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Just to be sure? An analysis of security in relation to the values of well-being, freedom, and equality

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Abstract

Security is something that people tend to care about, both in their own individual lives and in politics. But is security also something that people *should* care about? When looking for answers to this question, we may think of political philosophy as a good place to start. Contemporary political philosophers, however, have in fact paid relatively little attention to the concept and value of security. This dissertation aims to expand our understanding of both. First, it develops a new conceptual framework of security. It suggests that security can be understood as a particular mode in which individuals can enjoy goods, whereby this mode entails a factual, a cognitive, and an emotional aspect. Next, this dissertation analyses how security relates to a number of key values for liberal democratic societies. The first of these values is well-being. It is argued that there are important ways in which security can contribute to somebody's well-being – but there are also a number of ways in which security may actually hamper a person's flourishing. The second value is freedom. It is shown that, although there is no *necessary* conflict between freedom and security in public decision-making, the two *may* indeed come at the each other's cost – yet there are also ways in which security and freedom can actually work to each other's benefit. The third value is equality. It is demonstrated that in order for a society to meet the demands of equality in the moral, economic, and political domain, it must provide its members with a particular set of securities – while at the same time the pursuit of equality puts another set of securities out of reach. Ultimately, this dissertation finds no reason for considering security to be an intrinsic value; to be good for its own sake. It shows that security *can*, however, have extrinsic value: it can be good for the sake of well-being, freedom, and equality. In a liberal democratic society, then, security may well be something for which we should strive – but not in security's own name; never 'just to be sure'.