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

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Chapter 3

Being Sure and Living Well: How Security Affects Human Flourishing

3. Being Sure and Living Well: How Security Affects Human Flourishing[12]

3.1. Security and well-being

Why do we consider a worker with a permanent contract to be better off than one on temporary hire? To some extent, this has to do with the symbolic value of a permanent contract: it serves as a sign of recognition and trust on the part of the employer vis-à-vis the employee. But most importantly, we consider such a contract to be more valuable because it gives the worker more security. And security, we feel intuitively, is good for people. This is not only true for security of bodily integrity, that is, security in the narrow sense of the word. It applies to security of all things that contribute to a person's well-being, such as her health, her income, or her relationship. But why exactly would *security* of something that contributes to a person's well-being, also *itself* contribute to her well-being? Are there ways in which security of a good might actually be bad for someone? Just how much security should we aim to create for ourselves? These are the questions that concern me here.

In a way, these are old and familiar issues. It seems plausible that human beings have always found their well-being importantly to hinge on their security of goods, be it at first perhaps only of food and the tools used to procure that food. Two great utilitarian thinkers already addressed the significance of security for people's well-being back in the nineteenth century. According to Jeremy Bentham (1843), 'we must consider that man is not like the animals, limited to the present, whether as respects suffering or enjoyment; but that he is susceptible of pains and pleasure by anticipation; and that it is not enough to secure him from actual loss, but it is necessary also to guarantee him, as far as possible, against future loss' (p. 110). John Stuart Mill (1871) described security as 'the most vital of all interests', stating that '[w]e depend on it for all our immunity from evil' and 'for the whole value of every single good that goes beyond the passing moment; because if we could be deprived of anything the next instant by

[12] An earlier version of this chapter has been published as an article in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* (Daemen, 2022a). In turning that article into this chapter, I have kept the adjustments to a necessary minimum: aside from minor cosmetic improvements, the only revisions that I have made to the paper are those that were strictly needed in order to attain maximal conceptual consistency across the chapters of this dissertation.

whoever was at that moment stronger than ourselves, nothing could be of any worth to us except the gratification of the instant' (p. 81).

Questions about security and well-being are clearly relevant in today's society as well. Around the world people currently are concerned about security of many different kinds of goods. Pandemics compromise security of our health and that of our loved ones, flexibilisation of labour makes job and income security less accessible for a large part of the workforce, and climate change leads many to worry about their future living environment. Nonetheless, thinkers in contemporary analytical political philosophy have paid rather little thematic attention to the topic of security. There are a couple of notable exceptions. Waldron (2003, 2006) has done useful exploratory groundwork on the concept and value of security. Wolff & De-Shalit (2007) have provided an illuminating account of the ways in which people are disadvantaged when their functionings are or become insecure. John (2011) has developed a stimulating argument for considering physical security a constituent of well-being. But the most important source to be acknowledged here is the work of Herington (2015, 2017, 2019). Particularly valuable is his analysis of the contribution that security makes to well-being, which he investigates from the perspectives of hedonistic, desire-fulfilment, and objective-list theories of well-being (2019).[13]

This chapter is an attempt to deepen our understanding of the ways in which security affects well-being. It adds something new to the existing literature in a number of ways. Firstly, it starts from an improved understanding of security, interpreting it as an integrated ideal encompassing a *factual aspect*, a *cognitive aspect*, and an *emotional aspect* (section 3.2). Secondly, different from the writings on the value of security mentioned above, this work relates security to the concept of *human flourishing*. This is a specific understanding of well-being (section 3.3). Thirdly, this study pays special attention to the importance of the connections between the factual aspect of security, the cognitive aspect of security, and the emotional aspect of security. When and why it matters whether the facts, our beliefs, and our emotional condition are in line with

[13] In addition to the works just mentioned, which are especially relevant for an inquiry about security and well-being, there are a number of writings in contemporary political philosophy that address security in relation to other topics, such as human rights (Binder & Binder, 2019; Shue, 1980; Wolfendale, 2017) and emergency politics (Floyd, 2019; Neocleous, 2007).

one another when it comes to security, becomes clear from the investigation of the ways in which security can make a *positive* contribution to our well-being (section 3.4). The last novelty of this chapter lies in its exploration of the question whether security might also impact our flourishing *negatively*. It is demonstrated that there are indeed ways in which security can also hamper our well-being sometimes (section 3.5). I conclude by reflecting on the question what we can learn from these findings in shaping our own lives and working towards a better society (section 3.6).

3.2. Security as sureness

What is security? At the most general level, security, as it is understood here, is a mode in which a *person* can enjoy a *good* (see Herington, 2017, p. 187; Waldron, 2006, p. 462).[14] But what exactly does this mode entail? In answering this question, it is common to distinguish between 'objective' and 'subjective' security, whereby the former refers to some fact about a person's enjoyment of a good, and the latter concerns her own experience of the matter.

Herington (2019), however, replaces this contrast by a more refined conceptual framework, comprising three different elements. Firstly, there is 'fact-relative security'. According to Herington, '[t]he fact-relative security of some prudential good *G* for an individual *S* at some time *t* is the *objective* probability that *S* will enjoy *G*, given the state of the world at *t*' (p. 183). It is the answer to the question: what is the *actual* chance that this person will enjoy this good? Fact-relative security refers purely to the actual state of the world; what a person thinks or feels about this is irrelevant. Secondly, there is 'belief-relative security'. On Herington's definition, '[t]he belief-relative security of some good *G* for an individual *S* at some time *t* is *S*'s *subjective* probability of enjoying *G*, given her beliefs at *t*' (ibid.). It is the answer to the question: how likely does this person *herself* think it is that she will enjoy this good? Belief-relative security refers purely to the actual beliefs of a person; whether these are justified or true does not matter. Thirdly, there is 'the affect of security' or 'affective security'. On Herington's view, '[t]he affect

[14] In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I speak of security as a mode in which *individuals* can enjoy goods; in the current chapter, I rather speak of security as a mode of enjoying goods for *persons*. This is because this chapter specifically looks at how security relates to well-being, a concept that is commonly treated as something pertaining to 'persons' rather than 'individuals'. Following Locke (1975), we can understand the term 'person' to refer to an individual with particular mental properties (p. 335).

of security is an emotional state of calm assurance' (p. 184). It is not by definition experienced in regard to a good and it is not necessarily attached to a certain belief or a certain state of the world; it is just a feeling.

The distinction that Herington introduces between the facts, our beliefs, and our feelings when it comes to security is of great value when we try to make sense of security and its effects on well-being. At the same time, the conceptual framework set out above can be improved in a number of ways, especially if we want to use it for the project of investigating how security affects well-being. Building on Herington's analysis, I therefore propose a new conceptual framework of security. In the most general wording, on my view, if a person has security of a good, this means that she 'is sure' of her future enjoyment of this good. This 'sureness', in turn, has what I call a 'factual aspect', a 'cognitive aspect', and an 'emotional aspect'. Together, these constitute an integrated concept that I name 'security as sureness'.

I define the three aspects of security as sureness as follows. The factual aspect of security, firstly, entails that given the state of the world right now, a person is *actually* bound to enjoy a good in the future. In short, security's factual aspect simply entails the fact that this person is bound to enjoy this good. The cognitive aspect of security, secondly, entails that because this person is aware of the relevant facts of the world currently, she also *believes* that she will enjoy this good in the future. Put differently, security's cognitive aspect entails an appropriate belief on the part of this person that she will enjoy this good. The emotional aspect of security, thirdly, entails that because this person is aware of the relevant facts of the world presently, she also has *no fear* that she will *not* enjoy this good. In other words, security's emotional aspect entails an appropriate absence of fear on the part of this person that she will not enjoy this good. Importantly, the fear at issue is not episodic but rather dispositional: it does not concern the experience of being afraid per se, but a *disposition* to feel fearful in relation to one's future enjoyment of a good. Security's emotional aspect, then, entails an appropriate absence of such a disposition.

In order to make clear what security as sureness entails exactly, a brief illustration may help. Think, for a moment, of a person who has a nice job that she would like to keep. In order for her to count as having security of her job, in the first place, it must be the case that her employer is in fact

planning to continue her employment, with the result that the employee is *actually* bound to still have her job in the future. In addition, it must be the case that the employee, because she is aware of her employer's intention of keeping her on, also *believes* that she will continue to enjoy her job. Finally, it must be the case that our employee, given her awareness of her employer's plans, also has *no fear* that she will lose her job: she is not disposed to feel afraid in relation to her employment situation.

My understanding of security departs from Herington's (2019) in a number of ways. Let me highlight the three most significant ones. Firstly, I define the factual aspect and the cognitive aspect of security in absolute rather than relative terms. Whereas Herington describes fact-relative and belief-relative security as the objective and subjective 'probability' that a person will enjoy a good (p. 183), I say that the factual aspect of security concerns the *flat-out fact* that a person is bound to enjoy a good, and that the cognitive aspect of security concerns the *flat-out belief* that a person will enjoy a good. Secondly, I define the emotional aspect of security in negative rather than positive terms. Whereas Herington describes affective security as the presence of 'an emotional state of calm assurance' (p. 184), I say that the emotional aspect of security concerns the *absence of fear* that one will not enjoy a good. Thirdly, I emphasise that security as sureness is one integrated ideal comprising three different aspects, rather than separating between fact-relative security, belief-relative security, and affective security as if they were three self-standing security concepts. When I call my concept of security 'integrated', I mean this in a double sense. In the first place, I stipulate that in order for a person to count as having security of a good, the factual aspect *and* the cognitive aspect *and* the emotional aspect have to obtain for her. In the second place, I stipulate that the fulfilment of the cognitive aspect and the fulfilment of the emotional aspect are connected to the fulfilment of the factual aspect in important ways: in order for the belief that one will enjoy a good to count as realising the cognitive aspect of security, and in order for the absence of fear that one will not enjoy a good to count as realising the emotional aspect of security, the belief and the emotional state at issue have to be based on an awareness of the facts – they have to be *appropriate*.[15]

[15] A more elaborate account of my conceptual framework of security and my reasons for departing from Herington's in the ways mentioned here is given in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Security as sureness should be distinguished from a number of other concepts. First of all, security is different from safety. Safety, as I understand it, is a narrower notion than security. It may be regarded as security of one particular kind of good: the basic good of being alive and unharmed.[16] Security is also not the same as unconditionality. A person can have security of a good – say, an income – even though she has to meet certain requirements in order to continue or come to enjoy this good – say, she has to work – provided that she is sure to meet these requirements.[17] Furthermore, security differs from control. We can very well have security of things that are not under our control. The weather, for instance, does not depend on our will, and still we can be quite sure to have nice weather in the weekend.[18] Security is also different from certainty. Someone can have or claim certainty of beliefs about various kinds of issues – from what is the speed of light to the reason why England lost the football cup final – but only certainty of beliefs about one's future well-being (insofar as such a thing can exist) is directly relevant for one's security.[19] Lastly, security should be distinguished from robustness. Robustness is about whether a person *would* enjoy a good – say, her friend's support – if circumstances were relevantly different than the way they actually are – say, if she were chronically ill. Security, on the other hand, concerns whether someone *will* actually enjoy a good as time goes by.[20] Of course, there are important connections between security and these other notions. At the same time, however, security is a distinct concept worth studying on its own.

[16] For an exploration of safety in relation to security, see the analysis of Waldron (2006). It is from this analysis that I have borrowed the definition of safety given here (p. 461).

[17] For an argument that does link (income) security to unconditionality, see the work of Standing (2008).

[18] For an analysis of the balance between luck and control in the good life, see the account of Nussbaum (2001).

[19] For a thorough study of the concept of certainty, see the analysis of Reed (2008). Note, however, that if we understand certainty as 'the highest form of knowledge' or indeed as 'the only epistemic property superior to knowledge' (two views mentioned by Reed), then we may debate about the question whether being 'certain' about the future even is conceptually possible. Also see footnote 11, chapter 2. I will leave this issue to one side here.

[20] For an extensive treatment of robustness and its relation to the good, see the account of Pettit (2015). The difference between security as it is understood here, and robustness as Pettit sees it, is also important for his republican theory of freedom. On this view, a person is free insofar as she enjoys non-interference across different possible *worlds* – that is, to the extent that her non-interference is *robust* (p. 3). This need not be the same as the degree to which she enjoys non-interference across different possible *futures* – that is, in how far her non-interference is *secure*.

3.3. Human flourishing

Before delving into the question of how security relates to well-being, let me explain how well-being is understood here. I adopt a concept of well-being that I refer to as 'human flourishing'. This term is sometimes used as a translation of Aristotle's (2000) notion of 'eudaimonia' specifically. Here, however, it is used as an objective concept of well-being more generally. It points us to what things in life have 'prudential value', that is, what things are 'good for' persons.

If we take well-being to consist in human flourishing, we adopt an objectivist theory of the good. Such a theory can be contrasted with two subjectivist theories of the good: hedonism, which takes a person's well-being to consist only in her experience of pleasure, and desire-fulfilment theory, which takes someone's well-being to consist exclusively in the satisfaction of her desires. Instead of providing a full-blown defence of human flourishing as an understanding of the good, let me just highlight two important shortcomings in the other two theories, which we can overcome if we adopt an objective concept of well-being. Hedonism implies that nothing can matter prudentially to a person but the quality of her experience (Arneson, 1999, p. 114). On this view, the life of a person who *really* makes a friend or writes a great novel is no better than the life of a person who has the mere *illusion* that she does so – the experience, after all, is the same for both (Nozick, 1974, p. 42). Many people find this unintuitive and therefore renounce the hedonistic understanding of well-being. Desire-fulfilment theory, at least on its simplest version, implies that the satisfaction of a person's desires is good for her regardless of the content of these desires. On this view, fulfilment of a person's desires is good for her even if these desires do not seem to regard her *own* life – think of a desire that distant strangers are adequately nourished – or if she has these desires only because she is *confused* – think of a desire to eat food that will actually make her sick (Arneson, 1999, p. 124). Again, many people find this not intuitive and therefore renounce the idea of well-being as desire-fulfilment.

An objectivist theory of the good does not suffer from these difficulties, because it does not make a person's well-being hinge entirely on her subjective experience or desires. Instead, it puts forward an objective list of the things that a good human life consists in – the things that make up human flourishing. Different philosophers have included different things in

this list. Placing themselves within an Aristotelian tradition of thinking about the good life, many thinkers thereby refer to the natural characteristics that humans have as the kind of beings that they are. Kraut (2007), for example, takes human flourishing to consist in the possession, development, and enjoyment of our physical, cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (pp. 136-137). Others focus on the things that people can obtain by putting these characteristics to use. Rasmussen (1999), for instance, mentions health, knowledge, achievement, pleasure, and friendship (p. 4). As these lists suggest, the experience of pleasure and the satisfaction of desires may very well contribute to people's flourishing – it is just not exhaustively made up of these things.

I will not spell out what I take human flourishing to consist in specifically here. Instead of starting from a particular list of items and figuring out how security relates to each of these, I will try and make intuitive what a flourishing human life looks like and how security fits into this picture as we go. A couple of points, however, need to be clarified in advance. From the viewpoint of human flourishing, something can be good for someone for two different reasons: either it forms a *component of* a flourishing human life, or it is an *instrument for* leading such a life. In the first case, it can be said to possess 'final' value; in the latter case, its value is merely 'instrumental' (Korsgaard, 1983, p. 170).[21] Whether one sees something as a component or rather as an instrument depends on the definition of human flourishing that one adopts. On Kraut's view, for instance, the use of my social skills would count as a component of my flourishing; Rasmussen, on the other hand, would see it an instrument for achieving a component of flourishing (friendship, for example).

It is important to note that when we consider a person's *security* of a *good*, there are two factors at issue that potentially affect this person's

[21] As Korsgaard (1983) points out, 'instrumental' values are often mistakenly contrasted with 'intrinsic' values (p. 170), a category that we encountered in chapter 1 of this dissertation. In fact, Korsgaard explains, there are two separate distinctions of values that should not be confused. The first is the distinction between ends and means: the distinction between 'final' and 'instrumental' values (ibid.). This is the distinction that I refer to in the present chapter, whereby I classify components of human flourishing as 'final' goods and instruments for human flourishing as 'instrumental' goods. The second distinction is that between things that have value in themselves and things that derive their value from some other source: the distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' values (ibid.). This is the distinction that was introduced in chapter 1, and that will concern me further in chapter 6, whereby I will distinguish between different kinds of extrinsic values, of which instrumental values form only one category.

flourishing. The first one is the good that this person has security of. Throughout this text, the noun 'good' is taken to refer to something that contributes to this person's well-being, in some way, at some point, either as a component of or an instrument for her flourishing. This definition is deliberately kept vague so that a variety of things that we might speak of as matters that we can have some degree of security of can fit under this heading – from concrete stuff like our bicycle or our eyesight, to more abstract goods such as our ability to move or our aesthetic pleasure. The second factor potentially affecting human flourishing that is implied when we consider a person's security of a good, is security itself. As was explained above, security comprises a fact, a belief, and an emotional condition. The main question of this chapter is whether and how these three things impact people's well-being, be it as components of or instruments for human flourishing. Let us turn to that question now.

3.4. What is good about security?

Why would it be good for a person to have security of a good? Remember that the ideal of security as sureness has three aspects: a factual aspect, a cognitive aspect, and an emotional aspect. Below, I investigate how each of these may contribute to human flourishing. I will thereby consider them one by one, but also indicate when and why it matters that the fulfilment of a certain aspect of security is connected to the fulfilment of another aspect of security in order for the benefits of security to obtain.

Firstly, consider the factual aspect of security. Recall that when a person has security of a good, security's factual aspect entails that given the state of the world at present, this person is *actually* bound to enjoy this good in the future. Also remember that the good the security of which is at issue must be something that somehow, sometime, contributes to this person's well-being, as a component of or an instrument for her flourishing. Let us take some nice house to live in as an example. When a person has security of this house at some point, the factual aspect of security entails that she will in principle continue or come to enjoy this house at a later point. Generally, her well-being will be positively affected by this *at that later point in time*. It must be noted, however, that it really is *the house* that makes a contribution to this person's flourishing here, rather than the factual aspect of her security of this house. Hence, the contribution at issue only obtains when the house

actually stays or becomes present in this person's life, not at the point when she just has security of it. Strictly speaking, the factual aspect of a person's security of a good therefore does not itself contribute to her flourishing. In other words, the mere fact that we are bound to enjoy a good tomorrow, does not make us any better off today.[22] Still, it is important to recognise the role of the factual aspect of security in supporting our well-being over time: if the factual aspect of security obtains for us now, this generally means that we will flourish later. Indeed, it is this aspect of security that we normally consider the most significant: we primarily care about security of, say, our house, not because of the contribution that this security makes to our current well-being, but because of the contribution that this house will make to our future well-being.

Secondly, consider the cognitive aspect of security. Remember that when a person has security of a good, security's cognitive aspect entails that because this person is aware of the relevant facts of the world at present, she also *believes* that she will enjoy this good in the future. Shortly, I will explain in what way such a belief can contribute to human flourishing. But first, let me consider and refute an argument for the prudential value of the cognitive aspect of security developed by Herington (2019). He suggests that belief-relative security contributes to our well-being because we need it in order to make rational plans. Before I go on to challenge this view, a few words on the role that planning can be seen to play in a flourishing life. As mentioned before, many philosophers take the possession and exercise of the core human properties to be crucial for human flourishing. From an Aristotelian viewpoint, one of the essential human properties is that of practical rationality (Hurka, 1993). Making rational plans, in turn, is one of the central activities in which we put this property to practice. And for this activity, Herington (2019) argues, belief-relative security is critical.

The argument is as follows. For plans to be rational, they must be means-end coherent. Bratman (2009) explains it this way: 'The following is always pro tanto irrational: intending E while believing that a necessary means to E is M and that M requires that one now intend M, and yet not now intending M' (p. 413). Now, Herington (2019) argues that '[i]n order to make

[22] This view has been contested by John (2011), who argues that physical security, objectively defined, is indeed a constituent of well-being. However, this argument has convincingly been refuted by Herington (2019, pp. 194-198).

means-end coherent plans, we must believe (or presuppose) that we will possess all of the necessary means to realizing those plans' (p. 198). He appeals to the example of someone who believes that she will likely die from a congenital heart defect soon, and therefore is unable to make complex rational plans for the future. He concludes that we need belief-relative security, at least of our vital needs, in order to function as rational planners.

On closer inspection, however, this argument does not hold. Plans are different from fantasies in the sense that plans are actually intended to be carried out. Still, plans can and often do take a conditional form. Just like I could say: 'later, I am going to start a family', I could say: 'if I find a caring partner, I am going to start a family'. That my plan to start a family is conditional on my finding a partner does not make it any less of a plan, and it does not make my plan irrational in any way. In order to make the plan to start a family, then, I do not need to believe that I will find a partner – that is, I do not need security of partnership. I do, however, need to *not* believe that I will *not* find a partner, otherwise my plan to start a family would indeed be means-end incoherent; irrational; fantastical. Similarly, in order to make complex rational plans for the future, the person who worries about her heart condition in Herington's example does not need to believe that she will definitely live – that is, she does not need security of her vital needs. She just needs to *not* believe that she will definitely die. In line with this, Bratman (1999) writes that 'there need be *no* irrationality in intending to A and yet still not believing one will', but 'there *will* normally be irrationality in intending to A and believing one will *not* A' (p. 38, emphasis mine). Thus we do not need the cognitive aspect of security in order to function as rational planners.

Nonetheless, the cognitive aspect of security can contribute to human flourishing in a different way. In their study of 'disadvantage', Wolff & De-Shalit (2007) describe several manners in which people are *inhibited* in their flourishing when their functionings are or become *in*secure. When a person believes her functionings to be insecure, they point out, she tends to take actions to evade or brace herself for potential blows, and these actions are often costly in themselves. They mention the example of someone who 'fears being attacked on the street, and so has insecure bodily integrity', and therefore chooses 'always to travel by taxi, and suffer the financial costs, or simply not go out, and lose many opportunities as a result' (p. 68). If a person

has security of a good, on the other hand, she does not need to spend her energy, time, and money on preventing or preparing herself for scenarios in which she does not enjoy the good. Therefore, she can achieve more well-being in the present. At the same time, she can make sure that she is all set up to derive the maximum benefit from the good that awaits her. For instance, if someone is sure in advance that she will get a job in a different part of the country, she can arrange a nice place to live there at an early stage and thus get a head start when she takes up her new position. As a result, she can achieve more well-being in the future as well. Thus we can see that security can deliver an efficiency benefit that helps one to live a more flourishing life both in the present and in the future.

Although it is the cognitive aspect of security that does the main work here – it is because a person *believes* that she will enjoy a good that she forgoes costly precautionary measures now, and sets herself up for full enjoyment of the good later – this benefit importantly depends on the connection between the cognitive aspect of security and the factual aspect of security. To put it more concretely, in order for someone to reap the full efficiency benefit of her security of some good, it is important that her belief that she will enjoy this good is also backed up by the facts. After all, if someone is *in fact* bound to enjoy some good, then the belief that she will enjoy it can indeed help her to pursue her well-being in an efficient way. But if she is actually *not* bound to enjoy this good, then she better prepare for the scenario that she not enjoy it. In that case, allocating resources to this scenario may not be a waste at all, but may in fact be necessary for doing well in the future. Suppose that someone believes that she will always enjoy perfect health, and therefore does not purchase any health insurance. If, against her optimistic expectations, at some point she does fall ill, and then cannot afford the costs of treatment, these expectations did not make her better off after all. Thus the efficiency benefit of the cognitive aspect of security is importantly related to the fulfilment of security's factual aspect.[23]

[23] It must be noted that the belief that one will enjoy a good *can* also yield an efficiency benefit if it is *not* backed up by the facts. This is the case when the costs that one is bound to face when one does not anticipate some harm (say, the costs of medical treatment) are less than the costs of the precautions that one would have taken had one anticipated this harm (the costs of health insurance). However, the efficiency benefit will of course be higher if one is bound not to suffer this harm at all. I therefore say that security's efficiency benefit only obtains *fully* if the belief that one will enjoy a good is backed up by the facts.

Now we can see why it matters that I have characterised security's cognitive aspect as involving a belief that is based on an awareness of the relevant facts of the world; as a belief that is *appropriate*. By connecting the cognitive aspect of security to the factual aspect of security in this way, I have ensured that the cognitive aspect of security does come attached with the full efficiency benefit as described above.

There is an additional reason to think that human flourishing is better served by a belief that one will enjoy a good if that belief is backed up by the facts, which has to do with the particular character of this understanding of well-being. As noted before, human flourishing is not a purely subjective notion of the good: on this understanding, what matters for someone's well-being is not only whether she *experiences* the world in a certain way – whether she *thinks* that she has made a friend or written a great novel – but also whether that experience *matches reality* – whether the friendship is *in fact* mutual and the novel is *actually* great. In similar vein, it seems that it matters whether the belief that one will enjoy a good aligns with the facts. Not just because the efficiency benefit that comes attached with the cognitive aspect of security can only be reaped fully when the belief that one will enjoy a good is backed up by the facts, but also because a fitting belief about one's personal condition has more prudential value than an unfitting one. Someone who rightly believes that she will later enjoy good health, from this point of view, is currently better off than someone who falsely believes so, even if neither of them acts on her belief in a way that delivers her an efficiency benefit. Again, it turns out to be significant that I have described the cognitive aspect of security as an *appropriate* belief that one will enjoy a good in the future, thereby linking the cognitive aspect of security to the factual aspect of security. The cognitive aspect of security, as I have defined it, can thus be seen to be prudentially valuable in all of the ways just described.

Thirdly, consider the emotional aspect of security. Recall that when a person has security of a good, security's emotional aspect entails that because this person is aware of the relevant facts of the world at present, she also has *no fear* that she will not enjoy this good in the future. As I pointed out earlier, the fear under consideration is of a dispositional kind: it does not involve the experience of being afraid per se, but a disposition to feel fearful in relation to one's future enjoyment of this good. Obviously, when such a

feeling is triggered, it is generally experienced as a negative emotion. Think of the dread that we would feel at the thought of losing our house, or our job, or a sick family member. If a disposition to experience such a fearful feeling is frequently or constantly triggered, then this can also put us in a generalised state of stress and anxiety that makes us suffer in a more indirect way: by constraining our enjoyment of the physical and psychological capacities that we have as human beings. Wolff & De-Shalit (2007) point out that stress and anxiety resulting from the perception that we are at risk may hamper our bodily as well as mental health, and our ability to play and to plan (pp. 68-69). Nussbaum (2006) suggests that fear and anxiety can stand in the way of our emotional development (p. 77). Psychologists have long established connections between (prolonged) feelings of insecurity and stress on the one hand, and psychosomatic complaints and physical strains on the other (De Witte, 1999; Schneiderman et al., 2005). Probably, many of us can relate to this on a personal level as well: feelings of stress and anxiety connected to the future of our health, finances, social relationships, or other key goods, can gravely inhibit us in our normal functioning, by causing us difficulties to sleep, concentrate, and relax. If we have security of a good, by contrast, the emotional aspect of security entails that we do *not* have a disposition to experience such negative feelings in relation to our future enjoyment of this good. It can therefore be seen to fulfil a crucial function in our flourishing – not so much as itself a source of pleasure, but rather as a condition indirectly supporting various aspects of our well-being.

Does the benefit of the emotional aspect of security, just like the benefit of the cognitive aspect of security, significantly hinge on the fulfilment of the factual aspect of security? In other words, is it important that a lack of fear that one will not enjoy a good is also backed up by the facts? On the one hand, it may seem that this is not the case. It could be argued, after all, that it is good for us not to be disposed to suffer from fearful feelings in the ways specified above even if harm is in fact impending. Even if, say, we are about to be robbed of our wallet, perhaps it is good for us not to be afraid when it happens: because fear is unpleasant in itself, and because feeling fearful might actually undermine our ability to function properly both before and during the robbery (Herington, 2019, p. 187). On the other hand, there are reasons to think that the extent to which it is good for us to be without

fear depends greatly to the extent to which this emotional condition fits with our factual condition.

For a start, it seems that a fear that we will not enjoy a good can actually have a function in making our mind and body alert to dangers that we face to our enjoyment of this good, which in turn enables us to react to them timely and appropriately when they materialize (again, see the psychological research by Schneiderman et al., 2005). Not being disposed to experience any fearful feelings with regard to our future enjoyment of a good may therefore work out badly for us if we do in fact have good reason to be fearful in this regard. In the above example, having no fear as to our future enjoyment of our wallet might actually inhibit us from running away fast enough or screaming loud enough when the robber appears. Thus the benefit of the emotional aspect of security as just described *does* importantly depend on the fulfilment of the factual aspect of security.[24] This underlines the significance of my characterisation of the emotional aspect of security as an *appropriate* absence of fear that one will not enjoy a good. Aristotle (2000), too, often underlines the importance of emotions being 'appropriate'. Whereas the Stoics considered emotions such as fear and anger always inappropriate, as Kraut (2018) points out, Aristotle thought 'not simply that these common passions are sometimes appropriate, but that it is essential that every human being learn how to master them and experience them in the right way at the right times' (§ 5.1).

One additional and related reason for thinking that an absence of fear that one will not enjoy a good is more valuable if the factual aspect of security is fulfilled as well, takes us back once more to the particular character of human flourishing as an understanding of well-being. Remember that on this view, it is not only our experience that determines our good, but also the match between our experience and reality. A friendship that is *truly* mutual has more prudential value than a friendship that only *appears* mutual to a person. Similarly, we may say that being *rightfully* free from fear that one

[24] Note that there *can* also be advantage to a lack of fear if it is *not* backed up by the facts. This applies when the costs that come attached with inappropriately lacking fear that one will not enjoy a good (the costs of not being sharp in the face of danger) are less than the costs that come attached with fearing that one will not enjoy this good (the cost of great stress and anxiety). However, the benefit of not fearing that one will not enjoy a good will of course be higher if one really is bound to enjoy this good. Making a point similar to the one made in footnote 23 about the cognitive aspect of security, I therefore say that the benefit of the emotional aspect of security described here only obtains *fully* if the factual aspect of security is fulfilled as well.

will not enjoy a good is more valuable than a state of 'blissful ignorance' regarding the fact that one's enjoyment of this good is actually on the line. In more than one way, then, the prudential value of the emotional aspect of security hinges on my stipulation that the absence of fear which this aspect concerns is *appropriate*.

Before closing, let me add one more point.[25] This chapter analyses the ways in which people's security impacts their well-being without differentiating between the various goods that they can have (or lack) security of, or the various sources of their (in)security. But there is good reason to think that these factors do mediate the ways in which security affects well-being. People's security of basic needs fulfilment probably makes a greater contribution to their flourishing than their security of less vital goods. And insecurity that obtains structurally – think of the higher risk of violence faced by members of discriminated groups – is likely to reduce people's flourishing more than insecurity that is rather incidental – think of the fear of someone who finds himself in a dark alley just once. These issues deserve more attention than they can be given here. One account that illuminates both of them is that of Wolfendale (2017). She proposes to incorporate into the right to security not only the usual requirement of basic physical safety, but also a demand for 'moral security': that everyone *believes* that her basic interests and welfare will be accorded moral recognition by society, and that society *actually* regards everyone's interests and welfare as morally important (p. 238). Presumably, there exists not only a case for including this particular type of security among our basic human rights, but also for taking it to be of special importance for human flourishing.

All in all, we may safely conclude that security can make significant contributions to human flourishing. The factual aspect of security generally means good news for our flourishing in the future; the cognitive aspect of security enables us to be more efficient in our pursuit of well-being; the emotional aspect of security supports our enjoyment of many of our human capacities. Furthermore, we can conclude that it matters a great deal whether or not the facts, our beliefs, and our emotional condition are aligned with one another when it comes to security. Firstly, if a person is actually bound to enjoy a good but she is not aware of the fact, strictly speaking this

[25] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers from *The Journal of Value Inquiry* for raising this point and coming up with the example mentioned here.

fact itself does not even contribute to her well-being. Secondly, if a person believes that she will enjoy a good but the factual aspect of security is not fulfilled, then this can actually stand in the way of efficient preparation for the future. Thirdly, if a person has no fear that she will not enjoy a good but this emotional condition is not backed up by the facts, this may indeed detract from the sharpness that she might need in order to deal with an impending harm. Finally, from the viewpoint of human flourishing, it matters in itself that our beliefs and emotional conditions are appropriate to the facts that we find ourselves in. When it comes to its contribution to our flourishing, the integrated ideal of security as sureness thus turns out to be more than the sum of its parts.

3.5. What is bad about security?

Might there also be ways in which it is not good for a person to have security of a good? Let me now explore for each of the three aspects of security whether they can also hamper human flourishing.

Firstly, consider the factual aspect of security again. Can it ever be bad for a person if she is bound to enjoy a good? At first sight, this seems an absurd question. We already learned that strictly speaking, the factual aspect of security does not itself make a contribution to well-being. Instead, the contribution comes from the good the security of which is at issue. By calling this thing a 'good', we assumed that it is something that contributes to this person's well-being, in some way, at some point, either as a component of or an instrument for her flourishing. Therefore, it seems that by definition, the factual aspect of a person's security of a good cannot be bad for this person. On closer inspection, however, there actually is a way in which it can turn out badly for someone if she is bound to enjoy a good. This is when the good at issue might be good for her at a certain moment in time, but will be bad for her later.

Consider the following example. During my time as a student, I lived in a house together with twelve other students, with whom I had dinner every night, drinks every week, and a party every month. It was great fun, and I cannot imagine any other living situation that would have contributed more to my flourishing back then. Yet, it would not be good for me to still be living at that place right now. Indeed, it would have been bad for me if I had been bound to live there after I graduated. For one thing, having my own

apartment is a far better fit with my present occupations, and communal living would actually inhibit my well-being presently. For another thing, I consider my life enriched by having experienced different living situations, and I would not have achieved such diversity in my life experience if I were still living in my student flatshare. The general point is this: something that is good for a person at some point need not be good for her forever. Therefore, we could say that the factual aspect of a person's security of a good can, paradoxically, turn out badly for this person – although again, it must be noted that the negative effect on her well-being actually comes from the good in question, and only occurs as soon as this good stays or becomes present in her life when it is no longer good for her. Against this view one might raise two points, which are semantic but important.

For a start, it might be said that even if the factual aspect of security of a good obtains for a person, she can still opt not to enjoy this good, and therefore it seems that security's factual aspect cannot inhibit flourishing. Applied to the above example, the thought is that having security of my flatshare would not prevent me from deciding to move out. However, as long as it is true that I have security of my house, it must necessarily be the case that I have not (yet) decided to move out – for if I had decided to move out, I would no longer be bound to continue living there, and I would thereby have cancelled the factual aspect of my security of the house. Only if the good in question were the *option* of living in that house, would it be true that the factual aspect of my security of this good would not exclude the possibility of me moving out.

Relatedly, one might say that we should be stricter in our use of the word 'good'. Arguably, the word 'good' should be reserved for things that are good for people *at the point that they have them*. In the example mentioned above, this would mean that my flatshare would simply lose its status of 'good' for me when what was at issue was my potential enjoyment of the house after my graduation; perhaps this status would then be passed on to the *option* for me to live there. Of course, we could agree to use the word 'good' only in this stricter sense, and thereby make it by definition impossible for the factual aspect of a person's security of a good to turn out badly for this person. The basic point, however, still holds true: if a person has security of things that contribute to her well-being at one point in time,

the factual aspect of this security can indeed turn out disadvantageous for this person at a later point in time.

Secondly, let us revisit the cognitive aspect of security. Can it ever be bad for a person to believe that she will enjoy a good? One type of case was already discussed in the previous section: one believes that one will enjoy a good, but unrightfully so. We saw that this could indeed be bad for a person because it could hinder her in preparing herself for what will come. Here I focus on cases in which a person believes that she will enjoy a good, and this belief is also appropriate. Can that ever be bad? My thesis is that it can. Go back to the moment when you found out that you got accepted to graduate school, or got hired at your job. Would that moment have been just as valuable to you if you were already sure of the happy news beforehand? I think most of us would answer 'no'. Now remember a moment in your life when you were expecting one thing to come your way, but what you got was something completely different, which actually turned out great for you – perhaps a new hobby or haircut that was very different from what you planned for. Would you have preferred to have expected it beforehand? Likely the answer again is 'no'. Larmore (1999) captures these intuitions in his insight that 'being surprised by a good of which we had no inkling is itself an invaluable element of what makes life worth living' (p. 99). In a sense, living your life is like reading a book: a big part of the joy lies in not foreseeing what will happen next. Indeed, if the whole plot develops exactly according to your expectations, you might not even consider the story worth reading. For Larmore, this is one of the reasons to oppose an idea found in western political philosophy from Socrates to Rawls, namely that the good life is a life lived according to a rational plan. In the present context, it is a reason to think that the cognitive aspect of security can indeed sometimes impede human flourishing.

Thirdly, we go back to the emotional aspect of security. Can it ever be bad for a person to be without fear that she will not enjoy a good? We already learned that an absence of such fear may be bad when it is not backed up by the facts. Again, let us put such cases aside and think for now of a person who is rightfully free from fear that she will not enjoy a good. My thesis is that even this can sometimes be bad. Remember that the kind of fear under consideration concerns a disposition to feel fearful with regard to one's future enjoyment of a good. Of course, feelings of fear are mostly

experienced as unpleasant sensations. Yet, sometimes they can be enjoyable as well. People with risky hobbies such as climbing mountains or lighting fireworks will readily confirm this. But also those who do not actively seek risks will admit that a certain level of fear can be pleasurable in some circumstances – when you pick up the phone to hear the result from a job interview, or right before you profess your love to someone. And one need not be a hedonist to acknowledge the prudential value of such feelings: as noted before, pleasure may well be part of what constitutes a flourishing human life, even though such a life requires more than pleasure alone. Now, if we have security of a good, then the emotional aspect of security entails that we are not disposed to experience *negative* feelings of fear with regard to our future enjoyment of this good – but it also entails that we are not disposed to experience *positive* variants of fearfulness in relation to our future enjoyment of this good. We will not feel a tingle in our stomach before hearing whether we got the job, or making our romantic gesture. By robbing us of enjoyable fears, I conclude, the emotional aspect of security, just like the other two aspects of security, can indeed sometimes hamper our flourishing.

One final point should be noted.[26] Aside from the specific ways in which security can hamper a person's well-being analysed above, an abundance of sureness in any of its aspects might also inhibit a flourishing human life in a more general manner. This has to do with the fact that a good life is not the same as a life that is continuously smooth, easy, and painless. Facing and overcoming difficulty may indeed be crucial for developing the practical and rational abilities that we need in order to assume some kind of agency over our lives, and may well be essential to the good of achievement (see Bradford, 2015). Insecurity – be it in a factual sense, a cognitive sense, or an emotional sense – could be a source or manifestation of such difficulty, opening up chances for fostering resilience and individual growing. Absolute and permanent security in too many aspects of our lives, on the other hand, would indeed obstruct these elements of flourishing.

All in all, we can conclude that security is not always and only good for people. Indeed, the fact that one is bound to enjoy a good can turn out badly for a person. The belief that one will enjoy a good, too, can inhibit one's

[26] Again, I thank one of the anonymous reviewers from *The Journal of Value Inquiry* for making me aware of this point.

flourishing, as can an absence of fear that one will not enjoy a good – and this applies even if the belief and the emotional condition at issue are backed up by the facts. These findings are far from trivial. They teach us that it would not be wise to 'lock ourselves in' by securing forever what is good for us now, leaving nothing to be surprised by, nothing to be scared of. Also, there is good reason to think that even if we wanted to create such complete security, we could not achieve it anyway. Some philosophers have argued that however much we would like to foresee or control our future, many of the good things in life simply cannot be predicted or managed like that. Paul (2014), for one, points out that for a lot of big life choices we cannot know beforehand how they will turn out for us in the end – think, for instance, of the decision to have children, or the decision to convert to a certain religion. Nussbaum (2001), furthermore, draws attention to the elements of life that seem indispensable for the goodness of it, but are not entirely under the control of the agent living it – examples here include love and friendship with others. Although these thinkers focus on the lack of *control* that we have with respect to matters such as these, it may also be argued that it is impossible for human beings to have *security* in the areas at issue. However, such an argument should be distinguished from the thesis defended here: regardless of whether it is *possible* for people to have security of goods, it is sometimes even *bad* for them to have it.

3.6. Striking a balance

This analysis has shown that there are multiple ways in which security can contribute to our well-being: if we are in fact bound to enjoy a good, in principle this is advantageous for our flourishing in the future; if we also believe that we will enjoy this good, we can be more efficient in the pursuit of our well-being; if we also have no fear that we will not enjoy this good, this supports our enjoyment of our physical and mental capacities. For some of these benefits to obtain fully, it is important that our beliefs and our emotional condition align with the facts. From the viewpoint of human flourishing, this also matters because *appropriate* beliefs and emotions can be seen to have more prudential value than inappropriate ones, regardless of the consequences that these beliefs and emotions may have. Mirroring the upsides of security, finally, there are also ways in which security can impact our flourishing negatively on occasion: it can stand in the way of the change,

surprise, and pleasurable fear that are sometimes required for a good life too.

So what does a flourishing human life look like in terms of security? This research suggests that it has neither too little, nor too much security: one must be sure in a number of aspects of one's life, but not in all. There is a balance to be struck. Probably, the ideal level of security differs per person. Some people are like Hobbes, who claimed to have been born with fear as his twin (Hobbes, 1680, p. 2), and took 'the object of mans desire' to be 'not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire' (Hobbes, 1996, p. 70). Others are more like Nietzsche, who insisted that 'the secret to harvesting the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from existence is to *live dangerously*' (Nietzsche, 2018, p. 283). Presumably, in order to live your best possible life, you need a little bit of both.

To some readers, this conclusion may sound rather anticlimactic. Those who had hoped that the foregoing analysis would yield a straightforward checklist for determining when exactly security is good for us and when it is not, or a set of concrete instructions for balancing security and insecurity in the good life, will probably be a bit disappointed. I believe, however, that it would be deceiving to suggest that we could devise such general guidelines when it comes to being sure and living well. The Aristotelian tradition of practical wisdom teaches us that prudential judgment is indispensable in determining the right course of action in every case, and to me it seems that this lesson also applies in matters concerning the relationship between security and human flourishing. Borrowing the words of Kraut (2018), I say that we cannot expect to be able to make the right decision on each occasion 'solely by learning general rules': '[w]e must also 'acquire, through practice, those deliberative, emotional, and social skills that enable us to put our general understanding of well-being into practice in ways that are suitable to each occasion' (§ 0).

Does this analysis also have political implications? More specifically, does it imply that the state ought to create particular forms of security for its citizens? Not directly. For one thing, if we wanted to make such an argument based on the value of well-being, then we would need not just an analysis of the ways in which security affects people's flourishing, but also answers to the questions what particular goods it would be important for people to have

security *of*, and what sources it would be best for them to derive security *from*. Only if we managed to identify a specific list of goods the security of which people need in order to lead good lives, *and* the security of which can best be provided by the state, would such an argument be complete. For another thing, if we wanted an argument for state provision of securities to inform the politics of contemporary liberal democracies, then we would be wise to also take into account considerations other than well-being. After all, striving for security by the state is often not without its costs and dangers. As many scholars have pointed out (see, for example, Neocleous, 2007; Waldron, 2003), and as has become clear for example from the ways in which governments have responded to the threats of terrorism and the COVID-19 pandemic, the state's aiming for security in practice often comes at the cost of people's freedom. And the restrictions of civil liberties that may form part of the state's security policies may in turn end up undermining citizens' security. These issues will be examined in depth in the next chapter.

Finally, when considering if we should ask the state to relieve us from nagging insecurities, we should also remember that a world with only absolute securities would not be good for us either. As the current chapter has argued, a flourishing human life is also a diverse life, with occasional plot twists and a decent portion of suspense – be it with a solid foundation of securities to build on.