



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Matyáš Maděra

Title: Ontological Security and Anxiety: Establishing the Conceptual Link

Programme/year: International Security Studies/2024

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Jaroslav Weinfurter, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	28
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	20
<i>Total</i>		80	55
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	9
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	18
TOTAL		100	73



Evaluation

Major criteria:

- Research question is clearly stated, but the broader research problem (i.e. why is the RQ relevant and why it must be pursued) is not properly explicated and general research objectives are not fully realized.
- Highly ambitious and theoretically/conceptually sophisticated work.
- Instead of analysis, the work offers literature review. Methodological section, although present, is unused and therefore redundant.

Minor criteria:

- All stylistic and formal aspects meet the standards expected for work at this level of study. The work's use of literature is extensive (although not exhaustive) and sources used are relevant. Stylistic and grammatical issues are occasionally present.

Assessment of plagiarism:

Turnitin analysis shows a 14% match. Upon closer inspection, identified sections are, for the most part, related to author's use of literary sources. However, author in places tends to refer to the text of the work itself as "paper" or "essay" (p. 17), which raises the possibility that parts of the thesis might be drawn from unedited pieces of the author's previous works/writings. Further investigation into this matter might be warranted.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis, authored by Matyáš Maděra, is praiseworthy and problematic in equal measure. There is (very) much to be praised here, as the level of theoretical insight and of conceptual sophistication that is on display here is indeed very uncommon in Master's theses. The author makes use of the most recent literature and joins the most current intellectual discourse in ontological security theory (OST) by focusing on one of the central aspects of the debate: "How does ontological security interact with anxiety?" The author's discussion is competent and he demonstrates theoretical knowledge of ontological security (OS) that is much above the level expected or required of a Master's student. At the same time, however, the thoroughly theoretical focus of the work crowds out actual analysis and investigation into concrete security matters. In addition, there are some issues with regard to the author's conceptualisation of OS that have the effect of perpetuating a degree of ambiguity between OS and anxiety instead of clarifying the relationship. I shall elaborate.



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Firstly, the aims of the thesis are not only overly and unnecessarily ambitious, they are also quite unattainable. According to the author, there is an inherent ambiguity between ontological security and anxiety (this is indeed true) which has been unaddressed by the literature and thus warrants conceptual clarification – an “in-depth concept analysis can address these concerns” (p. 15) (personally, I am not sure what the author means when he discusses the “lost link” in OST between OS and anxiety – the link has always been there, even with Giddens who engages quite substantially with existentialist literature). What, however, the author does not acknowledge (despite obviously being aware of this), is the irreducible and unavoidable ambiguity in the category of the “self” – the fundamental reference point in OST. As a result, OST is inescapably shrouded in ambiguity – courtesy of the pluralism of philosophical traditions – which can only ever magnify when the category of anxiety is introduced. In this sense, the objectives of the work have not been fulfilled, because they cannot be fulfilled. Instead, the thesis merely debunks some problematic yet established tendencies in the use of OS, such as equating OS with identity and/or physical security, and equating anxiety with fear. This is not the same, however, as “conceptually linking” OS and anxiety, as the author explicitly intends to do. In this sense, the author’s own conclusion that “there is no determinate relationship between ontological security and anxiety in its original form. Neither produces the other; they simply coexist.” (p. 60) comes across as somewhat underwhelming, but expectable.

And secondly, although ambitious, the conceptual/theoretical nature of the work bypasses some of the crucial aspects of a Master’s thesis, such as analysis. Indeed, although the thesis builds an argument, this argument is derived from what inevitably is an extended literature review. This would explain, for instance, the presence of section 2.4 (the self and the state) or 4.4 (collective emotions), which serves no intrinsic purpose for the broader research objective. Even the core part of the thesis, which is chapter 4, feels like an exposition, fully in line with the tone and style utilized in previous chapters (why is the methodological section even needed?). In other words, the author presents anxiety in its revelatory function, but does so not by analytically deriving (nor empirically justifying) this correlation, but merely by pointing to exiting literature. It is therefore quite unclear what the actual contribution of the thesis is and one may justifiably ask whether the author’s own premises which constitute his research puzzle are built on valid foundations. Ultimately, these objections would have been avoided had the author not limited himself to theoretical explications and taken a further step towards application and/or testing, however briefly.



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In addition, there are some problematic aspects of the author's handling of OS, I shall point out two of them. (1) The "self" is presented quite unproblematically by the author as the inner space of an individual pitted into an ongoing struggle against the other (the external world). This strikes as somewhat strange when considering that the author relies quite a bit on existentialist literature where such Cartesian categories do not apply, like, for instance, Heidegger, whom the author frequently cites. As a consequence, the author is able to effortlessly shift between the OS of individuals and states (e.g. p. 29), oscillate between individual-level analysis and IR (section 4.4) and from abstract/conceptual discussion to world politics (e.g. pp. 27, 44 and elsewhere). This level of (unjustified) essentialism and disavowal is strikingly at odds with the work's general tendency to capture and explicate nuance and complexity.

And (2), the author brings much confusion into the discussion as he does not specify the field/discipline within which he chooses to operate. His sources are taken from general OST literature (and the multiplicity of its underlying philosophical underpinnings), but also IR, Sociology, Psychology/Psychoanalysis. Here it must be stressed that every discipline adapts and operationalises (and interprets) the categories of OS differently and selectively emphasizes some of its attributes (those that its "gaze" recognizes) and downplays other. The meaning and essence of OS thus always changes through the interdisciplinary parallax, making, in my view, any decisive attempts at reconciliation and clarification problematic, if not impossible.

Suggested grade:

C (73%)

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. W. S.', written in a cursive style.