Resilience and the Autotelic Subject: Toward a Critique of the Societalization of Security

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In discourses of resilience, there is a clear assumption that governments need to assume a more proactive engagement with society. This proactive engagement is understood to be preventive, not in the sense of preventing future disaster or catastrophe but in preventing the disruptive or destabilizing effects of such an event. In this sense, the key to security programs of resilience is the coping capacities of citizens, the ability of citizens to respond, or adapt, to security crises. The subject or agent of security thereby shifts from the state to society and to the individuals constitutive of it. In many ways, this shift away from a sovereign-based understanding to a social or societal understanding of security, under the guidance or goal of resilience, could be understood as a deliberating discourse, one which divests security responsibilities from the level of the state down to the level of the citizen. This article seeks to consider some of the genealogical aspects of discourses of resilience as a societal or agent-based understanding of security (particularly focusing on the work of Friedrich von Hayek and Anthony Giddens) in order to work through some of the consequences of the state’s divestment of security responsibilities for traditional liberal framings of state–society relations.

Today, there is little doubting the centrality of discourses of resilience to academic and policy framings of international security, covering practically the entire spectrum of threats—from terrorist attack to financial crisis, climate change, and state failure. Critical engagements with security discourses of resilience often couch this concept within examinations of the liberal drive to secure life, based on the foundational “liberal commitment to making life live” (Dillon and Reid 2009:11; see also Dillon 2007a,b; Duffield 2007, 2011a; Zebrowski 2009; Evans 2013). In this framing, life—as understood by the biological and information sciences—is to be best secured through its “capacities for adaptation, emergence, learning, information flows and resilience” (Reid 2010:397). For Dillon and Reid this biopoliticized understanding of security reduces “the human to the biohuman, based on an understanding and promotion of its powers of adaptation, learning, co-evolution and information-sharing” (2009:146). This article seeks to engage further with the understanding of resilience as driven by the bio- and life sciences and imbricated within biopolitical discourses of securing life.

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1This understanding of liberal security discourses as securing life rather than territory derives from Michel Foucault’s (1981:135–145) juxtaposition of sovereign power vis-à-vis biopower (see also Foucault 2003:239–263), though work on the biopolitical shift away from sovereign-based, territorial framings of security to societal understandings and the concern with life itself has also been informed by the work of Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt (see, for example, Doucet and de Larrinaga 2011; Owens 2011).
In doing so, I wish to highlight the importance of the societal rather than the sometimes abstract and essentializing conception of “securing life” driven by some neo-Foucauldian understandings of the biopolitical. In this sense, I think that rather than understanding current resilience discourses as extending liberal rule through the securing of life itself, it is more useful to consider the erosion of traditional liberal understandings of state–society relations through a focus on how security has become societalized. I wish to argue that the societalization of security removes the liberal political content of security practices—the articulation of political communities of action, shaped around a clash of competing interests (see Walker 1997), in effect reducing the problematic of security to the generic or “everyday” problems of individual behavior and practices, and the institutional milieu (cultural and social values, identities, power asymmetries, and information flows) which shapes these. As Foucault indicates, this shift away from sovereign and disciplinary power constitutes “the population as a political problem” and, within this, focuses on the real lives of individuals and communities “and their environment, the milieu in which they live . . . to the extent that it is not a natural environment, that it has been created by the population and therefore has effects on that population” (2003:245). It is this “milieu” which accounts “for action at a distance of one body on another” and thereby “appears as a field of intervention” (Foucault 2007:20–21). In this framework, governance operates indirectly, through work on the informal level of societal life itself, rather than through the formal framework of public law in relation to individuals as citizens; “action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players” (Foucault 2008:260).

In focusing on the deliberalizing of security—in its reduction in everyday behavior and practices through the societalization of security—I wish to develop some of the themes touched upon in work highlighting the links between discourses of resilience and the shift from a state-based to a society-based understanding of security practices (Edwards 2009; Briggs 2010; Bulley 2011; Duffield 2011b). These works implicitly question whether security can be analytically distinguished from other spheres of policymaking once resilience policies and practices shift the focus of security from state interests and capacities to the citizenry’s capacity for reasoned behavioral choices. Fillipa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose, for example, in their critique of understandings that security discourses seem to be leading to the securitization of life, observe that we are witnessing “perhaps the opposite of a ‘Big Brother State’” (Lentzos and Rose 2009:243). Discourses of resilience do not centrally focus upon material attributes (military equipment, technology, welfare provisions, etc.) that can be provided by governments as a way of protecting populations or responding after an event. Resilience concerns attributes of the population, both as individuals and communities, which cannot be directly provided by state authorities. For this reason, discourses of resilience do not fit well with traditional liberal framings of security practices as state-centric, national or territorial forms of mobilization, protection, or regulation.2

As Brassett and Vaughan-Williams (2011) note in their study of UK civil contingencies and trauma resilience training, the focus of resilience practices is less upon the specific threat or “event” (which can be prepared for, or reacted to) and more upon the effects of a crisis or disaster at the level of the individual subject. Here, the discussion of trauma is particularly useful as the resilience discourse encourages a shift from post hoc programs of trauma counseling to the inculcation of mental or subjective capacities to respond to crises without becoming traumatized (see also Furedi 2007; O’Malley 2010). In this context,

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2Resilience, as a concept, lacks clear theorization; this article seeks to contribute to a project of clarification, highlighting its sphere of operation outside the purview of liberal rationalist assumptions.
the problematic of the inculcation of societal resilience, of the subjective capabilities and capacities needed to respond and adapt to crises, has become a growing focus of governmental concern (see, for example, Coaffee, Wood and Rogers 2009; UK Cabinet Office 2011a,b; Walker and Cooper 2011).

It appears that resilience practices are transforming security discourses from concerns with external threats to fears over the domestic or internal coping and adaptive capacities of individuals and their communities. Coping and adaptive capacities are inner qualities possessed by individuals, which are held to enable them to autonomously anticipate and respond to complex or unexpected problems or circumstances. This shift from a focus on the activity and provision of government to the capacity of citizens to effectively respond and adapt to crises or problems—and increasingly to take responsibility for “self-government”—is of vital importance to our understanding of resilience as a set of discursive practices of governing through societal security (for example, Rose 1999a,b; O’Malley 2004; Foucault 2008, 2010:25–40; Miller and Rose 2008; Dean 2009). This article seeks to draw out further this link between “late,” “advanced,” or “postliberal” governmental rationalities and the security discourse of resilience (see further, for example, Dillon and Reid 2009; Chandler 2010). Following on from the work of Pat O’Malley it suggests that the problematic of resilience and the discourses of societal security are “not specific to the governance of particular threats, or indeed even to threats per se. It is a technology that is imagined to equip the subject to deal with uncertainty in general” (2010:505).

The resilience problematic of how the population, or society in general, proactively engages with, and adapts to, uncertainty has been at the heart of recent UK policy discussions on how to empower citizens to be more capable of governing themselves through making better life choices in the face of risk and complexity. This broader discussion locates the threat to societal security not in any particular externally generated “event” or “threat” but in the capacity or capability of citizens to proactively take responsibility both for their own security and for those around them (Dean 2011). The discussion of how society could become more self-governing, and how government practices could inculcate resilience, has been highlighted by the 2008 publication of *Nudge* by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein as well as the recent policy attention given to the importance of individual choice making by the UK Cabinet Office, UK Prime Minister David Cameron’s Behavioural Insight Team (the “nudge unit”), and the Royal Society for the Arts’ Social Brain project. For these authors and policy groups, the problems of societal security can be both analyzed and addressed through capability building at the level of the decision-making individual via intervention in the societal milieu or environment. This discourse illustrates how the resilience paradigm’s focus on individual and community capabilities reinscribes the security problematic within the “everyday” of policy problems of the social and economic sphere.

The starting point for *Nudge* is that people lack the capacity or capability to adapt efficiently to their circumstances and to choose what is best for them; that the modern liberal conception of “economic man” or *homo economicus* may work well in economic textbooks but that in the real world, real human beings are not very good at making the right choices. It is suggested here that a useful starting point for an understanding of resilience as a discourse of societal security can be found in the distinction made by Thaler and Sunstein between economic man and real human beings—or, in their words, between “Econs” and “Humans.” While economic man can be assumed to always make the right or rational choice, the human often fails, and this failure can have destructive

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3The Demos Resilient Nation Advisory Group defines resilience as: “The capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure, and identity” (Edwards 2009:18).
consequences at both the individual and the societal levels. The UK Cabinet Office has taken up these concerns to suggest that governance should focus on how the “choice environment” is shaped, as citizens appear to lack the rational capacities to make the right choices themselves without external “nudging,” “steering,” and “priming” (IfG 2010). While it could be argued that the UK Cameron/Clegg government’s Behavioural Insight Team or “nudge unit” has had limited effects on government policymaking (Curtis 2011; Day 2011), there is little doubt that the problematization of citizens as rational choice-making actors has been placed at the center of the discourse of resilience and security, positing the task of government in terms of governance: acting on the societal level to improve the choice-making capacity of its citizens.

The work of Nudge has helped to cohere the understanding of intervention in the societal milieu of the subject to develop capacities to deal with the unexpected events and complexities of our insecure world. Relying heavily on this schema, Charlie Edwards’ Demos publication, Resilience Nation (2009), argues that:

Thinking about choice architecture is an incredibly useful way of framing how central and local government, emergency planning officers and the emergency services can influence an individual or community’s behavior, especially on issues like risk … a fundamentally important task in making society more resilient. Nudges also help … [by] shifting some of the responsibility of resilience planning and management to communities and individuals … (Edwards 2009:42–45)

In the UK, Thaler and Sunstein have been challenged, not for their degraded understanding of individual capacities for choice making but rather for their underestimation of the problem of choice shaping (Chakrabortty 2010; Day 2011). The UK Royal Society for the Arts’ Social Brain project suggests that the problem of societal security is too large for the government to solve on its own, through “nudging” citizens to make better choices (Grist 2009:9). Interestingly, the RSA’s Social Brain project takes up many of the central conceptions outlined in Anthony Giddens’ work on Beyond Left and Right (1994) and in The Third Way (1998) to argue that governance requires a reorientation around the politics of individual choice to create or construct citizens who are able to respond to the problems of risk autonomously and responsibly:

... life politics is the politics of choice in a deep existential sense—a politics where one is aware of what it is like to live reflexively in a post-traditional and globalized world … Whether we like it or not, in late modernity citizens need to be able to reflexively chart their way through the choppy waters of a globalized economy. And whether we like it or not, they need to find ways of changing the way they live if they are to counteract problems like entrenched inequality and environmental degradation … The kind of person enabled by politics to face up to the challenges of late modernity Giddens calls an “autotelic” self … an autotelic self is really just an autonomous and responsible citizen. (Grist 2009:16)

The RSA propose an active program of governance on the basis of the need to empower modern citizens as individuated decision makers in order to inculcate resilience through overcoming their lack of rational decision-making capacities:

... wholly rational individuals do not need the support of publicly engaged institutions and associative groups to aid their decision making about the issues of life politics. They simply need to be fed information and, given their rationality, correct responses will inexorably follow. Yet people are not isolated and wholly self-interested … And neither are they wholly rational—left to their individual devices they may make bad decisions that economists would consider “irrational.” (Grist 2009:29)

The project of governing for societal resilience is asserted to depend upon “the limits of personal choice” and the development of knowledge of “how autonomy
and responsibility are produced” (Grist 2009). For the Social Brain project, the key to this new knowledge is that of “neurological reflexivity”: a greater understanding of the working and limits of the human brain (Grist 2009:33). Through a greater use of emotional and cognitive self-awareness, the RSA suggests that “people might gain more power over themselves by using knowledge from behaviourial science to improve their decision-making, and to guide their own behaviours in ways that enrich their lives” (Grist 2010:4).

The framework of governance, and the focus on the ways in which government can influence the milieu of the subject—the “choice architecture” or the “choice environment” in which individuals make choices and take decisions—fundamentally challenges the traditional liberal assumptions on which the division of the public and private spheres was constructed. Once the human subject is understood as lacking in the capacity to make “free choices,” the private sphere of freedom and autonomy becomes problematized and “life”—that is, the formally private sphere beyond and separate from the public sphere of government—becomes the subject of governance. This focus on the inner world of both the state (the milieu of societal life) and the individual (their decision-making capability) operates to efface the traditional subject categories upon which liberal discourses of security, sovereignty, rights, and law were based. Discourses of societal resilience thereby societalize security in their reduction of the formally separate liberal sphere of securing rights and interests into the “everyday practices” of the social sphere, now understood as the source or cause of the problems to be dealt with (see Chandler 2010, 2012b).

The stakes involved in the critical understanding of societal framings of security are therefore high. This article seeks to contribute to this project through an alternative genealogical analysis of “resilience”—of the ways in which this “internalized” understanding of societal security has developed. This is done through a focus upon the new institutionalist economic literature, tracing how these ideas have become cogently presented as the basis of a program of governing through societal resilience, particularly in the work of Anthony Giddens. In the following section, I draw attention to how new institutionalist economics became a key sphere of social theorizing through which the discourse of societal resilience evolved, highlighting the importance of Friedrich von Hayek’s work privileging the inner world of the subject over the external environment. The next section draws out the connection between the work of Hayek and that of Anthony Giddens, suggesting that the logical consequence of the internalizing project is that the construction of the resilient or “autotelic” subject becomes the goal of policies of societal security. The final section draws out the consequences of discourses of security as societal resilience for traditional liberal understandings of subject autonomy.

Bringing in the Inner World—Friedrich von Hayek and the Psychology of the Brain

For classical liberal framings of homo oeconomicus, the inside of the human head was as out of bounds as the inside of the sovereign state in international relations theory. Liberal frameworks of thought have always been vulnerable to critical deconstruction through the transgression of disciplinary boundaries keeping apart the interior and the exterior worlds of the liberal subject. Many of the most radical of these critiques have come from within the sphere of economic theorizing, particularly the new institutionalist economic challenge to classical

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4The contradiction between the asserted aim of “reducing the state” and the consequences of non-legislative state interference in the private sphere is well drawn out in the written evidence to the UK government Public Administration Select Committee (Richards and Smith 2011).
liberal assumptions of the smooth or natural operation of market rationality. These authors were keen to explain the problematic nature of market relations in terms of the cognitive, cultural, or ideational contexts in which the human mind operated. The critique of the rationalist assumptions of classical liberalism enabled a new programmatic of governance and societal resilience to emerge in response to the unknowability and unpredictability of the external world. In this framing of the human subject, both individually and collectively, the problematic becomes one of adaptation and resilience: how individuals and societies respond to a shifting external environment is prioritized over and against conceptions of the state as capable of planning, directing, or controlling socioeconomic affairs (see Hayek 1960; Foucault 2008:171-174).

In 1936, John R. Commons described new institutional economics as based on an understanding of the societal milieu: he emphasized the importance of cultural and ideational contexts of choice making—“man’s relationship to man”—which were ignored in classical liberal economic theory “based on man’s relation to nature” (1936:242). For Commons, the intangibles, such as goodwill, conceptions of rights, and duties, etc., all influenced the “reasonable” price that the buyer was willing to pay. These intangibles were understood to be shaped by societal institutions and shared norms, which meant that the classic liberal assumptions of perfect competition did not exist. Commons suggested that there was a “nationalistic theory of value”; that these national collective institutions meant that it was a fiction to talk in classical liberal terms of the universality of the market or of the autonomous rational subject (1936:247–248). This understanding freed analysis from the strictures of classic liberal assumptions, allowing autonomy of choices but only once the individual was understood as a product of a societal context: a subject of their “choice environment.” Commons stressed that rather than treating humans as automatic pursuers of fixed interests, real-life behavior had to be understood as shaped by the institutional milieu, especially that of custom and social norms (Forest and Mehier 2001).

The work of Commons and other new institutionalist economists was developed further by Herbert Simon. He argued that there was no such thing as perfect information or perfect rationality, merely “bounded rationality” where not all the facts could be known or all the possible options considered (Simon 1984). The decisions made with “bounded rationality” were still autonomous, that is, made on the basis of a freely willed conscious choice, but they were no longer necessarily rational, resulting in furthering the collective good or in optimal outcomes. For the advocates of societal resilience, the understanding of “bounded rationality” allows the critique of the liberal subject to operate without appearing to be overtly elitist or undemocratic. As Charlie Edwards suggests, this is not an overt critique of democratic assumptions of the rational subject per se, but of the late-modern subject’s capacity to deal with new, unexpected, exceptional, or complex events. Edwards argues that people who seem to be rational in everyday life “may revert to irrational behaviour, especially in response to a specific risk” (2009:41). The problematic of “bounded rationality” suggests that societal resilience needs to inculcate generic capabilities to equip people with the capacity to make decisions in situations where they have limited knowledge or experience. The inculcation of resilience, in fact, depends on the dematerializing or abstraction from specific risks or insecurities, to become a mode of life, a way of social being: “Risk communication cannot be detached from our everyday lives. It has to be hotwired into our decision-making processes and behaviours” (Edwards 2009:43). In making resilience a matter of the “everyday,” the exceptional event becomes subsumed into the life process itself—choices of university, life partner, insurance policy, child rearing, etc.—subsuming responses to external risk, such as terrorist attack or environmental disaster, under the generic policy concerns of societal governance.
The crucial facet of new institutionalist economics was that differences in responses to external shocks or unusual events could be understood as products of choice-making milieus rather than as structurally imposed outcomes. The important research focus was then the individual making the decisions or choices, and the environmental milieu in which this process was shaped. This is a societal perspective which starts from the individual as a decision maker and then works outward to society to understand why “wrong” or problematic responses to events occur. In this perspective, the individual subject is understood in isolation from their structuring social and economic context. “Wrong” choices are understood in terms of ideational blockages at the level of culture, custom, or ideology, and in terms of institutional blockages—the “choice architecture,” or the incentives and opportunities available to enable other choices (see also North 1990, 2005). These starting assumptions have much in common with therapeutic approaches, which also work at the level of the resilience of the individual (attempting to remove psychological blockages to making better choices) rather than at the level of social or economic relations (see, for example, Reivich and Shatte 2003; Neenan 2009; Clarke and Nicholson 2010). And, of course, it is from psychology that, as we examine later, Giddens takes the conception of the “autotelic self” (see Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2009).

The leading theorist of the inversion of state–society relations and responsibilities was Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek, whose ideas have become central to current understandings of societal security and resilience (see, for example, Walker and Cooper 2011). Writing in the 1950s, Hayek was concerned that, under the Keynesian influence of state-led development perspectives and liberal universalist teleologies, socioeconomic progress would lead to the dominance of socialist or communist frameworks of government (see Plehwe 2009). In order to combat this, Hayek sought to reintroduce difference as ontologically prior to universality and to flag up the internal limits to subjective reasoning. Perhaps the most insightful work in this area is his \textit{The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology} (1952). As the title indicates, for Hayek, the key area in which limits were to be located was in the psychological makeup of the subject, rather than the external world.

For Marx the key attribute of the human was the ability to imagine an end or goal before carrying it out—the capacity, through reason, to subordinate the self to an external object of transformation—to consciously transform the world through a self-directed aim (1954:174).\footnote{"A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality … He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will" (Marx 1954:174).} Hayek, on the other hand, was interested in the hold of the past and the incapacity of the subject to cope with the external world because reasoning could only be based on individual ways of thinking predicated upon past experiences. Our minds build models and expectations based on previous experiences which mean that our behavioral responses depend less on the “reality” we are confronted with than with the psychological preconditioning of our minds (see Mirowski 2002:232–240). Our consciousness, in fact, prevents us from engaging with the world in a reasoned and rational way (1952:25).

Hayek’s focus on the mind of the subject enabled him to remove the external world as an object of universalist understanding: in effect, he argued that the external world was merely a subjectivist phenomenological product. It, therefore, followed that it was not the external world of social relations which produced
and reproduced difference and hierarchy, but the internal differences of the human brain. The problem was not that we are not rational or “enlightened” enough to understand the external world, but that the external world only appears through the phenomenological constructions of our minds. These phenomenologies are the products of “interpretations” based upon inherited and learned experiences which mediate between the experience and the response: “we cannot hope to account for observed behaviour without reconstructing the ‘intervening processes in the brain’” (1952:44). It is our brains which make us respond differently to our external environments and can help explain different developmental outcomes which reproduce the same experiences and response mechanisms. Internal differentiations are therefore reproduced and exaggerate our differential responses to events or crises, particularly those we are unfamiliar with or lack previous experience of.

In Hayek’s work, we not only see how psychological explanations come to play a larger role in understanding the importance of practices of societal resilience, but also how responses to security risks or threats can be reinterpreted in terms of the cognitive workings of the brain. According to Hayek, brains are complex, integrated networks but they are also malleable and capable of adaptive change, depending upon the extent to which “phylogenetic” aspects (inherited patterns and connections) and “ontogenetic” aspects (acquired by the individual during the course of their lifetime) interact (1952:80–81). Where Marx sharply distinguished the human from the natural world, Hayek’s focus on the psychology of the brain focuses on how human responses are shaped through resilience and adaption, in ways which are little different to any other living organism:

> The continued existence of those complex structures which we call organisms is made possible by their capacity of responding to certain external influences by such changes in their structure or activity as are required to maintain or restore the balance necessary for their persistence. (1952:82)

Individuals, especially more complex organisms like humans, will respond differently to external stimuli in ways which enable them to discriminate differently between different stimuli, and to react differently. Often these differences will not be intentional, but arbitrary or accidental. The key point for Hayek is that differential experiences and reactions necessarily result from the innate historical experiential differences of individuals and the complex interaction between their “milieu intérieur” (internal, mental environment) and their external, societal environments (1952:109).

In terms of genealogical framings, it is important to emphasize that what is key in the work of new institutional economics, and developed in the ideas of Hayek, is a conceptual framework of critique and inversion of classical liberal assumptions. This critique was based upon the dethroning or decentering of the human subject as a rational agent, capable of securing itself through knowing and shaping its external world. Even though Hayek does not explicitly frame his understanding in terms of resilience, the individual, subject-centered problematic of learning and adaption, and the influential role of the societal milieu—central to today’s societal discourses of resilience—is fully present. However, the context in which these concerns were articulated was one very different to our own. The chief concern was that of a defense of liberal frameworks of rule against the backdrop of socioeconomic crisis and the challenge of socialist or communist alternatives, which stressed the potential of human agency to shape and control events through abolishing or restricting market relations. It took the defeat of the radical, class-based challenge to liberalism before the articulation of societal resilience could be represented as a progressive, even radical, framework of social empowerment (see, for example, Pelling 2011). The next section considers how the exhaustion of liberalism and the hollowing out of the liberal
subject has been articulated anew as a governing program in our “globalized,” insecure, and “postpolitical” world.

Removing the Outer World—Anthony Giddens and Manufactured Uncertainty

In order to contextualize and situate the inner logic of discourses of societal resilience, I have traced some guidelines of resilience genealogically through economic theories which have stressed the societal milieu of the decision-making subject as constituting the key problematic of security. The discursive importance of the internal capacities of the subject, however, played a relatively marginal role in mainstream liberal social theorizing in the postwar period. Today, however, it is clear that what was once a marginal preoccupation has now become central to understanding the world we live in and the role of the state in relation to society. As Foucault highlighted in his work on the birth of biopolitics (focusing on the exceptional circumstances of the postwar West German state), societal governance involves a shift from a focus on the state provision of the means of security, to the internal capacities of individuals and the influence of the milieu of civil society (2008). It could be argued that Foucault’s work in this area was highly prescient, to the extent that today it appears that the shift to divesting security responsibility to society, and with this the shift to concern over the internal world of the individual, means that the external world could be said to no longer exist for us in a meaningful way.6

Anthony Giddens has been one of the most articulate advocates of the shift from the external to the internal world and in turning this into an activist and proactive program of governance in the wake of the collapse of Left/Right framings of liberal modernity in the post-Cold War period. In his 1990s work, Beyond Left and Right (1994) and in The Third Way; (1998; see also 2000), Giddens clearly articulated the shift away from the liberal modernist belief that developments in science and technology might enable the extension of humanity’s control over the external world (1994:3). He argued that today we have become aware that the aspiration of controlling and shaping our external world is a product of human hubris and misunderstanding. Modern risks and insecurities are conceived in terms of “manufactured uncertainty,” as human products (or by-products) that cannot be dealt with through Enlightenment prescriptions of “more knowledge, more control” (1994:4), thereby necessitating the rejection of liberal modernist teleologies of progress:

Today, we must break with providentialism, in whatever guise it might present itself. Not for us the idea that capitalism is pregnant with socialism. Not for us the idea that there is a historical agent—whether proletariat or any other—that will more or less automatically come to our rescue. Not for us the idea that “history” has any necessary direction at all. We must accept risk as risk, up to and including the most potentially cataclysmic of high-consequence risks; we must accept that there can be no way back to external risk from manufactured risk. (1994:249).

Giddens states that in the preliberal age, or pre-Enlightenment era, the main conceptual framework for dealing with, or rationalizing, unexpected events or contingencies was through the understanding of fate or nature or God—catastrophic events could not be prevented, merely accepted. In the liberal era, the dominant framework of understanding was that of “risk” or “accident,” a

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6It could be argued that the dominant framings of modern social theory, from social constructivism and new institutionalism through to new materialism and post-humanism, depend on the asserted overcoming of the structure/agency divide (the fundamental Cartesian divide between the inner and outer worlds) (see, for example, Berger and Luckmann 1991; Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth 1992; Latour 1993; Peters 2005; Scott 2008; Bennett 2010; Goole and Frost 2010; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Connolly 2011; Cudworth and Hobden 2011).
framework which highlighted the borders of control and could be calculated, minimized, or insured against—the point being that “accidents” or “risks” were conceptualized as external factors, outside control. Giddens argues that today there is no outside to the human world and therefore no external risk. Once the problem is understood in terms of manufactured risk—setbacks and damage as a consequence of the decisions we take ourselves—work on the self is the only area through which these problems can be addressed.

To demonstrate the difference between an external risk and an internal one, Giddens offers as an example the changing nature of health security—shifting from intervention to prevention. In the liberal world, we understood that there was a risk of getting cancer or other ailments in old age; attempting to address the problem involved the development of medicine and forms of diagnosis and interventionist treatment. In today’s world, Giddens advocates a different approach of prevention based on the inculcation of resilience—of work on the self—changing attitudes and social norms to empower individuals to make better life choices and adopt better lifestyle habits. Societal security through resilience is understood as empowering, freeing, or liberating the agency of the individual. Another example is Giddens’ view of old age: “Aging is treated as ‘external,’ as something that happens to one, not as a phenomenon actively constructed and negotiated” (1994:170). Giddens seeks to argue that old age is a matter of individual choice, even aging: “many of the physical difficulties of old age are not to do with aging at all, but rather with lifestyle practices” (1994:170). Where the Enlightenment philosophers, such as Condorcet, imagined that the external-orientated growth of science and technology could lead to expansions of the human lifespan well beyond 100 years (Condorcet 2009), Giddens asserts that the same can be achieved through internal growth and care of the self.

As Giddens states: “Manufactured uncertainty intrudes into all the arenas of life thus opened up to decision making” (1994:6). The world is reduced to individual decision making, and at the same time, individual decision making becomes the sphere of problematization and governance intervention. The development of governance environmental “choice shaping” to assist us in our autonomous choice making, Giddens calls “generative politics.” The state can no longer do things for us in a directive and controlling way and so must confront the urgent and complex task of empowering the subject to make better life choices:

Generative politics is a politics which seeks to allow individuals and groups to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them, in the context of overall social concerns and goals ... it does not situate itself in the old opposition between state and market. It works through providing material conditions, and organisational frameworks, for the life-political decisions taken by individuals and groups in the wider social order. (1994:15)

Giddens clearly articulates the project of societal empowerment as the development of the autonomy of the individual. The internalized nature of the project is clear in the emphasis upon the modern subject’s need for “self-help” and “self-construction”:

The advance of social reflexivity means that individuals have no choice but to make choices; and these choices define who they are. People have to ‘construct their own biographies’ in order to sustain a coherent sense of self-identity. (1994:126)

However, this did not mean that risk could not be insured against or “capitalized” through the calculative technology of insurance (see, for example, Defert 1991; Ewald 1991; Baker and Simon 2002; Dillon 2008; Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008). This “socializing of risk” works on a very different rationality of security governance than that dealt with here, where the “societalization of security” engages with risk not as an external but as an internal problematic.
Giddens’ work is very important for understanding and drawing out the consequences of a societalized conception of security within discourses of resilience, and its relationship to our understanding of the human subject. The key point Giddens makes is that societal security has to be addressed at the level of the inner life or the inner capacities of the individual, rather than the material level. This transformation occurs through welcoming insecurity and establishing a proactive relationship to potentially destabilizing security risks:

Schemes of positive welfare, orientated to manufactured rather than external risk, would be directed to fostering the autotelic self. The autotelic self is one with an inner confidence which comes from self-respect, and one where a sense of ontological security, originating in basic trust, allows for a positive appreciation of social difference. It refers to a person able to translate potential threats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience. The autotelic self does not seek to neutralize risk or to suppose that “someone else will take care of the problem”: risk is confronted as the active challenge which generates self-actualization. (1994:192, emphasis added)

Giddens, in effect, generates a program of societal resilience on the basis of the unknowability and the contingency of the external world. This program is a transformative one, but the object of transformation is the inner life of the individual—the project to “foster the autotelic self.” The autotelic self is understood as an individual capable of self-governing in a world of contingency and radical uncertainty. The autotelic self turns insecurity into self-actualization, into growth. The subject being interpellated—the “autotelic self”—is very different from the universalized subject of liberal modernity. Whereas the modern liberal subject was assumed to have the will and capacity to collectively act on and to transform, to secure and to know its external world, the transformative activity of the autotelic self is restricted to the internal and cognitive realm.

As Giddens himself notes, this focus on the “life-politics” of the subject rather than on the state as a director of society, owes much to the work of Friedrich Hayek (1994:66–68). A focus on life politics rather than formal politics, organized on the basis of sovereignty and territory, is the essence of societal understandings of resilience. In the focus on “life” in the societalization of security, the external world disappears in two interconnected ways. First, it is unknowable because it is globalized: the relations of cause and effect no longer appear to operate clearly because we seem to have lost control over the consequences of our actions. The unintended effects overwhelm the intended ones because the world is much more complicated and interconnected than we imagined in liberal teleologies of progress and control. Second, the external world disappears because we can no longer distinguish ourselves from the world. In the words of Anthony Giddens, there is no longer any external “nature”—our external world has been shaped and constituted by human actions and choices (1994:6). Not only is the world unknowable, it is unknowable precisely because it is a human world.

While it is a human world, it is not thereby a liberal world as we knew it: the external world has been closed off to us, and with it, there can be nothing beyond the problematic of subjective constructions of behavioral choice, constituted through the interactions of the individual subject and its societal milieu of norms and institutional frameworks. Problematics of societal resilience, which problematize life, and the milieus which shape it, can be better understood as postliberal (see further, Chandler 2010). These deliberalizing frameworks,
working on the transformation of the internal world, can only understand the subject as individually differentiated in terms of choice-making vulnerability, never as a political agent and bearer of collectively constituted rights and interests.

**Choice and the Human Subject**

The exclusion of the external world in the discourses of resilience and societal security both results in, and reflects, the removal of a whole raft of social, economic, and political concerns from public political contestation. Without the contestation of Left and Right, the future appears merely to be an extension of the present. It is the attenuation of political contestation which appears to have facilitated the internalization of politics or the hollowing out and “deliberalizing” of state–society relations. There is still a discourse of transformation, but it is not about the transformation of the external world but rather the ongoing process of transforming the societal milieu shaping the inner world of individuals. Societal resilience works on the basis of reducing the problems of the world to those of the life politics of the behavior and decisions of individuals. In this respect, politics as a public activity beyond the private sphere disappears.

Hannah Arendt acutely warned of just such a shift to the societal and private realm, where the emphasis is on the transformation of behavior rather than on the active transformation of the external world. For Arendt, the key aspect of humanity is that it is a plurality of interacting individuals making contingency and uncertainty part of the human condition (1998). Using her framework, resilience-based policies and practices can be understood as a problematization of the human condition and of the human subject itself. For Arendt, what we now describe as resilience-based understandings of adaptation to the external world stood in opposition to the aspiration for human freedom: once the public sphere is reduced to the social, and to the management of society, then politics and the state give way to “pure administration.” We have a “withering away of the state” as predicted by Marx, but not through the mechanism of revolution (1998:45).

The reduction of politics to the administration of life was a central concern for Arendt, who argued that “through society it is the life process itself which in one form or another has been channeled into the public realm” (1998:45). The problematic of the societal influencing of behavioral choices she believed “reduce[d] man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal” (1998:45). Rather than understanding and resolving problems through action in the external world, this framing “concerns only a possible change in the psychology of human beings—their so-called behaviour patterns—not a change of the world they move in” (1998:49). For Arendt, this was a “psychological interpretation, for which the absence or presence of a public realm is as irrelevant as any tangible, worldly reality” (1998:49).

Arendt’s critical understanding of making life the problematic of government, and warnings of the reduction of politics to the administration of “behavioral change,” speaks powerfully to us today, particularly when read in conjunction with Foucault’s exploration of the rationalities of biopolitical governance. Bringing the discourses of resilience out of the narrow security framings and into the “everyday life” of regimes of postliberal governance enables us to develop a richer understanding of how these regimes operate to construct problems and policy solutions at the societal level. This is where the discussions of *Nudge* and, more generally, of the drivers of “behavior change” (Clark 2011:vii) have been particularly useful in highlighting our current dominant understanding that: “The kinds of problems that many societies now need to solve require changing the behavior of citizens, whose private actions are hard to regulate by laws and
commands” (John, Cotterill, Richardson, Moseley, Smith, Stoker and Wales 2011:2). This instantiates the problematic of how governments can interfere in the private or societal sphere to give citizens more capacity for reasoned thinking and behavior without appearing to be overly paternalistic.

Couched in terms of Nudge, resilience-based understandings have now become the subject of debate and academic critique for their undermining of liberal conceptions of rights and freedoms (for example, Furedi 2011; Saint-Paul 2011; Chandler 2012a). However, this is no more than the start of a critical project and essentially merely re-describes the ways in which biopolitical rationalities clash with those of traditional liberal framings of rights and law. The problem is not merely paternalism, in terms of the understanding of problems as the result of the subject’s lack of reasoning autonomy. Of greater importance is the need to work through the implications of understanding, the world as a product of the self-agency of the autotelic subject. This framing starts with the world as it is and works backwards to find the causes of appearances in the problematic choices of those held to be the most vulnerable and in most need of the capacity-building practices of resilience. In international relations, thus far, there has been relatively little critical appraisal of resilience-based understandings and practices in terms of the shifting of responsibility to those who have the least power and influence and are held to require “cognitive change” (Pelling 2011:84). This is especially the case where communities of the “vulnerable” are seen to need empowerment and capability building to overcome conflict, underdevelopment, or climate fluctuations (see, for example, Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011).

Conclusion

The key point, for those of us concerned with developing a critique of the discourses and practices of societal resilience and work on the shaping of environmental milieus, is that “freedom” and “choice” are entirely degraded once the external world is understood as the product of behavioral choice rather than composed of external structures open to understanding and transformation (see further, Chandler 2013). When the UK Cabinet Office, Giddens, or new institutionalist economists talk of the need to address problems or potential risks through mechanisms of societal “choice shaping,” they are not freeing or emancipating the autotelic self but degrading the concept of choice along with the formal autonomy of the liberal subject. This is because, in this framing, choice is reduced to culpability or responsibility. If the external world is held to prevent learning through the experience of acting and organizing, subjects can no longer take genuine responsibility through the exercise of their own agency, and there can be no genuine choice making between open-ended alternatives. Here, choice is merely a mechanism for the allocation of blame, on the basis that we are responsible for our decisions and choices and that we need to understand that our behavioral choices constitute and shape the world as it appears.

This discursive framing is increasingly unchallenged as we focus on the mechanisms of societal intervention to help overcome the “poor choice making,” or the lack of societal resilience, of our fellow citizens and neighbors held to be unable to reasonably make behavioral choices if they happen to be unemployed, to smoke, to be teenage mothers, eat fatty food, drop litter, fail to take up higher education opportunities, or to properly handle their emotions. The reduction in social, economic, political, and ecological questions to ones of individual choice-making capacities and environmental choice-shaping interventions is so pervasive, we often do not give the broader discourses of societal resilience a second thought. In essence, discourses of societal resilience seek to extend the responsibility of individuals to the world itself, insofar as it becomes reduced to the product of individual behavioral choice. Here, the subject, considered indi-
individually and communally, is held to be autotelic—to cognitively construct its own life or world.

The program of societal resilience is based on the transformation of the societal milieu shaping the cognitive world of the subject in order to facilitate better choice making. Concomitant with this is the denial of the reasoned moral autonomy of the subject. Our freedom to autonomously decide is seen as the problem, necessitating indirect mechanisms of environmental or milieu-based societal choice shaping at the same time as the constraints of our social relations become essentialized as the cognitive barriers of the human mind and its milieu. Capitalism is naturalized and normalized at the same time as human rationality is degraded and denied. The problem for societal resilience is always the human rather than the social and economic relations in which humans are embedded. The governance practices aimed at societal resilience and the construction of resilient communities can only be opposed on the basis of challenging the discursive collapsing of the external world into the interior of the human head.

References


