Securing the Self, Embracing Anxiety, or Nurturing Growth? How the Pragmatism of Dewey, James, and Mead Speaks to Ontological Security Studies

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A Pragmatist form of Constructivism speaks to, and encourages, an ethical/normative turn in Ontological Security Studies (OSS). Recognition that Self-securing routines are sometimes "unhealthy" implies that the subject of security is human experience and that social identities or social roles are means to that end. This resonates with John Dewey's Pragmatist focus on the practical task of ameliorating experience in environments constantly in the process of becoming. Normative value is not ontological, i.e., found in a fixed identity; it is processual, i.e., found in the practice of "learning" and the process of "growth." A Pragmatist narrative of learning and growth offers OSS a normative focus that is more compelling than the recent calls to "embrace anxiety," although it is important to acknowledge that even these narratives can induce anxiety. OSS can, in this instance, turn to the Pragmatist William James and his focus on the role that "faith" plays in encouraging the Self to adopt new identities. Building on this, Dewey formulated a "civic faith" to defend democratic routines (and the democratic identity) as a useful method of (social) learning. Finally, the Pragmatism of George Herbert Mead demonstrates how this democratic commitment to include "the Other" in the processes that secure the Self helps restructure an environment that otherwise demands dangerous routines. The article draws on Cold War history to demonstrate how such practices can and should be part of the "cultural repertoire" informing ontological security-seeking practices in contemporary Europe.

Argumentamos que existe una forma pragmatista de constructivismo, la cual aborda y fomenta un giro ético/normativo en los Estudios de Seguridad Ontológica (OSS, por sus siglas en inglés). El hecho de reconocer que las rutinas diseñadas para asegurar el Yo son, a veces, "insalubres" implica que el tema de la seguridad equivale a la experiencia humana, y que una identidad/rol social es un medio para lograr ese fin. Esto resuena con el enfoque pragmático de John Dewey en materia de la tarea práctica consistente en mejorar la experiencia en entornos que están en constante proceso de devenir. El valor normativo no es ontológico, es decir, se encuentra en una identidad fija. También es procesual, es decir, se encuentra en la práctica del "aprendizaje" y en el proceso de "crecimiento". Argumentamos que una narrativa de aprendizaje y crecimiento ofrece a los OSS un enfoque normativo que resulta más convincente que los recientes llamamientos a "abrazar la ansiedad", aunque reconocemos que estos pueden llegar a inducir ansiedad. Por lo tanto, utilizamos el pragmatismo de William James y el papel que desempeña la "fe" con el fin de animar al Yo a adoptar nuevas identidades, incluso en un contexto de incertidumbre. Observamos cómo Dewey formuló una "fe cívica" para defender las rutinas democráticas (y la identidad democrática) como un método útil de aprendizaje (social). Por último, usamos el pragmatismo de George Herbert Mead para demostrar cómo un compromiso democrático de incluir al "Otro" en los procesos que aseguran el Yo ayuda a reestructurar un entorno que, de otro modo, exigiría rutinas peligrosas. Demostramos, mediante la historia de la Guerra Fría, cómo tales prácticas pueden y deben ser parte del "repertorio cultural" que informa las prácticas de búsqueda de seguridad ontológica en la Europa contemporánea.

J'affirme qu'une forme pragmatiste de constructivisme témoigne d'un tournant éthique/normatif dans les études de sécurité ontologique (ESO), et l'encourage. Le fait de reconnaître que les routines visant à sécuriser le Moi se révèlent parfois ≪ malsaines ≫ implique que le sujet de la sécurité est l'expérience humaine, et qu'une identité sociale/qu'un rôle n'est qu'un moyen pour atteindre un but. Cette affirmation entre en résonance avec la focalisation pragmatiste de John Dewis sur la tâche pratique d'amélioration de l'expérience dans les environnements qui sont constamment en passe de devenir. La valeur normative n'est pas ontologique, trouvée dans une identité fixe, mais opérationnelle, trouvée dans la pratique de ≪ l'apprentissage ≫ et le processus de ≪ développement ≫. J'affirme qu'une histoire d'apprentissage et de développement offre aux ESO une focalisation normative plus convaincante que les incitations récentes à ≪ embrasser l'anxiété ≫, tout en reconnaissant qu'elles peuvent générer de l'anxiété. Je me tourne donc vers le pragmatisme de William James et le rôle que la ≪ foi ≫ joue quand il s'agit d'encourager le Moi à adopter de nouvelles identités, même dans un contexte d'incertitude. Je remarque que John Dewey a formulé la ≪ foi civique ≫ de manière à défendre les routines démocratiques (et l'identité démocratique) comme une méthode d'apprentissage (social) utile. Enfin, je me fonde sur le pragmatisme de George Herbert Mead pour démontrer que l'engagement démocratique en vue d'inclure ≪ l'Autre ≫ dans les processus qui sécurisent le Moi permet de restructurer un environnement qui sinon requiert des routines dangereuses. Je me base sur l'histoire de la guerre froide pour démontrer que ces pratiques peuvent et devraient faire partie d'un ≪ répertoire culturel ≫ qui renseignerait les pratiques de quête de sécurité ontologique de l'Europe contemporaine.

Introduction

My contention in this paper is that a Pragmatist form of Constructivism ([Adler 2019](); [Ralph 2023]()) speaks to, and encourages, an ethical/normative turn in Ontological Security Studies (OSS) ([Rossdale 2015](); [Browning 2016](); [Steele 2019](), [2023](); [Kirke and Steele 2023]()). I first consider how the existing OSS literature discusses its normative implications. I focus on the association of OSS with a conservative, stability, or status-quo bias ([Mitzen and Larson 2017](), 3; [Browning and

Joenniemi 2017, 31; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020, 240). This is seen in the assumption that security is felt when social identities are fixed by routine practice. OSS has recognized this as normatively problematic, referring to such identities as potentially "unhealthy" (Mitzen 2006a, 2006b) or "harmful" (Klose 2020, 854). It cites the possible need for new identities to preserve the Self's "well-being" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3), and/or to recognize otherwise marginalized subjectivities (Rossdale 2015, Browning 2016; Gehring 2023). This, I argue, implies that the subject of security is the human *experience* (of being), and that a social identity or, in interactionist terms, a social role, is a means to that end. That resonates with classical and contemporary Pragmatist thought, including its focus on the practical and creative task of ameliorating the lived experience in natural and social environments that are constantly "in the process of becoming" (Dewey 1998 [1925], 8; Adler 2019). Normative value for philosophical Pragmatists is not ontological, i.e., found in a fixed identity or concrete rules; it is processual, i.e., found in the practice of "learning" and the process of "growth" (Dewey 2011 [1916]). This is the ability to adapt identity (and its constitutive routines and narratives) to improve the lived experience in ever more complex environments. That, I suggest, speaks to "an understanding of ontological security that emphasizes a 'security of becoming'" (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020, 253; Arfi 2020).

Pragmatist OSS would thus seemingly demand a normative critique of conservative predispositions. Why, the Pragmatist would ask, should we persist with practices and routines that are harmful to the self and/or the other for the sake of an identity?[1] Asking that question, however, is not necessarily the same as actually adopting new routines and reimagining identity. As I explain in the second section, the search for ontological security raises a set of epistemological questions: *how can we know* that the new routines of a reimagined identity will actually improve our lived experiences? The process of identity change, in other words, may induce so much anxiety, and the benefits of the new routine may be so uncertain, that the least worse option may be to stick to our old routines, even if they are unhealthy (i.e., produce bad experiences such as fear).[2] For the Pragmatist, the normative task is not to dismiss these conflicting emotions but to render them "intelligent" (Mead 1934; Dewey 1972 [1948], 111). Intelligence involves reflection and deliberation. It involves weighing the experiential benefits of routines (new and old), as well as the costs of change.[3] Pragmatist OSS is not necessarily anti-conservative therefore. Old routines may be the best we have. Rather it encourages conservatives (as well as liberals and progressives for that matter) to be reflexive and deliberative. From that perspective, I question in this paper whether the Lacanian-inspired call within OSS to "embrace anxiety" is useful. Its purpose is to encourage "dynamism and renewal" (Browning 2016, 4), but its proposed method—to simply embrace what makes us

insecure—is hardly compelling.[4] I argue instead that alongside the Deweyan conception of "growth," William James's (2012 [1896]) discussion of "faith," and the role it plays in our everyday practice, can better encourage the progressive reconstruction of harmful routines in the face of epistemic doubt. In this way, I am speaking to Badredine Arfi's (2020) work on "performative leaps of faith" in OSS. Whereas Arfi's emphasis is on the role faith plays in adopting routines, I examine the role it can play in replacing them.

In the third section, I follow Jennifer Mitzen's (2006a; see also Behravesh 2018; Greve 2018; Arfi 2020) work to examine what Pragmatist OSS means for the international security dilemma. My contention is that Pragmatists would not be content with the empirical finding that "[physically] dangerous routines provide ontological security" (Mitzen 2006a, 341; also Steele 2008, 2; Browning and Joenniemi 2017, 33; Browning 2018, 113; Rumelili 2020, 266–8).[5] Such a finding prompts doubt; and for the Pragmatist committed to "epistemic security" (Adler and Faubert 2022), doubt demands reflection and inquiry. Pragmatists, in other words, will search for secure identities that do not demand dangerous routines.[6] More specifically, I draw on the Pragmatism of George Herbert Mead (Mead 1934), which focuses on the way in which the Self's identity is constructed through interaction with Others, and—crucially—how that interaction can be purposefully managed to reconstruct common identities so that dangerous routines become redundant.

Crucial to this progressive strategy is "altercasting," or the practice of projecting an identity onto the "Other" in order to meet one's own goals (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963; Wendt 1992, 1999; McCourt 2012; Klose 2020). A Pragmatist interested in transcending the costs of security dilemmas would explore how this process can creatively deconstruct problematic identities and reconstruct a security community where states experience physical *and* ontological security (Greve 2018, 859). Here my aim is to build on Stephan Klose's demonstration of the synergies across Mead's interactionism and OSS, as well as his claim that "reflective intelligence enables an international actor to address destabilizing disconnects between its 'self'-image and societal role-play' (Klose 2020, 851). Whereas Klose focuses on relations between the EU and its Eastern and Southern neighborhood to illustrate his point, I focus on transatlantic relations with Russia in the immediate post-Cold War period and following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A normative commitment to a progressive strategy of reconstructing problematic identities by "altercasting" is not risk free. Conservative and Realist refrains often combine to point this out. They note how progressives seeking to transform costly routines that ontologically secure the nation are prone to wishful thinking. In their haste to grow out of a harmful "national" identity situated in anarchy, and into a less harmful "transnational" identity situated in a security community, progressives may incorrectly project a peaceful identity onto other states. As a result, they may naively propose inappropriate practices, for example, disarmament instead of deterrence. My argument

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[1]Although "routines" and "practices" have been used interchangeably, especially by early iterations of IR practice theory (Adler and Pouliot 2011), I prefer to use "routines" to indicate pre-reflexive behavior. I reserve "practice" (or *praxis*) for creative action motivated to reconstruct problematic routines, see Hellmann and Steffek 2020.

[2]For change to happen, the "expected costs of intentional role change . . . cannot be greater than its reward" (Wendt 1992, 419). On the separation of fear and anxiety in OSS and existentialist philosophy see Steele 2008, 51; Arfi 2020; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020; Rumelili 2020; Krickel-Choi 2022, 161; Kirke and Steele 2023, 917).

[3]On reflexivity in OS-seeking practices, see Steele 2008, 68–70, 150–60. On the re-weighting of previously marginalized discourses as part of a "dynamic capacity for psychic reorganization in order to defend against intense anxiety," see Cash 2020, 317.

[4]For similar concerns regarding the critics' "valorizing" of instability, disorder, and anxiety, see Steele 2023.

[5]Pragmatism thus aligns with the argument that "there is a genuine two-way relationship between physical and psychological security and that ontological security is consequently best understood as 'security of the self-in-the-body'" (Krickel-Choi 2022, 159).

[6]See Ralph (2023, 16–17) on the Pragmatist commitment to "epistemic security" and knowing when to call on expertise. That can be a check on certain identity "myths" and their power to do "horrific damage" (Kirke and Steele 2023, 919).

is that the Pragmatist emphasis on normative reasoning that is grounded in empirical reality mitigates this risk. At the same time a Jamesian faith in the possibility of reconstruction, and the Deweyan/Meadian commitment to intelligence, guard against the risk of unwarranted conservativism, which may sustain dangerous routines when opportunities exist to change them. I anchor this faith in instances of progressive change, drawing on Wendt's (1992) analysis of Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking." I draw on that history in the fourth section to argue it is part of the "cultural repertoire" (Cash 2020) informing ontological security-seeking practices in contemporary Europe.

Ontological Security: A Conservative Bias?

A premise of OSS is that we feel secure when our identity, and the broader environment of meaning in which it sits, is stable. Change is associated with "existential dread or anxiety." When we can no longer "sustain our routines," or when "our self-narratives are called into question," we begin to feel "as if we no longer know who we are" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3). In such situations,

> we seek ontological security by reasserting routines or appealing to comfortable narratives. That is, ontological security-seeking means engaging self-consciously in practices that remind us of and reproduce who we feel ourselves to be (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3).

In this way, ontological security routines might be deemed conservative and an obstacle to learning. Mitzen and Larson recognize this. Ontological security, they write, responds to a conservative predisposition that on some level humans prefer stability to change.[7] So, "if ontological security needs drive some political actions, then positing this need may help deepen our accounts of homeostatic tendencies in a social system, including the international system" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3). Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020, 240) similarly speak to a "status quo bias" in OSS research. From that perspective, OSS is interested in understanding the reasons why certain agents do what they do to fix identities.

OSS has had a vibrant analytical research agenda for some time.[8] More recently, OSS has turned to consider the normative implications of its findings. Mitzen and Larson (2017) in fact make this point in Deweyan terms, (but without citing Dewey). Noting the conservative assumption implicit in the concept of ontological security, they point to insights from the psychoanalytic literature. These alert us to the possibility

> that too strong an attachment to a rigid, fixed self is more dangerous to *well-being* than accepting the possibility of change *and growth*. This suggests that some ontological security-seeking practices can be counterproductive (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3 emphasis added).

This speaks to Mitzen's (2006a, 350; see also 2006b, 274) earlier work, which noted there were "two modes of attachment" to routines, "flexible and rigid." In the later work with Larson (2017, 3) this formulation is presented as "rigid versus healthy," which of course implies a normative rejection of inflexible identities. Similarly, Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020, 241) draw on Eklundh et. al (2017)to identify "two distinct anxiety logics, a security logic that closes down subjectivity and politics, and a resistance logic that makes room for social and political change."

It is not the case therefore that an analytical focus on a conservative predisposition to fix identities necessarily leads to a conservative normative bias. OSS can also prompt change by exposing what Brent Steele (2013cited in Browning 2016; see also Steele 2023) called the "dark side" of ontological security routines. OSS has more recently placed a particular emphasis "on how the search for ontological security often results in the securitization of subjectivity based on drawing lines of categorical difference with others" (Browning 2016, 2). Chris Rossdale (2015, 369) for example argues that "attempts to order political life into an ontological/security episteme disciplines or marginalizes modes of subjectivity which resist the closure of ontological security-seeking strategies."

This interest in the normativity of routines begs a question of OSS. What exactly makes ontological security routines "unhealthy"? On what normative platform does OSS stand when it criticizes certain identity-seeking behaviors; and if, as it surely is, OSS is part of a wider Constructivist research agenda, how can it "ground" a normative position when it knows values are historically and socially contingent?[9] This is where I think a Pragmatist conception of Constructivism can help. Two concepts from John Dewey's Pragmatist philosophy are especially helpful: experience and growth. Experience helps us address the relativist's claims that uncontested normative ground simply does not exist and we (as academic observers) have no authority to criticize ontological security-seeking routines. Pragmatism sweeps aside these objections to focus on what is natural and inescapable: the lived experience. In this way, philosophical Pragmatism empowers agents who may be suffering—because they are operating under an assumption that their identity or role is the only one possible—to think more creatively and purposefully. This is why Pragmatism is considered a democratic philosophy and why it has appealed to those interested in changing, for example, patriarchal (e.g., Jane Addams), racial (W.E.B. Du Bois), or caste (B.R. Ambedkar) hierarchies (Seigfried 1996; Aboulafia 2008; Stroud 2023). It does not tell agents what to think, but it helps them value their experiences and to improve those experiences by considering—to use Dewey's 1910 title—"how we think" (Dewey, 1991 [1910]).

I argue that this Pragmatist focus on experience (which incorporates physical and psychological effects) maps on to, but also expands, the normative turn in OSS. For instance, Pragmatism takes seriously the role emotions like fear and anxiety, as experiences, play in influencing human conduct. Dewey insisted, however, that "experience" has a "double-barrelled" meaning (Dewey 2018 [1958], 8): it is a feeling or affect, but it is also an acquired competence that enables people to improve their lives.[10] Indeed, for Dewey, the empiricist's focus on the *experience* of an object (or identity) rather than its *essence* (i.e., ontology), makes it easier for the inquirer "to see what knowledge contributes—namely the intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering." In other words, "when we trace the genesis of knowing along this line, we also see that knowledge has a function and office in bettering and enriching the subject matters of crude experience" (Dewey 2018 [1958], 22). This, I suggest, has implications for OSS. Normative value lies not in being, or how that is identified. It lies in the experience of being; and crucially, in the ability of agents to assert control over

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[7]Although see Shadunts (2023, 3), who "shows that states might not be as uncomfortable with uncertainties as many OS and poststructuralist studies assume."

[8]See Kirke and Steele (2023, 913–5) for a good summary.

[9]On "constructivist ethics" see Price (2008, 2012) Erskine (2012) Ralph (2018).

[10]Levine (2019, 11) draws our attention to the separation in German of *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*.

that experience by learning how to avoid bad experiences. The question of whether that requires a change to routines, and the identities that demand such routines, has no a priori answer. It can only be answered in situ (see also Mead 1934, 221). The point Dewey was making is that we value the practice, indeed habit, of learning (and the identity of a learner) because that enables us to protect and improve the lived experience. It also gives us hope that the Self can be self-determined (Hook 1974, 60).[11]

This valuation of learning, as a form of becoming, followed from the processural ontology that the late nineteenth Century Pragmatists took from the Darwinian revolution (Dewey 1965 [1908]). The things we see in front of us have not always been that way. They have evolved in response to their environment, which itself is in a constant state of becoming. That evolutionary process also characterizes the formation of the Self. The Self may find comfort in habits that bind "the arena of deliberative choice" (Mitzen 2006a, 347), and "reduce the effort needed for motivation and control" (Kirke and Steele 2023, 909), but it is also capable of adapting as the environment changes around it. Adaptation may be necessary to sustain and improve the lived experience. Dewey called this process "growth" (Dewey 2011 [1916] 26–32), which is revealed as an "expanded personality" (Dewey 1998 [1932a], 333). Nurturing growth involves exercising empathy for those "Others" whose actions help constitute the Self's social environment. Empathy, in this respect, is an important "intellectual tool" (Dewey 1998 [1932a], 333). It enables the creative practice that is necessary to transcend the types of relations that constitute problematic identities. When unfamiliar Selves are thrust together by material and social change, for instance, the exercise of empathy helps to nurture personal growth and the realization of a new common identity, the routines of which can better adapt to new material circumstances (Dewey 1927).

Returning this to OSS, I would argue that the Deweyan valuation of experience, learning, and growth helps us to constitute "healthy" identities. Interestingly, and perhaps counterintuitively given the valuation of experience, Dewey celebrates in *Democracy and Education* the "plasticity" (Dewey 2011 [1916], 27–28, 32; 1998 [1922], 42) of the child who adapts to new experiences on a daily basis. Indeed, Dewey regretted the apathy of socialized adults fixed in their ways and prejudices. He remained hopeful, however. "[U]nless and until we get completely fossilized, we can break old habits and form new ones" (Dewey 1998 [1932b], 352). Being experienced, in this respect, meant knowing how to learn and when to adapt. Furthermore, societies were to be valued when they preserved this innate plasticity and developed the skills to manage it in ways that improve experience. This includes the school, which could be criticized if all it did was produce individuals skilled at repeating the outdated knowledge of their teacher. Other societies (and by implication individual identities) could be criticized on the grounds that they stunted growth. The criminal gang, for instance, might be "marked by fraternal feeling" and that, in our terms, would create a sense of ontological security. But such a gang is to be condemned because those who identify as members are shut out "from full interaction with other groups" (Dewey 2011 [1916], 47; see also Mead 1934, 295). Those identities, in other words, cannot properly empathize with outsiders and they therefore limit growth. They

are thus unhealthy because the Self is less able to adapt to a pluralistic and changing environment.

Refocusing OSS: Embracing Anxiety?

The Pragmatist valuation of experience, learning, and growth resonates with Browning's (2016) discussion of ethically defensible ontological security-seeking practices. These practices, he writes, "are most ethically defensible when they prioritise an emphasis on self-reflexivity and openness to plurality as part of a broader quest for fulfilment through living what, in Heidegger's terms, might be called a more 'authentic' life" (Browning 2016, 2; also Browning and Joenniemi 2017, 43–4).[12] Browning advances this ethical position while trying to refocus debates about ontological security "away from upholding specific identities towards alternative ways of living with anxiety, and potentially even embracing anxiety as a starting point for living a more authentic and morally fulfilling life." His recourse to Giddens' argument that 'a capacity for self-reflexivity is required to enable the subject to respond creatively and innovatively to a changing world' also matches the Pragmatist valuation of learning and growth.

But what about the emphasis on "the impossibility of a fully stabilized sense of 'self'" (Klose 2020, 855; also Arfi 2020), the "productive possibilities of anxiety" (Steele 2008, 60–1; Kirke and Steele 2023, 907), and the normative claim that anxiety may "be welcomed as an opportunity for dynamism and renewal" (Browning 2016, 4)?[13] Is this the only way forward? Routines that fix an identity may indeed be dangerous, or they can become dangerous when environments change. It is not a comforting prospect, however, to hear that the only alternative is to "embrace anxiety" because "being" is inherently insecure. My concern is that Selves will not be persuaded to abandon unhealthy routines if all they are promised is anxiety. If it is to help Selves "come to terms with" (Mälksoo 2015: 226) the anxiety of changing dangerous routines, OSS needs a more compelling story.[14] My argument is that the Deweyan emphasis on "growth" offers a more uplifting and encouraging narrative. Yet it is true that "growth" only takes us so far in transcending the danger-anxiety binary because of course growth can still be anxiety-inducing. We might rephrase our question, therefore, to ask how can we encourage healthy change by *nurturing* growth?

To answer this question my attention shifts from Dewey to another classical Pragmatist, William James.[15] James' work is particularly important because it alerts us to the epistemological question underpinning the search for ontological security: how do we know the value of a truth claim? In our context, how do we know the value of a claim that a particular identity (and associated routines) brings physical and ontological security? As noted, an ontological security strategy may embrace dangerous routines—and thus experience fear—in order to reduce anxiety about being. This is

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[11]Hook made this point in a Chapter entitled "The Quest for Certainty—Existentialism without Tears."

[12]On Heidegger as 'a close kin of the American pragmatists' see Okrent 2013, 26. This is because an authentic life is a practical life. Being involves "tools or pieces of equipment that are used for bringing about possibilities that matter to us" (Okrent 2013, 140).

[13]See Browning and Joenniemi (2017, 32–4) who cite Rumelili (2015, 13). Also Rumelili (2020) on "embracing anxiety" in Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

[14]As Shadunt (2023, 4) puts it: "reflexive attitude creates room for some level of change; however, it does not necessarily mean that states are prepared to be perpetually uncertain about their self-identity."

[15]James experienced a "nervous collapse" following the completion of his medical degree. Jackman (2008, 62) writes: "[t]his affinity with what [James] later referred to as the "sick soul" was an important strain in his thought that contrasted the outwardly 'healthy minded' tone of his work."

unsatisfactory for the Pragmatist because it is likely to be accompanied by doubt, and doubt prompts a need for reflection and deliberation. But how, within that process, can we *know* that different routines will reduce both fear *and* anxiety? Two concepts in Jamesian thinking are important here: the "cash-value" of thought and "faith."

When James spoke of the "cash-value" of a thought he did *not* mean its financial value. By "cash-value," James was simply referring to the practical and experiential impact of a thought. We do not have to be certain that a thought is true for it to have this kind of value. We may one day learn that what we currently believe is in fact untrue, but in the meantime, belief can help us in a practical way (i.e., it cashes out). It can, for instance, help us to cope with uncertainty and to do things in that context. Indeed, James argued that we live most of our lives like this. Unverified claims "form the overwhelmingly large number of truths we live by." Every time we step on to the plane, for instance, we let "our notion [that we will be safe] pass for true without attempting to verify." This is because circumstantial evidence is sufficient. We can go on "without eye-witnessing" (James 2004 [1907]) the relevant proof.

What James is talking about here is faith. Despite uncertainty about our knowledge claims, we can have faith in them and reap the experiential benefits of acting as if they were true.[16] This might sound like it reinforces a status-quo bias, as we can trust our routines even in the face of uncertainty. I do not think that is the most important implication, however. I think the implication of Jamesian thought is that we need not accept the fear generated by a dangerous routine in order to secure ourselves from anxiety.[17] Fear prompts doubt, and despite the anxiety generated by change, faith gives us the time and the resources to come to terms with a reconstituted identity in ways that resolve both doubt and fear. Faith, in other words, helps us to wean ourselves off dangerous routines by encouraging us to believe that future identities will not be so demanding.[18] It helps us understand that these routines exist only because we believe the identity they are constructing is given and fixed; and crucially, we do not need to be *certain* that things will improve before we commit to change. As James (2012 [1896]) argued, in perhaps his most famous work, "The Will to Believe," progress starts with the scientist's *faith* that their hypothesis is correct. Without that faith, scientists would be "unable to do the work necessary to find the evidence" (Jackman 2008, 72).

There is another reason why faith serves to mitigate the anxiety of change, and that is because "the facts we are trying to discover are themselves sensitive to our beliefs" (Jackman 2008, 73). Jackman captures this when he writes: "if I interact with someone while withholding judgment about whether or not they like me, this may result in a lack of warmth on my part that will bring it about that I won't be liked" (Jackman 2008, 73). The inverse confirms the point. If I believe someone likes me then I am more likely to engage in friendly interaction, which then turns a (mere) belief into a fact. James himself used an example that resonates especially well with the IR reader familiar with the collective

action problem. He offers the example of thieves going from carriage to carriage and robbing passengers on a train.

> A whole train of passengers (individually brave enough) will be looted by a few highwaymen, simply because the latter can count on one another, while each passenger fears that if he makes a movement of resistance, he will be shot before any one else backs him up. If we believed that the whole car-full would rise at once with us, we should each severally rise, and train robbing would never even be attempted. *There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.* And where faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the "lowest kind of immorality" into which a thinking being can fall (James 2012 [1896] emphasis added).

The point is not that we can have a blind faith in humanity. The point simply is this: when there is faith in a certain outcome it leads to action that makes that outcome a reality. Even Realist critics of Pragmatism recognized this. The classical Pragmatist's contemporary Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, attacked their commitment to learning and reason because it supposedly lacked a theory of power, but Niebuhr also argued that *religious* faith was needed to discipline power and hold societies together (Rice 1993).[19]

Dewey was less convinced than Niebuhr by organized religion. Still, he recognized the power of faith. In echoes of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he argued instead for a *civic* faith. This involved "faith in intelligence" (Dewey 1998 [1925], 13), and a faith in democracy as a form of social intelligence (Dewey 1967 [1934]; also Hook 1974, 184–9). This faith was justified because he considered orders based on epistemic and social democracy to be more secure in a pluralistic world than those based on the fixed, and hierarchically enforced, myths of traditional religion.[20] Following the Pragmatist Charles Pierce's (1877) argument in *The Fixation of Belief*, for instance, Dewey argued that epistemic contestation is not fatal to the democratic identity in the way it is to those social hierarchies that are based on substantive and absolute truth claims. This is because democracy brings "conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised." Because they identify with this *process* of deliberation, and the public good that emerges from it, democrats can adapt their *substantive* beliefs without undermining their core identity (Dewey 1998 [1935], 331). That is ultimately more resilient in a world of change. With his conception of civic faith, Dewey was thinking about both reason and aesthetics. He was, in effect, mythologizing democracy. As Kirke and Steele (2023, 920) put it, the myths that help secure us and our nations against anxiety "do not need to be exclusionary." I return to this point in the conclusion.

My point in this discussion of Jamesian thinking is that the normative turn in OSS can avoid what appears on the surface to be an unsatisfactory, if not contradictory, position. Embracing anxiety as a means of encouraging healthier identities (because they can change rather than ossify) is unlikely to appeal for the reasons OSS identifies. People prefer to mitigate anxiety. That does not mean they have to

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[16] Here "faith" is playing a similar role to "myth," and its capacity to temper anxiety (Kirke and Steele 2023, 907). It is similar to "basic trust," which enables actors to know "that their cognitive world will be reproduced" (Mitzen 2006a, 346, citing Giddens), which encourages "learning" (Mitzen 2006a, 350).

[17] See Arfi (2020, 300) for a discussion of how "performative leaps of faith" can underpin "rigid attachment" to routines and a process of "critical rationalization."

[18] My emphasis, therefore, is on the reflexive actor's "leap of faith that the process of critical assessment will eventually produce a sense of existential security" (Arfi 2020, 301).

[19] Rice (1993, 19) describes passages of Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* as Jamesian Pragmatism.

[20] For Schou Tjalve (2013, 786), Pragmatism espoused "democracy as a pedagogy, seeking to bolster the democratic 'mind'," Realism "hoped to ground the democratic practice in a deeper theology seeking to re-enchant the democratic 'soul'."

accept dangerous routines, however. In this situation, Pragmatist OSS would agree with Browning's argument that self-reflexivity and openness to change are ethically more defensible, but it also offers an analysis and a way of thinking that is more compelling than telling people to embrace anxiety. A Jamesian analysis of the role faith plays in our existing habits makes it less daunting to adopt new routines and reconstitute problematic identities. Together with a more life-affirming image of "growth," a civic faith in democracy as a form of social learning can, I suggest, help to constitute a progressive identity. That offers an alternative to the otherwise unappealing choice between a conservative identity that sustains dangerous practices and a radical call to embrace the anxiety of permanent instability.[21]

It is important to recognize that faith is contingent, however. Faith is context-specific, in other words. Go back to James's train metaphor. It *would* surely be dangerous (and this is the value of Realist skepticism) to act on a *misplaced* faith in one's fellow passengers. The problems created by uncertainty are not so easily swept aside. For the Pragmatist, however, the implication is not to despair at the generalized tragedy of the human condition. As Sidney Hook (1974, 20) noted, there is a false sense of heroism in the Realist embrace of that position. The "more serious, even more heroic" position is found in the Pragmatist's challenge; the challenge to explore empirically, and to realize practically, the possibilities that are immanent in the particular moment. In an OSS context, the challenge can be framed as follows: how can we reconstruct the social environment in ways that will allow us to change our Selves and abandon unhealthy routines? How, in other words, can we encourage others to encourage us to change as we seek to wean ourselves off a dangerous set of routines and the identities that sustain them?[22] To help answer that question I turn to the Pragmatism of George Herbert Mead.

Nurturing Growth through Intelligent Interaction

Mead's form of Pragmatism is useful here because it establishes the processual or relational (Pratt 2017) character of the Self. Mead (1934, 152–3,193–9) draws a distinction between the "I" (the impulsive part of the Self) and the "Me" (the self's image when it looks at itself through the eyes of Others).[23] The Self, in this respect, does not exist without being other-regarding. Wendt (1992, 402; see also Greve 2018, 862) echoed this for an IR audience when he noted "actors do not have a Self prior to interaction with an Other." This does not mean the views of Others determine the Self. For Mead, an internal "dialogue" between the "Me" and the "I" constitutes the Self (Harnisch 2010, 5–8; Klose 2020, 856).[24] In this dialogue, the "I" can push back against what might otherwise be the determining quality of the Other's expectations (or the "Me"). This leads to a realization that the Other's views can be reconstituted

through interaction (Mead 1934, 239–48).[25] When that happens, the "Me" interacts differently with the "I" and the Self is changed. This process is not limited to interaction between individuals. Just as the "I" can pushback against the expectations of particular Others, so it can push against, and reconstitute, the social norms of what Mead called the "generalized" Other (Mead 1934, 170–82). The normative structure of society can, in other words, be reconstructed through the interaction of the Self (especially organized Selves) and the generalized Other.

This is important for OSS and the normative interest in healthy identities (i.e., those that secure and improve the lived experience). According to Mead, it is possible to improve the lived experience by changing the social environment rather than merely adapting to it.[26] Indeed, an implication of Meads' analysis of how the Self emerges is that we can look again at the source of, and remedy for, the bad experience. The bad experience might follow not because the "I" drives pre-reflexive routines that refuse to adapt to the expectations of the Other/society. The bad experience might be a consequence of the "Me," and the routines that are required to conform to the expectations of the Other/society. A failure to adapt to society's expectations can be harmful, but so can giving in to peer pressure. Controlling the egoistic responses of the "I" might be socially appropriate, but it might not be intelligent if the routines demanded by the social environment are unhealthy. Here the "I" can assert itself and formulate creative strategies that change the social environment and the impact it has on the Self (Mead 1934, 239–48). If successful, the social pressures on the Self to engage in harmful routines will be less. Changing the social environment is, therefore, one possible strategy for maintaining a healthy identity. That is easier said than done of course, and it begs the question: how?

I think Meadian Pragmatism answers this question by echoing the value of what Dewey called "growth." Like Dewey valued the "plasticity" of children and their capacity to learn, so Mead celebrated the child's ability to realize a healthy Self through role play. Role play informed the process of self-determination by revealing the "Me," i.e., the views of, at first, significant Others. Children had a little problem, Mead noticed, seeing themselves as they adopted in their play the roles of parents, teachers, and doctors. They have "a set of stimuli which call out in [themselves] the sort of responses they call out in others. [They take] this group of responses and organize them into a certain whole. Such is the simplest form of being another to one's self" (Mead 1934, 168). This ability to be Other *and* Self-regarding is a form of intelligence. It enables humans to identify how in social settings a particular gesture ("this") would lead to a particular outcome ("that"). Role-playing, in other words, leads to social intelligence, which makes it possible to control conduct (or routine) so that it is purposive, creative, and ultimately healthier. That can involve action that reconstructs the unhealthy Self by reconstructing the Other's expectations of it (Mead 1934, 283). Echoing Dewey (1927), Mead

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[21]As Rumelili (2020, 269) notes, the politics of OSS is seemingly reduced to "the temptation to contain anxiety" which "mostly functions as a driver of conservative and authoritarian politics" and the mobilization of "radical political agendas."

[22]Hook (1974, 59) spoke to this when he argued we "must recognize a social responsibility to instate the conditions that make the consequences of desirable risk-taking in human experience less onerous."

[23]Impulse is not only a consequence of biological, including emotional, responses. It includes "the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in [their] own experience" (Mead 1934, 219).

[24]Steele (2008, 60–3) does not draw on Mead but similarly identifies a "dialectic" of the self.

[25]"The response of the ≫I≪ involves adaptation, but an adaptation which affects not only the self but also the social environment which helps to constitute the self" (Mead 1934, 240).

[26]This can also be found in Dewey's (2011 [1916]) concept of "control." For Dewey, a living being "controls for its own continued activity the energies that would otherwise use it up. Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment" (Dewey 2011 [1916], 5). In this vein, Pratt (2017, 78) argues that the referent of ontological security should be relocated "from the self to the broader contexts in which selves emerge and interact," which he terms "social arrangements."

made clear this kind of intelligence was necessary with the increasing interconnectedness of societies and the conflicts that emerged from that. Social intelligence was needed on an increasingly larger scale "to bring about the reconstructions . . . that are needed to resolve or settle those conflicts" (Mead 1934, 328).

I interpret this aspect of Meadian Pragmatism as supplementing the value Dewey puts on sympathy/empathy. Social intelligence sees the Self through the eyes of the Other and is thus a useful pedagogic tool for informing the internal dialogue between the "I" and the "Me." But what if the outcome of this internal reasoning process *is* a realization that the healthy Self requires changing the Other's expectations of it? How is that realized? One strategy to emerge from a Meadian emphasis on interaction and role-play is "altercasting." This involves "projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one's own goals" (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963, 454; Wendt 1992, 421–2). If a state wants to end the harmful routine of excessive defense spending, for instance, and sees this routine as the product of a social identity and international role that requires it to deter military action by an Other, then an altercasting strategy will project and cast identities that help it to reconstruct what the social environment requires. In this case, the Self (Ego) might find that the problem (i.e., the possibility of military confrontation) is the product of its own projection of a particular identity onto the Other (Alter). Acting on that realization, the Self (Ego) can adopt routines of restraint and cast the Other (Alter) into a similar role, which can—*if that role is taken-up*—change the relationship. That can in turn change the Self's dialogue between "I" and "Me." The "Me" is no longer so dependent on playing the role of international deterrent and the "I's" concern for harmful defense spending is now more assertive. The Self that emerges no longer identifies in a way that demands harmful international roles and routines.

This logic lies behind the Pragmatist association with internationalism. Dewey, James, and Mead were all concerned, for example, about how nationalist identities and militaristic routines were harming the American experience (Cochran and Navari 2017). Mead's concern followed from his insight into the dialogue between the "I" and the "Me." An overdominance of the former could produce an unhealthy superiority complex or imperialist mindset. Indeed, the superiority complex is doubly problematic because it not only leads to unhealthy routines (e.g., excessive defense spending), it closes the Self off from "full interaction" with [inferior/excluded] Others [recall Dewey's critique of the criminal gang]. Not all nationalist identities do this of course, but those that do limit empathy, reflexivity, and growth. They can be criticized for that reason. This is especially the case when nationalisms harm the lived experience, as was clearly the case with the wars (Civil and World) that the classical American Pragmatists lived through.

The alternative for the Pragmatists is to try to reconstruct the environment in which states operate. That can make it safe for states to change the meaning of nationalism so that national identities do not demand the performance of harmful routines. In the classical Pragmatist's early twentieth-century American context, that meant allowing the United States to be its Self by deconstructing an international environment that demanded routines (e.g., militarism and imperialism) that threatened the US constitution (both social and legal). It involved the projection of restraint (rather than superiority), as well as an openness to interactions that reconstructed inter-state or inter-nationalist identities; and of course, that argument mapped on to a republican or Wilsonian internationalism and support for the League of Nations as a form of post-war reconstruction (Deudney 2007, 161–89). For Mead (1934, 245), the League was an attempt to get beyond "the methods of warfare and diplomacy, and reach some sort of political relation . . . in which they [nations] could be regarded as members of a common community, and so be able to express themselves, not in the attitude of hostility, but in terms of their common values."

Nurturing the Transatlantic Security Community: Then and Now

Classical Pragmatism heavily influenced IR's turn from Rationalism to Constructivism. Alexander Wendt, for example, cited Mead, and those influenced by his interactionism, to support the claim that identities are constituted by collective meanings rather than the distribution of material power. Following Mead, Wendt brought to IR the insight that "[a]ctors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self— by participating in such collective meanings." Identities, in this sense, "are inherently relational." Processes of interaction with an Other construct the Self (Wendt 1992, 397). This did not mean that identities, or the relations that helped constitute them, are necessarily malleable. One reason for working against reconstruction is the search for ontological security. "[A]ctors' interests in maintaining relatively stable role identities" (Wendt 1992, 411) can inhibit systemic change. By exploring how change was possible through interaction, however, Wendt implicitly challenged this conservative predisposition as somehow natural and fixed. Furthermore, while Wendt did not explicitly explore the normative implications of constructivism (or ontological security), he did call for dialogue between constructivist IR, Political Theory, and normative IR. This was necessary if we were to realize the "possibility of collective reflexivity at the international level" (Wendt 1999, 376). My point in the above sections is that the classical Pragmatists were engaged in just such a dialogue. From the theoretical resources Wendt used analytically, they developed a normative commitment to identities based on learning and growth.

Wendt's constructivism had additional normative implications. It demonstrated the value of altercasting *in practice.* The evidence cited for that was Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "New Thinking." This emerged in the context of the Soviet state's inability to meet economic-technological-military challenges and the breakdown of a consensus based on Marxism-Leninism. In Meadian terms, the Soviet "I" was now challenging the "Me" and the experiential costs of the international role imposed by the Cold War. In response, Gorbachev "rejected the Leninist belief in the inherent conflict of interest between socialist and capitalist states and . . . recognized the crucial role that Soviet aggressive practices played in sustaining that conflict" (Wendt 1992, 421). In moves that Wendt interprets as part of an altercasting strategy, Gorbachev withdrew Soviet forces from Afghanistan, unilaterally cut the number of armed forces stationed in Eastern Europe, and changed national security discourse from one of warfighting in the name of deterrence to mutual security. In this case, the "ego" (USSR) re-presented itself and recast the role "alter" (United States) could play in the relationship. The ultimate purpose was to recreate the role "ego" (USSR) would play in an environment so that

it was less demanding economically (Wendt 1992, 421–2). Wendt was by no means certain that such a strategy would lead to the growth of a transatlantic security community. That depended "on domestic, bureaucratic, and cognitive-ideological sources of resistance in both East and West to such a change." Yet he concluded that "New Thinking" showed a greater appreciation "for the deep structure of power politics," how it was constituted by the roles states played, and how they could mitigate the costs of those roles through intelligent interaction (Wendt 1992, 422; see also Mitzen 2006a, 358–9).

Since then we have seen a return to security competition across the European continent, and interestingly there are areas where Realist and Constructivist analysis offer similar explanations of why this is the case. Citing John Mearsheimer's views at this point might seem strange, given his association with a Neorealist approach that tends to take the power-maximizing identities and the interests of states to be fixed (Mearsheimer 2003). On NATO–Russian relations, however, his view reflects a classical Realist interactionist-type critique of liberal internationalism (Mearsheimer 2014; 2022). The liberal commitment to expanding NATO was the exact opposite of what Russian "New Thinkers" were expecting and hoping for. "Alter" (the United States), in other words, did not fully accept the role Gorbachev had cast. That made Russian "New Thinkers" appear—in Wendt's (1992, 422) terms—like "suckers," and that helped reconstruct a Russian sense of victimhood and resentment. Nationalist politicians like Putin were then able to exploit that. In this way, Mearsheimer insisted, western liberals were to "blame" for the Russian invasions of Ukraine and the return of security competition to Europe. Patrick Porter (2018, 12) helps us relate this to OSS and its insight into the state's unwillingness "to learn their way out" (Mitzen 2006a, 354) of familiar routines. For Porter, the United States strategizing post-Cold War lacked 'a rigorously self-conscious process'. As such, the habits of a foreign policy elite, in particular its commitment to US primacy, contributed in his view to unwanted experiences, such as the frequent use of force.

While Mearsheimer and Porter (2020) identify as Realists, their analysis is an interactionist account of identity and interest construction. That can also be found in the New Constructivism (McCourt 2022) of, for example, Vincent Pouliot's "practice-theory." For Pouliot (2010, loc. 127–9), a practice-theory account tells us that "it is not only who we are that drives what we do; it is also what we do that determines who we are." This can account for the failure to build on Gorbachev's new thinking and the end of the Cold War. With identities in flux, there was an opportunity to transcend security competition but diplomatic practice failed to do this because it was insufficiently Other-regarding. The NATO–Russia Council was not a site of learning and mutual reconstitution because, as Pouliot (2010, loc.151) put it, there were "two masters but no apprentice." While Russian diplomats seemed happy to play the role of "junior partner" for a while, that relationship broke down when NATO decided to enlarge its membership and to use force in Kosovo. These macro-level developments were compounded by "superiority complexes" at the micro-level. At the level of everyday practice, in other words, NATO practitioners saw themselves as the "teachers" of Russian diplomats, who were represented as "irrational and emotional" (Pouliot 2010 loc. 1704). Predictably Russian diplomats "despised" NATO's "self-attributed role as a teacher," and this experience contributed to a resurgence of the "great power" (Pouliot 2010, loc. 1728; Greve 2018, 872) or "modernist" (Browning 2018,

107) habitus in Moscow.[27] As a consequence, competitive security relations were reconstructed, and the costs of that have been experienced as war.

What might Pragmatist OSS say about this? It may well be that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is an example of a nation embracing dangerous actions (e.g., war) in order to avoid the anxiety of its international role (e.g., "apprentice"). It may also be the case that NATO's macro- and micro-level interactions with Russia were insufficiently sensitive to, or accommodating of, Russian anxieties. I do not think, however, that NATO's commitment to expansion, and the cost of that in terms of relations with Russia, are a consequence of the liberal primacist's inability to reflect. There is a danger that narratives based on the Western "ego" and the Russian "alter" overlook the identities and experiences of people living in between the great powers (not least Ukrainians).[28] A greater burden of reflection falls on the constitutive role played by Russian nationalism (see Akchurina and Della Sala 2022) when these experiences are taken into account; more certainly than appears in Realist critiques of NATO expansion. The impulse for expanding NATO came from East European states whose fear and anxiety were a consequence of the Russian inability to reassure them. To ignore that would have had consequences. To make a proper normative judgment we have to compare the problematic experiences of the present with the problematic experiences that were avoided by past actions, including expanding NATO. The costs of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have been high, but it is also true that the order constituted by NATO expansion helped prevent a wider European war.

Looking forward, I think it is important not to lose faith in social intelligence and the possibility that environments can be reconstructed in ways that reduce both fear and anxiety and thereby meet the demands of physical and ontological security. There is nothing natural or inevitable about the return to security competition in Europe.[29] It might seem utopian in the present moment to think of a future where Russia is (re)integrated into a European "security community" (Adler 1998), but then the 1970s peace and democracy movements, working under the cover of superpower détente, were also dismissed as utopian when they asserted that Cold War routines were anachronistic in the context of a growing internationalist consciousness. That was until the ideas of "common security" (Evangelista 1999; Thomas 2001) took root in a Soviet elite that was looking to transform the international environment and a problematic Soviet identity. Because the Self, and the environment in which it operates, is in a constant state of becoming, and because agents have in the past acted with social intelligence, it chal-

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[27]Although Browning (2018, 111–2) focused on the EU he identified a similar dynamic. Russia is "steadfast" in its "refusal to accept the universalist presumptions of EU self-narratives or the notion (expectation even) that Russia should accept a diminished and subordinate standing in relation to the EU"; and despite "EU proclamations of an equal partnership the basic sentiment in Europe remains one of viewing Russia as a laggard, mired in historically anachronistic modes of thinking, becoming increasingly authoritarian and fully expected to suffer continuing economic, social, political and even military decline, and therefore only destined for greater marginalization. This view fundamentally reaffirms EU conceptions of self-identity." This had normative implications: "the sense of ontological certitude established," Browning (2018, 113) concludes, "is too simplified, overrides the complexities of the contemporary situation, but in doing so threatens to become self-fulfilling." See also Akchurina and Della Sala (2022, 1643), who identify an "inability to see beyond its own identity as a light-footed ethical actor that blinkered the EU as [the 2013–14] events in Ukraine spiralled out of control."

[28]On this as an example of "epistemic superimposition" see Dutkiewicz and Smolenski 2023; Mälksoo 2023.

[29]As Cash (2020, 311) put it: "the presumption that states-in-interaction are restricted to an established culture of anarchy and adhere to established role-identities and routine practices in order to avoid chaos is seriously misleading."

lenges Pragmatist OSS to identify practices that can reconstitute problematic identities. Looking back to look forward gives us faith this can be done. It also alerts us to the importance of relational work (Cochran 2017) at the transnational level (Chilton 1994; Mitzen 2006a, 343, 363), because it is here that an internationalist consciousness sensitive to difference can emerge to both critique and replace problematic nationalist identities.[30]

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to return to Dewey's point that democracy is a form of social intelligence and social learning. I want also to make explicit the point that because democracy facilitates learning a democratic identity is "healthy." For that reason, Pragmatist OSS should normatively commit to democratic practices, and the democratic identity they help constitute. This does not mean international relations should be normatively ordered according to states that self-identify as democratic. This is because such states do not always live up to that identity, especially in their treatment of non-citizens, or what Dewey (1927) called "publics," i.e., those impacted by but excluded from power. Dewey's conception of democracy went beyond the organization of the state. Democracy is, he famously wrote, 'a way of life' (Dewey 1998 [1939] 341). I interpret this to mean a social life that involves both purpose and compromise; one that sustains and improves experience by appropriately controlling and adapting to a changing natural and social environment. It involves democratizing "the Self"—at all levels—by including "the Other" in the learning processes that (re)constitute identity; a process that can lead to the growth of an expanded personality and a security community.

This is important to OSS in the current moment. In the face of actual material threats (pandemics, climate change, and nuclear atrocity), we do not want to be anxious (and therefore hesitant) in our opposition to a politics that conserves dangerous routines for the sake of exceptionalist identities (Ralph 2023). OSS has been useful in highlighting how these routines create problems, but my argument in this paper is that it has not yet formulated a normative theory that can satisfactorily address these problems. I fear that the consequence of a radical call to "embrace anxiety" will be a doubling down on the identities that conserve failing routines. I suggest instead that we have faith in our democratic practices and the identities they constitute because these are the best ways of coping with change. If Dewey (1998 [1939]) had such faith on the eve of World War II, then surely we can commit to a similar form of "creative democracy" as we act to meet our current challenges, including the one highlighted in my transatlantic security case study.

The classical American Pragmatists disagreed on national security policy questions of the day, including the US decision to enter World War I (Cochran and Navari 2017). This demonstrates the difficulty of translating Pragmatist ethics into substantive policy recommendations. But one insight is particularly important in Dewey's decentered conception of democracy: the way it focuses attention on transnational activism at the social level of everyday experience. Those looking for "practical" implications of Pragmatist OSS should not therefore limit their investigation to state policy. This is because the grassroots activism that works through the mediums explored by OSS (e.g., myth, narrative, memorialization, and art) can change the meaning of national identity and, subsequently, the parameters of state security dilemmas. An engaged form of Pragmatist OSS may in this sense support feminist movements across Russia and Ukraine, including their appeals for "affective dialogue" as a means of constructing "solidarity across difference" and ending aggression (Sasunkevich 2024), as well as their campaigns for gender equality as a means of changing problematic national identities based on hyper-masculinity (Arutyunyan 2020; Sharova 2022).[31] Of course, state policy and practice remain significant; and I think a Pragmatist approach to finding sustainable security in this case would argue for the military defense of Ukrainian democracy. That should be done, however, in ways that do not close down the post-war spaces for this kind of transnational activism because it can help nurture the security communities and expanded identities that transcend fear and anxiety.

Acknowledgements

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[30]For an argument that "security communities need not only to reinforce a sense of 'we-ness' but also to recognize members' distinctiveness", see Greve 2018, 858.

[31]For more on feminist pragmatism, especially the peace activism of Jane Addams and other women, see Cochran 2017; Tickner and True 2018; Antanavičiūtė 2023.

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