9. Pragmatism, practice and the value of security[1]

Introduction

There is on-going debate in critical security studies over the 'value' or ethics of security. Because of the ways in which security has often been used, particularly by states, it is often dismissed as a problematic or even negative concept. This is hardly surprising, as critical security studies emerged from critique of traditional security practices and narratives. Some see security as a totalising metanarrative, suggesting it legitimises problematic exclusionary practices by states whereby 'we' are secured against a threatening 'other'. Others still view security as problematic because of the consequences of speaking security, with the Copenhagen School suggesting that securitization has negative consequences, in the form of 'threat-defence', state-centred responses and a narrowing of political debate. However, authors drawing on critical theory, particularly emancipation scholars but also those drawing on human security, suggest security can be a positive value to strive for. This division affects and is affected by fundamentally different approaches to security, with some authors understanding and analysing security as a *process*, whether a speech-act or a broader practice, and others approaching it as a *state of being* (see chapter by Floyd in this volume). Overall, those who view security as a process are more likely to point to its negative features or consequences and reject it on ethical grounds, while those who approach it as a condition or a state of being tend to suggest security *can* be a good thing, often advancing alternative concepts of more 'positive' security.

So far, there is broad agreement that security is not *unequivocally* positive and that it has often been used in problematic ways. However, contrasting views over the potential for security to be a 'good' thing – and thus ethically desirable - have divided authors and there is no consensus over how to move on from here. Therefore, the question or 'puzzle' tackled in this chapter is, how do we combine an awareness of the problematic manifestations of security discourse and policy, while still moving forward? These disagreements relate back to ongoing division over the ethics of security and critique; about what is ethical and what 'critical' security studies should be about. The intention here is not to dismiss these divisions and disagreements: they are significant, and interrogating our own assumptions in a reflective way is an important part of thinking about security in more ethical terms. However, Ethical Security Studies raises serious real world problems, highlighting growing insecurities affecting real people in real places. Without dismissing these differences, therefore, too much is at stake to allow theoretical divisions to hinder productive engagement in pursuit of a common goal: the development of a security studies and security practice that takes questions of ethics seriously.

This chapter argues that a pragmatic practice-centred approach provides a way to overcome existing divisions in ethical security studies. Such an approach involves focusing on how security works in practice and what it 'does' in different empirical contexts, to gain practical knowledge about the value and ethics of security, to understand when it is 'good' in a particular time and place. Thus, it also answers a recent call for critical security scholars to move beyond current paradigms and universalised assumptions about security 'to engage in nuanced, reflexive and context-specific analyses of the politics and ethics of security' (Browning and McDonald 2013: 14). Pragmatism has been interpreted and used in many different ways in IR: for an overview of different strands, see Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009). It is not single approach, but some basic principles and ideas unite the agenda: most importantly a focus on real world experience. Moreover, pragmatic approaches generally see truth as provisional and contingent, and consequently argue that we need to interrogate that which is taken for granted. The rise in pragmatism is closely linked to the 'practice turn', with which it shares many themes. Most

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importantly, both emphasise the 'primacy of practice' (Hellmann et al. 2009: 639) to focus on what is actually happening, transgressing theoretical boundaries.

Following this, I argue that divisions over ethics can be overcome and dialogue can be restarted by 'focusing on a shared empirical research puzzle' (Kornprobst 2009: 655). This is also in a sense the broader theme of this book: getting authors from a wide range of approaches to reengage with the central questions of ethics and security to consider where we can go from here. This chapter presents pragmatism as a path for moving beyond the current gridlock. It proceeds in three parts: it sketches the central divisions in studies of ethics and security, it then outlines pragmatism and how it has been used in IR, and lastly, it considers how it can help us bridge divisions and move forward in productive engagement.

Debates and divisions

The key division relevant to this discussion is over the value of security: many authors working in the critical security studies tradition favour rejecting security on ethical terms. This division also goes beyond the value of security, to what it means to be critical, and what we *can* and *should* do as critical scholars of security.

On the 'positive' side, emancipation scholars and those working in the human security tradition see security primarily as a state of being, as a desirable condition, and thus a goal worth striving for. They tend to either reject traditional state-centred security practices or argue that they are inherently limited, and therefore focus on forwarding alternatives to achieve the condition of security. The vast majority of arguments in favour of a more ethical notion of security, including emancipation or human security approaches, rely on defining the 'positive' elements in the abstract. Here, the focus on ethics makes change an active goal, to produce more ethical alternatives. Some, but not all, draw on Critical Theory: indeed, Booth's introduction of emancipation into security studies produced a separate school of capital 'C' Critical Security Studies, with emancipation as its expressed goal (Booth 1991, 2005). Emancipation as defined by Booth was about 'the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constrains which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do...emancipation, theoretically, is security' (Booth 1991: 319). Here, being 'Critical' explicitly involves advocating ethical alternatives.

In the same wave, human security was developed by the United Nations to provide an alternative notion of security. It shares many features with emancipation (and could indeed be said to have emancipation as its goal), but originates from the 1994 United Nations Development Report. This argued that human beings rather than states should be the referent of security: 'For too long, security has been equated with the threats to a country's borders...For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event' (UNDP 1994: 3). These approaches share most of their goals, most importantly a focus on securing human beings in a broader sense, to allow them to flourish beyond mere survival. They both advocate change, and start from a vision of what an alternative more 'secure' world should look like. While they focus on security as a state of being, these approaches do consider security as a process, with both emancipation and human security scholars stressing that some security processes (most importantly those which secure human beings) are more desirable than others.

The most vocal critiques of these approaches come from poststructuralist authors, who tend to reject the potential for security to be ethical. Such arguments are often founded on security *as a process* rather than a state of being; suggesting that if we study security practices more broadly or what security 'does', we will find that it is best avoided. They are founded on a concern with power and a scepticism of universal solutions or objective ideas of 'progress', and take two main forms. Firstly, some argue that security is simply too bound up with neoliberal state practices which are inherently problematic (Neocleous 2008). Secondly, 'security' in itself is said to necessitate exclusion and others made threatening: it is 'meaningless without an "other" to help

specify the conditions of insecurity' (Lipschutz 1995: 9). Thus even as a condition, security is exclusionary: we cannot all be 'equal sharers of security' (Aradau 2008: 73). Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument suggests that security politics is both antithetical to, and incompatible with, inclusive politics.

This also relates back to the Copenhagen School's emphasis on the consequences of (the process of) securitization. In its original form, this approach argues that while security is intersubjective and constructed, because 'security' is used in very specific ways in the field of practice it 'has to be read through the lens of *national* security' – it cannot escape its historical connotations (Wæver 1995: 49). Consequently, they argue that securitization leads to threat-defence thinking, state-centred responses and undemocratic emergency politics, and that it 'is articulated only from a specific place, in an institutional voice, by elites' (1995: 57). As a result, the Copenhagen School posit that 'security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues as normal politics' and thus most issues are best desecuritized (Buzan et al. 1998: 29). Here again, security is associated with exclusionary and militarised politics. Thus, a range of scholars reject security on ethical grounds.

The most enduring division is between positive security approaches and poststructuralist critics. While both camps identify as 'critical', they do so in very different ways. Poststructuralists focus on critique and deconstruction, uncovering power relationships. Scholars of emancipation or human security, meanwhile, also take issue with the current security structure, but focus on reconstruction rather than deconstruction. Indeed, they tend to view this as central to taking a 'Critical' approach. Thus, both argue security contains a lot of power and can be problematic. However, while human security or emancipation scholars argue that there is positive potential both in security processes and in the condition of security which should be harnessed for progressive ends, poststructuralists argue that it is too tied up with problematic state practices and *in*security. Thus, while the former forward various models and ways of thinking, analysing or practicing security more ethically, poststructuralists often explicitly reject the idea of developing alternative models, based on scepticism over security itself as well as a Foucauldian concern with power. Despite this division, both 'camps' still both broadly come under the heading of critical security studies. In many ways they have similar goals: firstly, both are deeply concerned with the ethics of security and the often problematic nature of state-centred security and security studies. Secondly, they share a concern with power, uncovering power relationships on the one hand, and reorienting power at the more extreme end.

Whether or not security can be ethical or 'positive' and whether a critical security studies agenda should involve reconstruction, forwarding or advocating ethical alternatives, remains a divisive question. While focusing on these differences scholars often talk past each other or focus on critiquing each other rather than engaging to actually achieve their shared goals. Before moving on to outline pragmatism and how a pragmatic practice-centred approach can help us move past these divisions it is worth briefly noting that the gulf between these approaches is less wide than it may appear at first sight.

Firstly, many authors working in the emancipation or human security traditions reject objective notions of 'truth' and 'progress', just as poststructuralists do. Emancipation draws on immanent critique, locating potential for change in the existing order. As Nunes notes, 'the internal contradictions of predominant security arrangements, made visible by immanent critique, constitute fault-lines where alternative [emancipatory] visions of security can be fostered' (2012: 352, 2015). Thus, most visions of emancipation do not invent an objective emancipatory ideal, but rather locate the potential for change in the existing order. One example of this is Wyn Jones notion of 'concrete utopias'. He warns against the 'temptation of suggesting a blueprint for an emancipated order that that is unrelated to the possibilities inherent in the present' (Wyn Jones 1999: 77), and suggests that it is necessary to conceive of emancipation as 'a process rather than an endpoint' to avoid presenting a totalising metanarrative (Wyn Jones 1999: 78). This argument also shifts the discussion away from security as a state of being. Although

allowing only visions of change which already exist has been critiqued as too conservative, allowing only limited change (Burke 2007: 21), this concern is somewhat mitigated by more recent attempts, including McDonald's focus on *contestation* as a space for developing alternatives to dominant security narratives (2012), and Peoples focus on *resistance* over emancipation or liberation (2010: 1133). Nunes also makes a case for reconstruction which includes an effort of deconstruction (2015). These approaches provide less static alternatives. Alongside this, Newman has forwarded a more critical notion of human security (2010: see also chapters by Wibben, Robinson and Nunes in this volume).

Secondly, there is nothing inherently contradictory between poststructuralism and ethics. Authors often accused of ethical nihilism in presenting poststructural or interpretive work that emphasises critique, in reality both address and are deeply concerned with ethics. Deconstruction and critique are ultimately an ethical demand (Critchley 1999: 12). Indeed, 'The very intention of criticizing metaphysics also carries with it certain normative-political consequence' (Honneth 1995: 290). Critchley goes on to note that 'the ethical conception of justice that drives the deconstructive enterprise, and which is defined in terms of responsibility to the other, would seem to be essentially connected to the possibility of political reformation, transformation and progress' (1999: 275). Indeed, looking at the later work of Derrida and Lyotard, Honneth suggests that while postmodernism as a philosophical movement may have begun as 'strictly directed against every kind of normative theory,...this initial reticence has since given way to a dramatically changed attitude': he goes as far as referring to this change as 'an ethical turn' (1995: 289). Meanwhile, work in IR that draws on poststructural writers have often also made ethical arguments, including Walker (1988), Campbell (1998), Campbell and Shapiro (1999) and Dillon (2002). In the simplest form, critique itself works to make alternatives possible by disrupting 'common-sense' or accepted notions of security. Thus, critique in itself involves taking an ethical stance.

More recently, some authors have explicitly attempted to move beyond the division between 'positive' and 'negative' security approaches to argue that security can be either positive or negative, and focus on developing criteria to establish what makes particular security processes or conditions positive or negative (Floyd 2007, 2010; Roe 2008; Hoogensen Gjørv 2012). They have forwarded a range of criteria which could be used to determine when security is positive/'good', or negative/'bad'. However, their criteria differ widely, and authors use the terms positive and negative in very different and sometimes contradictory ways. They also tend towards establishing absolute or universal criteria which do not leave enough space to recognize that which kinds of security processes or conditions are 'good' can vary depending on the context, and will also evolve and change over time within the same context. This is not to say that these bridging attempts are without merit: they have served to highlight a much needed debate and provided some potential solutions. For example, while developing her criteria Floyd has illustrated that security processes can in fact be positive and desirable (see chapter in this volume). Overall, these approaches highlight the overlap between 'positive' and 'negative' security camps, and this chapter builds on this, suggesting an alternative route to bridge the divide.

What is pragmatism?

Pragmatism is a philosophical approach drawing on the American pragmatists, a group of philosophers active around the turn of the last century. It is usually associated with the work of writers like Charles S. Peirce, John Dewey and William James, and more recently with Richard Rorty. Pragmatism has been used in a wide variety of ways in IR (see Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009; Hellmann et al. 2009; Cochran 1999, 2002; Brassett 2009a; Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Franke and Weber 2012) though it remains overlooked in discussions on security ethics. It is not a single approach, but some basic principles and ideas unite pragmatic scholars: most importantly a focus on practice, or real world experience. In this sense, the increasing popularity of pragmatism in IR is also linked to the practice turn.

There are different versions of pragmatism and here I draw on a wider notion, using pragmatism as an approach to understanding which starts from practice. In this sense, pragmatic research starts with a puzzle, focuses on practice and experience as central, and refuses to see the mind and the world as separate. Here, 'knower and known are not discrete entities, and are instead mutual participants in an ongoing creative process whereby situations arise, are transformed...' (Jackson 2009: 657). Pragmatic approaches see truth as provisional and contingent, emphasising a need for reflexivity and ongoing conversations about our underlying assumptions. Thus the emphasis is not on producing or uncovering an objective 'truth' that is 'out there' in an independently existing world, but on gaining practically useful knowledge, which is always provisional and always historically contingent (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 713). This in turn has ethical implications: if we can't hide behind the idea that in our research we are representing the 'truth', 'we have to take responsibility for the ways in which we are depicting the world to be' (Jackson 2009: 658).

Dewey emphasised the importance of uncertainty and reflective thinking, not 'settling' or determining truth (1910: 9). Thus, meaning is only accepted *conditionally,* 'accepted for examination' and re-examination rather than as truth: in this sense, 'an idea is a meaning that is tentatively entertained, formed, and used with reference to its fitness to decide a perplexing situation — a meaning used as a tool of judgment' (Dewey 1910: 108). Consequently, Dewey warns of the dangers of relying either purely on reason or purely on empirical experiences. Similarly, for James pragmatism involves a turn away 'from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins', a rejection of 'finality in truth' (James 1907). It is in essence 'an attitude of orientation', a method or way of approaching research, rather than a theory per se. Truth is contingent on context and experience, and never fixed: thus the 'quest' for truth is never settled: theories are 'instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest' (James 1907). In this way, James emphasises a shift away from first principles and categories, towards last things and consequences – an idea or practice is 'good' if the results are deemed to be good, and only for as long as the results are deemed to be good. This is best summed up by Rorty:

> From a pragmatist point of view, to say that what is rational for us now to believe may not be *true*, is simply to say that somebody may come up with a better idea. It is to say that there is always room for improved belief, since new evidence, or new hypothesis, or a whole new vocabulary, may come along (Rorty 1991: 23)

In IR pragmatism is connected with a shift in thinking, 'a profound critique of the theory-centred mainstream' to refocus on 'life-practices' (Rytövuori-Apunen 2009: 642). There are growing calls to move away from traditional paradigms and divisions, and with it a growth in approaches which self-define as 'pragmatic' and/or 'practice-centred'. Consequently, working together and across theoretical divisions becomes easier: pragmatism can help us answer both practical and ethical questions. Cochran draws on Dewey to argue that pragmatism can help bridge the gap between positivism and post-positivism in IR. Following Dewey, she suggests that '"[p]rogress" is provisional and temporary, but it is not empty and it certainly is worthwhile because of the security that it brings for a time' (Cochran 2002: 528). Instead of obsessing over what Dewey refers to as a 'quest for certainty', therefore, 'we should embrace experience as it is lived, rather than generate universalisable abstractions about a 'real world' deliberately removed from everyday practice' (Cochran 2002: 528). By studying real world experiences, we can both create a more grounded critique of problematic security practices, and, conversely, analyse cases and contexts where security is deemed to be good or desirable and what security processes and conditions look like in such cases.

Dewey also addresses ethics explicitly, emphasising practice and individual experience as necessary for ethical enquiry. Importantly, Cochran argues that Dewey's pragmatism presents possibilities for dealing with the difficulties post-positivists face when they try to 'develop concepts and theories that are capable of taking seriously the subjective meanings that social

actors attach to their actions, while at the same time stepping back from those understandings in order to offer clearer, generalizable assessments of them (2002: 542). For Dewey, 'that which is objective is that which settles a practical problem to the extent that doubt can be put aside for the time being' (Cochran 2002: 544). Thus, while there is no universal truth, a pragmatic approach

> does not mean that an argument for one particular solution to a problematic situation over others, and the acceptance of its associated social consequences, is inconceivable or unjustifiable. It simply means that any such preference cannot be given the status of truth. It is held to operate until a new substantive doubt arises which begins inquiry again. Until that time, though, it can serve as a basis for directing change in human social life (Cochran 2002: 547)

This has important implications for thinking about ethics.

Lastly, it is worth elaborating briefly on the relationship between pragmatism and the practice turn in IR. Practice theory has become influential in IR more broadly, with popular variants drawing on Bourdieu and/or Latour's Actor-Network Theory (for an overview, see Bueger and Gadinger 2015). Unlike pragmatism, it is also well established in critical security studies, where it is associated with what is usually termed the Paris School, and authors like Bigo (2002). However, while such studies of practice have added much to the critical security studies project, they have remained broadly critical of security processes. They have also focused largely on government/state security practices and their consequences. However, when referring to the practice turn here, I am referring to a broader approach, as used by authors like Adler and Pouliot (2011a, 2011b). Such an approach fits more logically with pragmatism: by opening up the meaning of practice, it allows us to study a wide range of security practices and processes, from discursive practices and speech-acts to policy-making processes as well as contestation and resistance to hegemonic security practices. Linking pragmatism explicitly to the broader practice turn also provides a clearer toolkit for how to study security in practice. As a philosophical school, pragmatism is vague on research methods, while practice theory provides ample research guidance which fits well with a pragmatic approach (see Adler and Pouliot 2011b). All of this has important implications for debates over the value of security, which I will now turn back to.

How can a pragmatic practice-centred approach help us move forwards?

A pragmatic, practice-centred approach can help us return to the original focus of critical security studies: the politics of security and life experiences of it. Existing approaches remain split over the value of security and the meaning or purpose of 'critical'/'Critical' research. Many reject the possibility for security to be ethically good, suggesting that it is too 'tainted' by its association with existing problematic national security practices and ontologies. Alongside this, a concern with power has led poststructuralist authors to focus on deconstruction over reconstruction, in return for which they are critiqued for lacking 'emancipatory impetus' (Hynek and Chandler 2013). However, pragmatism can help us recognise core concerns and help us move forward through three contributions. Firstly, it avoids foundational 'truth'; secondly, it presents a different way to think about ethics though a 'weak foundationalism' allowing for contingent ethical claims; and thirdly, it allows us to move forward with a practical research agenda. The rest of this chapter will expand on these contributions.

A pragmatic approach rejects the idea of foundational 'truth', and involves a recognition that nothing is ever definitively settled. Rather than being anti-foundationalist, Cochran suggests, a pragmatic approach can be seen as 'weak foundationalist', and leads to *contingent* ethical claims which are context-dependent, 'temporary and provisional' (Cochran 1999: 16). Based on this, Cochran has used pragmatism to build bridges in normative theorising within IR. She argues that for pragmatists, establishing 'truth' is not the same as for a positivist: it involves settling 'a controversial or complex issue for the time being, until something comes along to dislodge the

comfort and reassurance that has thereby been achieved, forcing inquiry to begin again' (Cochran 2002: 527, 1999). So, while progress is always provisional, 'it is not empty' (Cochran 2002: 528).

Such a 'weak foundationalist' approach helps us to move beyond debates over whether or not security is 'positive' or 'negative', as nothing is ever definitively settled. Though she doesn't use the terminology of pragmatism, Mustapha makes a similar argument in proposing a 'modified' poststructuralist approach to security based on weak foundationalism. As with an 'unsettled' pragmatic approach, this means that 'any ontological claims that are made must always be open to interrogation' (Mustapha 2013: 74-5). This allows us 'engage with the (contingent) "realities" of actual "security" problems' (Mustapha 2013: 77), and makes reconstruction possible even for most poststructuralists. Here, '(contingent) foundational claims are not static and are open to interrogation, but are necessary for politics and ethics. Security is a *practice/means* as well as an *end*' (Mustapha 2013: 82).

The weak foundationalism which underpins pragmatism emphasises the contingent nature of claims, and shows that security doesn't have to always be negative, but likewise, any 'ethical' or 'positive' notion of security should not be considered to be fixed or permanent. Instead, reflexivity is imperative, with continuous evaluation and re-evaluation of our claims. It also helps move past arguments by poststructuralist and Copenhagen School authors who suggest that the way in which security has traditionally been attached to problematic national security politics makes it 'tainted' by association. Instead, the meaning and value of security is not fixed and can change, and will never be settled. It also helps to avoid some of the controversial baggage of emancipatory approaches (Barkawi and Laffey 2006: 350).

It also helps us to move beyond debates over deconstruction/reconstruction and the meaning and purpose of critique: most importantly because it is inherently pluralist, and therefore argues that there is no one 'truth' and so no 'correct' approach to critique or ethics. Poststructuralist discomfort with going beyond critique and related concerns with power become less significant once we recognise this. Anti-foundationalists don't believe that there are secure foundations on which we can base ethics: a pragmatic approach helps us to recognise the lack of secure foundations and still move forward with reconstructive agendas. Ultimately, it allows for suggestions of alternatives based on experiences, while recognising that these alternatives will never be final. Consequently, although we can never reach 'emancipation' or 'security', we can instead focus on becoming *more* secure, given what we know about different conditions and contexts at any given time.

This moves us onto the second contribution a pragmatist approach can make: it provides us with a different way to think about ethics. As noted, Cochran makes a link between a pragmatic weak foundationalism and contingent ethical claims. Once we reject 'truth', it becomes clear that ethical claims, or the 'good', can never be settled but must rather be continually re-thought and improved upon. Thus, while we can draw ethical conclusions, these conclusions are 'no more than temporary resting places for ethical critique' (Cochran 1999: 17). Drawing on Brassett's work on pragmatism, we can suggest 'possibilities, while remaining sensitive to their limitations' (Brassett 2009a: 226). Once we drop the obsession with 'truth' and finding 'truth' in scholarly enquiry, 'the task becomes one of engaging in the trial and error process of suggesting possibilities...' (Brassett 2009a: 226). Drawing on Rorty, he argues that 'ethics is political – negotiated as a relational human construct – and politics is ethical: a process of contest that has direct ethical outcomes..': therefore, recognizing that there is no foundation 'does not mean dropping values, or the notion of progress' (Brassett 2009b: 282).

This helps us move past debates over the value of security by showing that it depends on the context. Thus, both sides of the debate are right: security can be problematic, but it can also be 'good': however, any notion of positive or 'good' security has to be continually interrogated. It also helps to reframe the debate over deconstruction/reconstruction, by shifting it towards

moving forward towards 'better' things rather than establishing abstract 'positive' alternatives. In the process, it emphasises the fact that all alternatives have limitations. The focus on experience, including alternative experiences, is central to pragmatism's contribution to debates over security ethics. Brassett makes a related argument drawing on Rorty, presenting a different view of ethics as grounded in experiences:

> we need to overcome the second view that effective resistance requires us to somehow 'distance' ourselves from power. This view that we can somehow practice critique from a standpoint that transcends questions of power and domination in Truth, the ideal speech situation, or some other idea(l) suggests that there are correct 'spaces' or 'practices' of resistance, be it democracy, the revolutionary working class or a post-national constellation (Brassett 2009a: 242)

Using pragmatic critique to forward ethical solutions can also draw on 'oppositional politics', that is, politics which involves alternative actors and/or is not linked to the state, as a way to explore potential alternatives and 'imaginative solutions' to existing problems (Cochran 1999: 279). This is particularly relevant for this debate: as I have argued elsewhere (Nyman 2014), while state security discourses are indeed often problematic, non-state actors often forward alternative notions of security which have more ethical potential.

So, given this, what guide to what is 'ethical' does pragmatism offer? While pragmatism is essentially a method or an approach, and this is how it is usually used by others, it does offer some guidance on ethics. Pierce's 1878 paper titled 'How to make our ideas clear', suggests that 'different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise' (Peirce 1997 [1878]: 33). Thought exists and is worthwhile if it produces action, and the '...purpose of action is to produce some sensible result': for Peirce, the only distinguishing factor between different thoughts it the extent to which they produce different forms of action or practice in tangible terms (Peirce 1997 [1878]: 35). When we think about a thing, all that matters is what that thing might do or lead to in practical terms: what sensations, habits or actions it will produce. So, only what security *does* in different situations matters. William James goes further to conceptualise truth as a type of good: 'the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons' (James 1907). Here, good ideas are ideas which 'are also helpful in life's practical struggles' (James 1907). Again, this relates back to how it will affect experiences and Dewey's claim that a focus on practice and individual experience is necessary for ethical enquiry. So to understand when security is good, either as a process or a state of being, we need to ask: what do various security practices *do*? How do they make people feel, what actions and habits do they produce, how do they affect life experiences? Do they produce sensible results, and results, actions, habits or feelings which help life's practical struggles? The answers to these questions will always be contingent, but a pragmatic contingent ethics does allow us to conceptualise when security is good or bad in a particular situation.

By allowing reflexive exploration of 'unsettled' alternatives in a way likely to be more acceptable to poststructuralist authors as it does not rely on a foundation of truth but rather on human experience, pragmatism also helps to move past discussions over what it means to do 'critical' research. Reflexivity and self-doubt can be used to rejuvenate 'ethics and ethical discourses' (Brassett 2009a: 226). To this effect, Brassett quotes Rorty's statement that we should '"regard the realization of utopias as an endless process...rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth" [1989: xvi]' (Brassett 2009b: 284-5): an argument also made about emancipation by Wyn Jones. Once we doubt the universality of our own notions of 'ethics' and the 'good', we become more sensitive 'to the (alternative modes of) suffering of others, [raising] curiosity about alternatives' (Brassett 2009a: 226).

Lastly, while recognising the unsettled nature of 'truth' and what this means for thinking about ethics and alternative futures, pragmatism also allows us to move forward with a practical

research agenda. As our knowledge cannot have secure foundations, the aim is simply to 'seek knowledge that will enable us to deal with relevant problems' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 726). Thus the focus turns to generating useful knowledge to understand how security works. By focusing on practice and human experience, to gain practical knowledge, a pragmatic approach switches the focus away from traditional debates to study experiences and practices of security in different empirical contexts. Thus, it shifts away from grand theorising towards 'mid-level' questions and puzzles (Haas and Haas 2002: 574). This is where 'abduction' comes in as a pragmatic research strategy: 'instead of trying to impose an abstract theoretical template (deduction) or "simply" inferring propositions from facts (induction), we start reasoning at an intermediate level (abduction)' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 709). Thus, rather than imposing universal notions of 'positive', 'good' security or emancipation, we can look at how security works in practice and when human beings experience it as a 'good' (and vice versa). As a result, rather than being crippled by dividing perspectives about the abstract potential of security to be 'good' or 'bad', we can move onto empirical research to analyse how it works in practice, to gain practically useful knowledge about the value of security.

Conclusions: Towards a pragmatic understanding of security ethics

A pragmatic, practice-centred approach can help us overcome existing divisions to allow productive engagement in the pursuit of a security studies and a security practice which is 'good'/better or more 'ethical'. It can help us gain practical knowledge of how security works, to understand the value of security better as well as help us to suggest alternative possibilities. This is not an argument for dismissing differences in approaches to ethics, but rather for re-engaging in debates over security ethics and what security *should* be about. Security is both a process/practice and a condition, and even as a condition it is never fully settled. While these two aspects of security inform the existing debates in different ways, they are difficult to separate. The way the debate is currently framed serves to underscore differences rather than consider shared commitments. To look at security ethics pragmatically, we should turn to practice, or human experience: to study how security is practiced and experienced by different people in different places, to generate useful knowledge to understand when security is 'good' and when it is problematic. Ultimately, pragmatism can enable productive engagement across theoretical borders in pursuit of common goal: the development of a security studies and security practice that takes questions of ethics seriously.

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