumelili (2020) also identifies this interaction as the core of the power struggle because those with power are the ones who can shape the future. They are driven to attain power in order to be able to limit anxiety.

There is a broad consensus that the distinction between anxiety and fear is in the object. Fear is tangible; it has a form. But anxiety resembles staring into the endless void: “The object of dread is a nothing” (Kierkegaard, 1946: 69). Anxiety doesn’t arise from anything that is yet specific, but in the state of anxiety, one feels the weight of endless possibilities and potential futures. Where in fear, one is paralyzed by the tangible threat, anxiety instead overwhelms by the sheer weight of future possibility (chapter 4.3.). It is because of this that while anxiety reveals a plethora of different options for actions that lead to different outcomes, the most common outcome is perhaps stagnation. Unlike fear, anxiety cannot be faced with courage because it is not tangible (Tillich 1952: 32-40).

3.4. The object of anxiety

“If then we ask further what is the object of dread, the answer as usual must be that it is nothing. Dread and nothing regularly correspond to one another. So soon as the actuality of freedom and of the spirit is posited, dread is annulled (*aufgehoben*). But what then is signified more particularly by the nothing of dread? It is fate” (Kierkegaard, 1946: 86). As such, anxiety can have an object, but that object must remain nothing. Kierkegaard (1946) highlights fate and guilt as examples of the unknown objects. A genius is anxious about not fulfilling his fate – but he is not aware of this. A believer is anxious about committing a sin but may also be unaware of it. The state of anxiety reveals the object of anxiety – and through that revelation, the anxiety can become fear – because it is no longer an unknown possibility but an actual something. But long before this object is revealed, it already exists in the unconscious – which is more perceptive. Not in the form of a threat but in the form of a possibility.

Kierkegaard (1946) maintains that only the future can cause anxiety. While the individual may be anxious about a past event, this is self-deceptive. One is anxious about the past offense he may have committed repeating in the future, as the past often repeats. Or he may be anxious about the future possibilities lost because of a decision in the past – before they even became possibilities. Anxiety is not only about the possibility of a threat; it includes aspects like lost potentiality for being, unfulfilled potentials, or undesired potential. The duality of anxiety is that the individual dreads both becoming something and not becoming something. As Heidegger (1962: 185) claims, “Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities.” “Anxiety discloses dasein as being possible” (Heidegger, 1962: 232).

Therefore, contrary to the psychological understanding, for Kierkegaard (1946), the object of anxiety is not an unknown threat. But despite that, every single possibility is a threat to being. Each unknowable future possibility is connected by the only certainty – death – the ultimate threat. Here is where Kierkegaard (1946) and some of the other existentialists depart. According to Megna (2015: 1297): “Modifying Kierkegaard, for whom the object of anxiety is the radical potentiality afforded by the subject’s freedom, Heidegger (1962) makes anxiety’s nonobject the nonbeing of death.”

Tillich (1952: 40-57) further clarifies the distinction between death anxiety and fear of death, which means the fear of being killed by something specific, while death anxiety is the awareness of the unknowability of death. It arises from the knowledge of our imminent non-being. And so, Heidegger (1962) moves the concept of anxiety again closer to the psychological definition as a response to an unknown threat, which is “non-being.” But because the knowledge that non-being is possible is the default situation “the being” finds itself in, according to Heidegger (1962: 232): “That which anxiety is anxious about is Being in the world itself.” The object of anxiety cannot be anything tangible, but it is not nothing because it exists in the world. It is, in essence, the primordial situation that appeared when being was thrust into the world. Anxiety appears in that first moment – and as such, it can never disappear. Sartre (1992) argues that these two approaches are not in conflict with each other. Just as anxiety reveals possibilities of being, it reveals possibilities of non-being.

But if Anxiety is a fundamental constant state of being, how can one be momentarily anxious about something? Heidegger (1962) argues that anxiety is also a momentary state of mind in which this primordial anxiety becomes manifest. Heidegger (1962) makes a dual distinction between anxiety as a state of being and a state of mind, where one is anxious about something. The real world sinks away in this state; the individual feels like it can offer nothing more and thus loses connection with others and becomes unable to understand himself in terms of the outside world. Anxiety in the more primordial sense is ever-present. Because the world is always there, so is anxiety, and thus, the state of mind can arise at any moment without any present threat. The state of mind is thus subordinated to the more primordial anxiety of being in the world. In this state, one is again anxious about something that is not specific – the threat of a threat. But what he is fundamentally anxious about is the state of being in the world, and so the two kinds of anxiety reconnect. The in-the-moment feeling of anxiety is the manifestation of that primordial, ever-present emotion. This duality of anxiety, which is different from the distinction between normal and neurotic anxiety, is fundamentally vital for understanding the connection with ontological security. It does not determine the outcome, but it explains how anxiety can be both an ever-present emotion and an observable in-the-moment feeling.

It is challenging to define anxiety, but based on the reading above, it can be depicted as an: “emotion that arises when the individual is faced with the unknowability and infinity of future possibility, which in turn reflects on him the possibility of his own “self” including its finitude and limitedness.” Rather than functioning purely as a response to a threat, anxiety has a revelatory function. *It is not only anxiety that paralyzes, but also the revelations it provides.*

4. “The self” and anxiety

Now that both concepts are sufficiently established, it is possible to analyse the interaction between them. The following debate serves as a highlight of what exactly the inconsistencies are and what problems need to be tackled to establish the connection successfully.

Rumelili (2021) argues that anxiety contributes to the creation of the securitization process. According to Gricius (2023: 14), “security is also always insecurity” because the securitization process heightens fears.” This leads to the reproduction of negative routines, as states defend against fear by creating more fear. But Mitzen (2006) argues that rather ontological security-seeking reproduces negative routines (chapter 2.4.), because actors seek to establish a stable self-identity. This creates a chicken and an egg question. Do states create a self-harming routine structure that promotes fear to seek reprieve from anxiety, or do they strive to achieve ontological security, which also happens to create a reprieve from anxiety? As argued in chapter 3.2. it is a choice to commit to these routines, but what is it that creates the motivation to make that choice? To understand this interaction, which is a major question in ontological security studies, what must be understood is which of the two variables is dependent and which is independent.

Gellwitzki (2022: 1004) argues that: “Ontological security is the capacity to keep existential anxiety at bay and experience oneself as a whole...” and that anxiety motivates much of human behavior, as subjects tend to avoid it at all costs. In this interpretation, anxiety is the original impetus, and actors seek ontological security to prevent it but do so through routines that may perpetuate conflict.

This idea is problematic in two ways. Firstly, Berenskötter (2020) identifies a clear paradox in anxiety – subjects are both drawn to it while seeking to avoid it at the same time. Secondly, this dynamic differs from that outlined in Chapter 2. by Laing (1990). In his interpretation, the anxiety can be perceived as more of a product of ontological insecurity. His patients attempted to avoid it not by seeking ontological

security but rather by isolation – though this strategy only resulted in generating more anxiety. But the source of anxiety was the constant threat to their being, which the insecure individual experiences. The threat in that example was present due to the state of insecurity that produced it. Ontological insecurity, as Laing (1990) understood it, was essentially producing anxiety. This view is echoed by Hom and Steele (2020), who maintain that within ontological security studies, anxiety results from a gap between the actor's biographical narrative and its Self-identity (and between the narrative and “the self's” wider environment.) But as highlighted in Chapter 2., this is also when ontological insecurity occurs. Does ontological insecurity, therefore, produce anxiety? Or is anxiety creating a state of ontological insecurity?

Vieira (2017) presents an entirely different view of the role of anxiety. From the Lacanian perspective, actors never achieve ontological security. They strive for it endlessly and attempt to anchor themselves in positions that give meaning to their actions. However, ontological security does not exist. Stable identity is a fantasy they seek to achieve, but the closer the subject achieves that fantasy, the more anxiety becomes manifest. Because the divide between fantasy and reality becomes apparent to them. The sense of stability the actors strive to attain is only illusory. The anxiety arises from a lack of something in contrast to other actors. A lack of meaning or coherence of identity, self, etc. The strive to attain stable ontological security veils this lack. From this perspective, anxiety is a driver for seeking ontological security, but that strive leads to even more anxiety.

Therefore, the essential questions to be answered are whether ontological insecurity produces anxiety, anxiety produces ontological insecurity, whether the two phenomena are simply co-constitutive and occur simultaneously, or whether ontological security both reacts to and produces anxiety.

4.1. The leap of faith

The previously established distinction between anxiety as a primordial emotion and feeling in the moment can help clarify the interaction with “the self.” Anxiety appears simultaneously when a being starts being, but this has to be differentiated from becoming “the self” in the Kierkegaardian (1954) understanding. As highlighted in

Chapter 2., part of “the self” is an identity, the story that the individual experiences and identifies with his self. But in this original state, when anxiety appears, the individual has yet to obtain an authentic self. “The self” is ontologically insecure in this state because it has yet to become anything. It exists – but it is still only a possibility. By being formed by possibility, “the self” in this state is surrounded by anxiety. The individual is everything and nothing simultaneously – he is only potential. Only once he commits to something does the anxiety diminish, together with the infinite possibilities.

In the past, this process was accelerated by providing the individual a structure that served as a constraint for what “the self” could become and so limited possibilities. Anxiety is, therefore, also contained by the construction of meaning and morality, which provide structural systems and further diminish the perceived number of infinite possibilities. However, the systems of meaning that were provided by religion have been shattered, and science has failed to provide an alternative (Browning 2017). The construction of meaning has been placed on the back of the individual, and anxiety has risen under the weight of that task.

It is clear that ontological insecurity is the original state of being rather than ontological security. And it appears at the same time as the primordial feeling of anxiety. As such, it does not produce anxiety, nor is it anxiety or a result of anxiety. It is co-constitutive with the state of ontological insecurity. But ontological insecurity can arise even after the individual has already formed a relatively stable sense of self.

Kierkegaard (1946) compares the process of limiting anxiety to a leap of faith. Faith creates a boundary for the infinite. It is the courage to renounce anxiety because it extricates itself from anxiety’s moment of death. The moment that is the most unknowable and, therefore, causes the most existential anxiety. By the leap of faith, the individual chooses to believe in a specific outcome or set of outcomes instead of the sheer infinitude of possibilities. Faith creates a constraint on the future possibility of death – through the image of after-life, it makes death knowable. But this is not the ultimate end to anxiety. If the object of anxiety is death, then faith addresses that issue. But soon, a new object of anxiety emerges. The faithful individual begins to be anxious about the sins he may have committed when he was not yet faithful. Every single new crossroads requires a new leap of faith. And once that is conducted, new anxiety arises.

The leap of faith is essentially the same as routine. As Giddens (1991) highlighted (chapter 2.), the routine requires conscious choice at the start of every action. And so, even in routine, one is always faced with different crossroads that reflect different future possibilities. And every time, a new leap of faith in one direction has to be made. The leap of faith is not an ultimate remedy. Even for the most devout man, a trace of doubt that there are other possibilities might remain – perhaps even hidden in his subconscious. And so, anxiety never truly disappears. It is ever-present – together with the future possibility.

This view of anxiety makes it clear why the strife to achieve ontological security is ultimately endless. Once the subject achieves a specific form or reaches a certain goal, the question "What now?" inevitably arises. With that question, a new set of future possibilities presents itself, and a new leap of faith is required. Until the new leap of faith is made, the individual is again engulfed in anxiety. Even once, "the self" becomes something, as argued in Chapter 2.3. the process of forming "the self" never ceases.

4.2. Courage to be and the paradoxical nature of ontological security

If, therefore, there is anything that gives the individual any semblance of ontological security, it is not the leap of faith itself; it is the courage to make it and to remain making it. Browning (2017) establishes "courage to be" as a key factor in facing anxiety. Because the individual cannot face anxiety with courage, he has to maintain the "courage to be" in spite of anxiety and the multitude of destabilizing factors. In the face of endless possibilities, the individual needs the courage to commit to a single path – a leap of faith. Anxiety, as such, is not something that can be dealt with like fear. It is ever-present. The only other alternative to courage is despair. But if the individual does not have the courage, he stops being, to escape non-being (Tillich, 1952). This is the first paradox of ontological security, exemplified by the schizophrenic (Laing, 1990; Chapter 2.). In order to preserve their self, they cease to be anything. They envelop themselves in a protective cocoon. In other words, ontological security does not prevent anxiety by itself. It is the courage to try and attain ontological security that does –

despite the vanity of that endeavor. “Courage is the self-affirmation of being despite the knowledge of non-being” (Tillich, 1952: 155).

Ultimately, ontological security in the traditional sense does not prevent anxiety. However, the courage to attain ontological security helps to limit anxiety. This is why it is helpful to frame ontological security as a scale – the ultimate state of ontological security is unachievable because possibility never disappears. However, “the self” that commits to a possibility is more secure than “the self” that is formed by unlimited possibility. Because it has fewer possibilities, it is faced with anxiety less often.

How can the self be faced with anxiety less often when anxiety is a primordial condition that is ever-present? Again, the distinction between the two modes of anxiety is illuminating. It is not the unconscious form of anxiety that appears less often; it is the in-the-moment feeling – which is ultimately an extension of the primordial emotion. The subconscious state of anxiety is always there, but the less conscious the individual is about possibilities for his self, because he has committed to a single possibility, the less this feeling manifests consciously.

But here is where the second ontological security paradox appears. According to Tillich (1952), what saps away the courage to be is the knowledge of “non-being.” Anxiety, as established (Chapter 3.4.), reveals possibilities for both being and non-being. Instead of anxiety being a direct threat, “the self” cannot be secure in anxiety because it is precisely the revelations of anxiety that sap from the individual the courage to be – which he needs to keep anxiety at bay and achieve a stable “self.” If anxiety was ever-present, the self would constantly be surrounded by revelations of future possibilities and never attain any courage to be – the situation of the schizophrenic. It would remain in constant paralysis. But it is only the in-the-moment anxiety that presents the revelation. The primordial long-term anxiety remains only at the edge of the subconscious, as does the revelation.

The in-the-moment feeling of anxiety differs from a mood (Chapter 4.4.) in that it is not a collective feeling. It is the individual experience that can arise from a mood. But it can also arise at a moment when the individual stands on a cliff. In that moment, it is not only the fear of falling that the individual faces; it is also the “possibility” of falling. While anxiety is looming and ever-present, it is in the moment, when presented

with that possibility, that it manifests itself into a feeling. It is the in-the-moment feeling which reveals the possibility.

Until that point, the emotion is unconscious; it exists, and the individual is drawn to it – curious about the revelations but also avoiding them – afraid of them. A third paradox of ontological security. Giddens (1991) correctly observes that most of the anxiety happens on the level of unconsciousness. The awareness of anxiety is minimal. It is when this unconscious sense transforms into consciousness that in the moment anxiety emerges. Giddens (1991) is not wrong in that anxiety at this moment transforms into fear because by becoming conscious, it gains an object. But at first, it appears as anxiety before it becomes fear. Fear, again, is not the only revelation anxiety provides; it is merely one of them.

If anxiety reveals the source of the threat to “the self,” it also reveals other possibilities. “The self” needs to become something in order to exist. And that something – the authentic self, is also revealed through anxiety. In the literature, anxiety is understood as both a source of threat that creates ontological insecurity and a source of inspiration to attain ontological security. Both Browning (2017) and Rumelili (2014, 2020) echo this dual nature of anxiety. Rumelili (2014) argues that anxiety leads to conflict because conflict helps to create structure and routines to resolve the threat of anxiety. But anxiety also provides the necessary freedom to enact change.

However, this dual understanding of anxiety is insufficient because anxiety is not a threat. It is the non-object of anxiety, which is a threat to “the self.” In that sense, it is as Heidegger (1962) maintains a threat of a threat. The fourth ontological security paradox is that while the individual needs “courage to be” in order to retain ontological security, courage without substance is nothing. There is no leap of faith if there is no possibility.

And so, while anxiety reveals the threat to the self that saps away the courage to be. It also reveals the possibility of the authentic self, which enables acts of courage to happen. The more ontologically secure “the self” is, the less immediate anxiety it faces, but at the same time, it loses the inspiration needed for becoming ontologically secure, and so it inevitably reverts back to insecurity. Just like physical security is paradoxical, actors produce more fear in order to face fear. Ontological security is paradoxical

because actors' security is both reinforced and threatened by the revelations of anxiety. Without the revelation of authenticity, “the self” is also insecure because of the divide between “the self” and projected identity. And so again, ontological security is not attainable.

The fifth and perhaps the most severe ontological security paradox is that the leap of faith is also a cause of a different type of anxiety. As maintained in Chapter 4.1., the leap of faith simply switches one type of anxiety for another. For Sartre (1992),³ anguish can appear precisely in the moment when a man commits himself to a single path. He becomes overwhelmed by this choice and is faced with inescapable responsibility. Part of that process includes a fear of failure, but there are other unknown possibilities that appear after the leap is posited.

4.3. The process of revelation

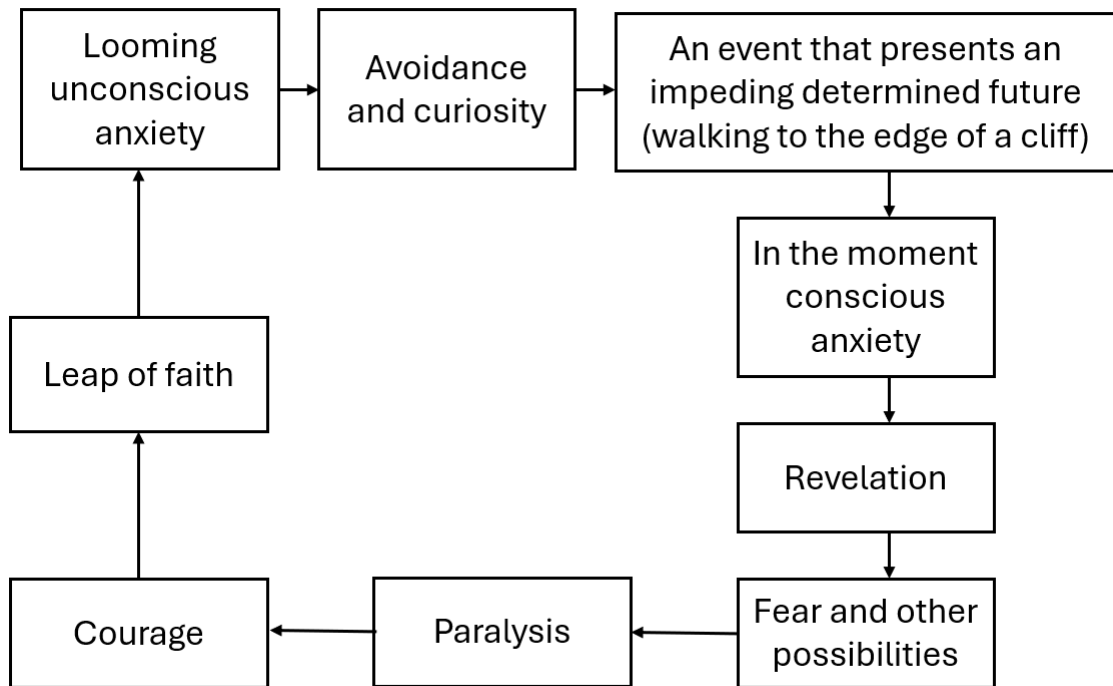
The example Sartre provides deserves more attention because he delves deep into how the process of a leap of faith operates. Curiously, Sartre’s understanding of anxiety has not really been part of the debate in the field. When the individual is anxious about something, or rather the possibility of something, it is a warning from his subconscious. What he is anxious about is the future possibility he is heading to. Anxiety, which reveals fear, reveals a determined impeding future, and in a sense, to hide from it, one seeks other possibilities. But these are contrary to the one the individual is afraid of, strictly undetermined.

When an individual stands on a cliff, the possibility of jumping down triggers anxiety. Because anxiety reveals the future one is anxious about, this possibility seems determined – because the individual up to this point was walking towards the cliff, and

³ Because Heidegger (1962) and Kierkegaard (1946) use the term *Angst* or *Angest*, the translations are a bit inconsistent. The word is translated as anxiety, anguish and dread into English (Tally, 2010). Sartre, who is French, directly references both Kierkegaard and Heidegger but uses the word “*l’angoisse*” rather than the more common “*anxiété*,” which is more akin to anguish and is translated as such. One could make the linguistic argument that while akin, “*angst* (anxiety)” and “*l’angoisse* (anguish)” are somewhat different terms in common usage, but it is clear Sartre (1992) refers to *angst* when developing his ideas. For example, in the English translation Sartre references that Kierkegaard distinguishes anguish from fear (which Kierkegaard does with *angest*).

if he continued, he would fall off that cliff. And so, once presented with the cliff, the determined possibility reveals itself as the fear of falling. What triggers the in-the-moment feeling of anxiety is the threat of an impending determined future.

Yet, the individual does not jump. This is because he has other future possibilities that hold him back. In the face of other possibilities, the one that the individual fears, such as jumping down the cliff, becomes just another undetermined possibility. This realization freezes the individual in indecision before he commits to one of the present possibilities. At this moment, he freezes – and this lasts until he finds the courage to commit to one of the possibilities – the leap of faith. But the same feeling can appear when one simply walks to a crossroads. Yet it doesn't have the same magnitude. Because the threat of the consequences of that decision is not as impending. The feeling of anxiety in that moment is there, but it is barely conscious. The paralysis only happens when the emotion manifests itself in an important moment, which is when it becomes a conscious feeling. In this state, anxiety can be neurotic, but it doesn't have to be – because it can be overcome by courage. But because every revelation of non-being saps away the courage, the more often this happens, the more likely it becomes that anxiety becomes paralyzing. Model 3. Illustrates the cyclical process of anxiety, which is based on this interaction.



Model 3: The circle of anxiety

From Sartres (1992) depiction of this moment on the cliff, it can be deduced that anxiety stemming from a commitment to a path can also reveal a source of ontological insecurity. The individual who is on the cliff, in the moment of anxiety, envisions his possible future self. This creates a connection with that future mode of being. This non-existent future self is dependent on the present self and its actions. As Sartre (1992: 32) exclaims, “Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being.” One is, in that way, obliged to constantly change and restructure himself in order to bring the imagined future self into being. Because if he doesn’t, then it never comes to being. And because “the self” has identified with that future self, not becoming it creates a threat to “the self.” More precisely, it is again not anxiety that creates a threat to the self. It only reveals it.

To contrast this with the cases in Laing's (1990) work. The source of the threat revealed in anxiety was becoming something. Because the individual identified with his state of nothingness. Every single interaction manifested his anxiety because he faced the impeding determined threat of becoming something. But in this specific case that

Sartre identifies, the threat revealed by anxiety is about not becoming something. As such, the future is determined by some sort of character lack that is holding the individual back from becoming that future self. It is similar to the Lacanian interpretation of anxiety. The conscious moment of anxiety, in this case, arises whenever the individual is faced with the impending determined future where his lack is revealed, and the envisioned future self as such under a direct threat of non-existence.

But one state of being clearly produces more conscious anxiety than the other. While some kind of insufficiency may present itself once in a while and trigger anxiety, when the anxiety presents itself with every single interaction, it is bound to be more neurotic and more paralyzing. Clearly, there is some sort of hierarchy of ontological security. And the individual with a more continuous and identifiable sense of self has more ontological security. But it cannot be the only factor. On one hand, some individuals with no sense of self may feel threatened by every single mundane interaction; on the other hand, there are events significant enough that they threaten every individual's "self."

In conclusion, there is no determinate relationship between ontological security and anxiety in its original form. Neither produces the other; they simply coexist. Anxiety, instead, has a revelatory function. It reveals the true source of ontological insecurity to the individual. But unlike in the Lacanian interpretation, where the source of the threat is some form of lack, from the existential perspective, it can be anything or even nothing. The threat in ontological security is not anxiety. In its purest form, it is "non-being." Anxiety only reveals that possibility. That source of ontological insecurity may always be different, depending on what "the self" attributes itself to, but there are universal causes, such as death. Because anxiety is what presents the individual with the possibility of his non-being, it appears as the cause of ontological insecurity or a product of it. But it is not. *It is only the messenger.*

However, the source of ontological insecurity can keep triggering the conscious experience of anxiety, which can potentially lead to paralysis and become neurotic. In that sense, it can be argued that the state of ontological insecurity produces a conscious manifestation of anxiety, or rather, the individual in that state is more attuned to it. But the paralysis is not the main function, it is more of a side effect.

4.4. Existential anxiety as a collective emotion

Despite the previously laid arguments against state personhood (chapter 2.4.), the existential approach to anxiety appears to be more transferable to international relations. The state does not work like the human body or share the same rules. But it still has a unified body, an identity, and needs meaning for its existence – despite being a construct shaped by human interpretations. Regarding ontological security, the only rules that apply to the state are the rules created by individuals. If an emotion is to be applied to a collective entity, it does not make sense to apply it based on the same rules. This is despite the fact that most authors (Sasley, 2011; Mercer, 2014) treat the state as a collective of individuals when applying emotions.

As laid out in Chapter 2.4. the state shares many characteristics with the individual. The argument is that in its current form, the state itself does not experience ontological insecurity, but individuals' experience of ontological insecurity drives state action. However, unlike ontological security, a more individualistic concept due to the nature of “the self,” emotions are a more collective phenomenon in the form of a mood.

Ringmar (2017: 454) defines mood as: “how a public attunes itself to the situation in which it finds itself.” The experience of ontological insecurity is tied to individual agency, but emotions are infectious; they spread. Where ontological security is tied to how being experiences itself over long periods, mood is rather a state of being. It is more temporal; the environment influences the manifestation. Essentially, the emotion of anxiety comes into consciousness by interacting with others who are experiencing the emotion. The first step of forming “the self” comes from within the individual (Darwich, 2016). It forms through interactions with others (chapter 2.2.), but the origin is within. However, emotion in the form of mood can come from the outside, although it is still influenced by how we are individually attuned to the world (Ringmar, 2017).

Rumelili (2021) establishes that when the public mood is anxious, there is a greater incentive to promote politics of fear to make the anxiety manifest into something tangible – a direct security threat. As such, the state's action is directly tied to a collective experience of an emotion. And unlike “the self,” which needs to be

consciously experienced by the individual, who has to decide to attribute it to his self, in other words, “will to be the self.” Emotions are often experienced unconsciously without this control or oversight. An emotion happens as a trigger often despite conscious choice. Rather, to have “the self” is not necessarily a requirement for experiencing an emotion. This is demonstrated by Laing's (1990) patients, who, despite having no developed “self,” still experience an overwhelming sense of anxiety. For example, fear arises even after an unconscious perception of the situation. Before the individual is even aware of a threat (Öhman, 2008). In Chapter 2.4., the main argument is that for a state as a being to exist – there has to be a conscious choice on its behalf. But to feel an emotion on behalf of something is not so much a choice as an unconscious reaction.

Furthermore, while two different identities compete with each other – the individual cannot be both the state and the individual, emotions can be felt both on behalf of something through empathy and on behalf of oneself. Mercer (2014) also argues that emotions are far more than an in-body experience. Different languages have different terms for emotions, and no “in-body” triggers exist for each. Language influences how emotion is experienced; some emotions are arguably entirely a construct. This makes emotions more easily transferable to the state. To feel on behalf of a state is not conditioned by devotion. It results from an empathetic attunement to the world. As such, the state can directly contribute to increasing the conscious feeling of anxiety within individuals. This gives the state an important role in the relationship between ontological security and anxiety without being a direct object of ontological security.

Conclusion

The thesis uses conceptual analysis to answer the question, “How does ontological security interact with anxiety?” and to help establish a coherent ontological security theory – which requires answering that question. While the primary contribution of this thesis is the in-depth analysis of this interaction, based on insights from existential philosophy, it contains other minor innovations that can help move the field in the right direction. For example, while most authors use ontological security as a binary category, in this thesis, it is approached as a scale in order to circumvent some of the main conceptual limitations. Primarily the paradox that genuine ontological security is essentially unachievable.

Ontological security is approached broadly as “the security of the self.” A broader framing to expand the scope of the field beyond the traditional understanding of ontological security as dissonance between “the self” and an external identity, or even just (in)security of an identity. Instead, based on the theory of Anthony Giddens, this thesis highlights four main areas that should be the focus of ontological security studies: “Existence and being, Finitude and human life, Experience of others, and Continuity of self-identity.” A threat to “the self” can arise from either of these areas and contribute to ontological insecurity. While this broader framing creates a problem of applicability to the level of the state, this thesis presents an argument for retaining ontological security as an individual-level concept. The state is instead viewed only as an actor that contributes to individual ontological (in)security. Because the concept of “the self” has been identified as the core of ontological security. A substantial part of the thesis focuses on establishing that concept.

To illustrate the interaction between ontological security and anxiety and answer the research question, anxiety is divided into two types. A looming long-term unconscious emotion that is ever-present and exists no matter how secure “the self” is. And a conscious momentary manifestation of that emotion. In the state where “the self” experiences more ontological insecurity, the individual is more vulnerable to the conscious manifestation of anxiety. The more this anxiety appears, the more it saps the

“courage to be” and creates an effect of paralysis, turning it into neurotic anxiety. But as argued in this thesis, this is more of a side effect and is in no way the determined outcome. Anxiety is not a threat to ontological security. The primary role of anxiety is revelation. Anxiety reveals the source of ontological insecurity and the pathways to achieving a more ontologically secure existence. It reveals both the possibilities of “being” as well as the possibilities of “non-being.”

While the answers in this thesis are in no way definite. It presents a theoretical pathway forward that can be built upon and tackles some of the main paradoxes in the field. But, of course, the scope is limited, and a lot more research into the relationship between anxiety and ontological security is required. The field of ontological security could specifically benefit from wider collaboration with the field of psychology. While Laing established an analysis of some of the ways ontological insecurity occurs, his account cannot be seen as all-encompassing. There is a wide array of ways the individual can attain ontological insecurity, as established in this essay through the analysis of Sartre. Exploring the other causes of ontological security on the level of psychology could further illuminate the role of the state in this process and improve the analysis in terms of security studies.

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