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Taking Ontological Insecurity (More) Seriously: The Future of Ontological Security Studies in International Relations

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Where lies the future of ontological security studies (OSS) in International Relations? Drawn primarily from the work of Anthony Giddens, ontological security has so far provided International Relations with valuable tools to better understand why identity commitments matter so greatly to international actors seeking security within and beyond their borders. However, by regarding chaos as the sole alternative to the maintenance of practices that support an established role-identity, OSS fails to adequately capture the variety of identity maintenance techniques at work in international politics. In particular, it explains the persistence of established identities, routines, and relations, but does a poor job of addressing modifications to established formations. This matters because international contexts are especially fluid, requiring actors to frequently adjust and recalibrate how they go on and, in some cases, how they see themselves and others. OSS's unduly conservative bias in this respect risks reifying the identities, routines, and narratives that actors work very hard and continuously to produce. This roundtable proposes a different way forward for OSS by shifting focus to ontological insecurity. Participants will discuss the different ways that actors respond to the profound anxiety that ontological insecurity generates, and highlight the varied effects of such responses. They will also reflect on how to cultivate a more complex and dynamic approach to the politics of ontological in/security.

Track Classification: Interpretivism in International Relations Working Group