"Think You Right: I Am Not What I Am": Dialectical Self-Overcoming and the Concept of Resilience

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that "resilience" in some sense of the term is a necessary predicate of all subjectivity, and thus of all political programs subjects could be capable of undertaking. While contemporary political discourses typically call for "resilience" as a way to justify the social formations already in place, this does not mean that the concept of resilience is itself irredeemable. In fact, all subjects must first be "resilient," i.e., continue to exist as themselves in some sense, before they can aspire to be other than what they are. Consequently, we cannot totally abandon the concept, even as we must continue to examine with suspicion the ways those in authority deploy it to secure their rule. I contend that the term "resilience" embodies—etymologically and socially—the classical tension between "being" and "becoming" that lies at the root of dialectical thought. By framing resilience in terms of dialectical thinking, we can see how it is both necessary for and dangerous to the pursuit of a robust and imaginative politics, as well as to ethical projects of self-mastery and self-creation.

Keywords: Resilience, Dialectics, Critical Theory, Foucault, Machiavelli, Nietzschean Ethics, Self-Mastery

Introduction

The call for papers that *SPECTRA* advertised for this volume was titled "critiques of resilience." The rest of the call elaborated on the sense of "critique" in the title by explaining that the editors were seeking papers "critically engage[d] with the notion of resilience by way of integrating theoretical, empirical, literary, and ethnographic research." What this makes apparent is that the editors were not merely in want of a ruthless criticism of the concept of resilience aimed at eviscerating it until it had been proved devoid of any value. Rather, the sense of "critique" is closer to that brought to contemporary political theory from the tradition of the Frankfurt School.[i] There are two intellectual histories, and thus two distinct meanings, that inform "critique" in this sense. As Paul Connerton elaborates, "In the first, critique denotes reflection on the *conditions* of possible knowledge," while in the second, "it denotes reflection on a system of *constraints* which are humanly produced: distorting pressures to which individuals or a group of individuals, or the human race as a whole, succumb in their process of self-formation."[ii] Connerton labels the first of these senses "reconstruction" and the second "criticism." What, the project of Frankfurt School critique asks, is the basis on which human knowledge is necessarily constructed, and what are the social conditions that stand in the way of various humans' abilities to live in the world in a free manner on the basis of these fundamental characteristics?

For my part, I am less indebted to the Frankfurt School for the manner in which I undertake inquiry than I am to the Foucauldian spirit of analysis, which is less concerned with what elements of knowledge might be said to be fundamental (reconstruction) and how these fundamental elements are socially distorted (criticism). Indeed, Foucault once proclaimed in an interview that "Nothing is fundamental. That is what is interesting in the analysis of society. …

There are only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another."[iii]

Foucault's method, though, could nevertheless be said to retain a distinction between the two senses of "critique" influential to the Frankfurt School, albeit in a modified form as "archaeology" and "genealogy." Like reconstruction, archaeology addresses itself to what "is" in a given time, and like criticism, genealogy interrogates the social conditions that have permitted certain regimes of knowledge to emerge at the expense of others. However, unlike reconstruction and criticism, archaeology and genealogy do not presume that the present archive of knowledge is natural and essential, nor that the social genealogy responsible for the present archive has obscured some fundamental underlying truth of social organization that would free us if we only recognized it. Foucault explicitly says as much: "Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, 'this, then, is what needs to be done.' It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. … It is a challenge directed to what is."[iv] In what follows, I offer a critique of resilience that disavows the fundamentality of social formations but which does ground itself in what I believe to be an inescapable metaphysical tension between "being" and "becoming." I am not here interested *per se* in how discourses of resilience are tactically deployed in a social struggle regarding identity, agency, and material resources, though such explorations are important. Instead, I am more concerned with offering an alternative to "critiques" of resilience that treat the concept as anathema and view its proliferation as no more than a barrier to human emancipation. By exploring how the concept "resilience" relates to the tendency of systems of knowledge to secure their own sedimentation, a tendency constantly undone by the ontological open-endedness of life, I hope to show how "resilience" is neither good nor bad in itself but instead contains political tools for both those who wish to keep present relations of power as they are and those who would "fight … resist and refuse what is."

To this end, I offer four interlinked sections exploring, in the following order, the relationship between the dialectical tradition, discourses of resilience, classical political theory, and ethics as the autopoietic mastery and creation of the self. My argument is that resilience *in some sense* is a necessary predicate of all subjectivity, and thus of all political programs subjects are capable of undertaking. Consequently, we cannot totally abandon the concept, even as we must continue to examine with suspicion the ways those in authority deploy it to secure their rule. Subjects must *first* be resilient, though subjects who are *merely* resilient without higher aspirations to self-mastery are aesthetically contemptible, as are the regimes of truth and of material distribution that frustrate subjects' attempts to become other than they already are.

Dialectical Thought
In his postface to the second edition of *Capital: Volume I*, written in January 1873, Marx offers brief comments on the popularity of the Hegelian dialectic and the way in which Marx's own materialist perspective redeems "the rational kernel within the mystical shell" of Hegel's philosophy. Marx writes:

> In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of

what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.[v]

Horkheimer and Adorno, writing some seventy years later, likewise emphasize this element of dialectical thought, in which concepts, imbued with a potentiality that exceeds their origin, are always laden with more meaning than they could have been intended to signify at their outset. Horkheimer and Adorno applied this framework to the process of "enlightenment," demonstrating how the will to reach a final stage of Enlightenment is constantly negated through the attempts it makes to achieve progress. In this continual movement, which is "a product of dialectical thinking, … each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. … [D]ialectic discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth."[vi] The conditions of knowledge at one moment become the basis on which they are at the next moment shown to be untenable. The danger of this will to Enlightenment for Horkheimer and Adorno is that when it becomes systematized, it seeks to free itself from this unavoidable dialectical tendency by expurgating every trace of mythology from the realm of knowledge, "detect[ing] myth not only in semantically unclarified concepts and words … but in any human utterance which has no place in the functional context of self-preservation."[vii] This distinction is reflected in Kant's and Foucault's respective answers to the question of what enlightenment is. For Kant, there awaits the possibility of a final stage of actual enlightenment: an "enlightened age."[viii] For Foucault, on the other hand, it is an ongoing and "undefined work of freedom."[ix]

Enlightenment's social manifestation is found in a regime of truth that presents itself to its subjects as if it were this finalized "enlightened age." Accompanying it are disciplinary apparatuses proliferated through modernity, capable of increasingly intense forms of management that reduce objects to their mathematically quantifiable logical surfaces, to their "abstract spatial-temporal relationships, by which they can then be seized."[x] Whether the disciplinary regimes of utilitarianism, Fordism, school, prison, and hospital or the "apparatuses of control" deployed by biopolitical societies, the drive to further enlightenment proceeds dialectically in pursuit of a teleological end in which the promise of full Enlightenment has finally been achieved and the dialectic may finally be avoided.[xi] Here is the Hegelian mythology manifested in scientism and positivism, for which the "real rational" expresses itself in purely mathematical terms. "The actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology."[xii]

The vision of the dialectic as "a fluid state" in which everything "becomes what it is by becoming what it is not" dates back to classical tensions between "being" and "becoming" best captured in the competing philosophies of Parmenides and Heraclitus. Heraclitus' famous pronouncement, "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs,"[xiii] contrasts with Parmenides' denial of the possibility of true, not merely apparent, alteration, which Parmenides rejected on the grounds that all alteration is the generation of new characteristics out of nothing, which is philosophically impossible.[xiv] The difficulty came to a head in "the Platonic tradition, … [where] the fact that man as a finite, temporal being was different from the essence of humanity signified that 'man was other than

himself,' i.e. his empirical, temporal, factual existence was not identical with the ideal, perfect, extra-temporal Being of humanity as such."[xv] The subject that appeared to exist, and as such existed in a state of constant fluctuation, was in fact alienated from Being itself. That which was not a part of the river becomes the river, even as the river is manifested through its interaction with substances that were not original to it. Humankind as a concept is continuously manifested, altered, and made what it always-already had to be through the behavior of particular humans. Concepts, which must act as if they have captured timeless essences, are constantly undermined by the real-world manifestations of the objects they ostensibly represent. As such, concepts necessarily become themselves through the constant absorption of what they were not but must presume themselves always-already to have been.

In early theology, adoption of the dialectic was necessary to solve the difficulty of why God would have created anything at all. Explicating the Christian mystic John Scotus Eriugena, Leszek Kolakowski explains it in the following way:

> Speaking in the most general terms, it is the idea of the potential Absolute (a semi-Absolute, if this expression can be permitted) which attains to full actuality by evolving out of itself a non-absolute reality characterized by transience, contingency, and evil; such non-absolute realities are a necessary phase of the Absolute's growth towards self-realization, and this function of theirs justifies the course of world history. In and through them, and above all in and through mankind, the Deity attains to itself: having created a finite spirit it liberates that spirit from its finitude and receives it back into itself, and by so doing it enriches its own Being.[xvi]

That which is must create out of itself and bring back to itself that which it is not so that it can become what it always-already was. Essences project themselves outward onto and into the objects, practices, relations, and encounters that they are not, that through the projection of themselves as always-already more and other than what they are they might become, if temporarily, that projection. The positivistic reduction of language to tautology combined with disciplinary control thus destroys the transient potentiality of dialectical movement by maintaining a tight control over the nexus of history–language–practice, such that everything must remain itself in a non-fluid way. Disciplinary control, however, is always unstable. The ontologically ineliminable quality of becoming renders disciplinization perpetually incomplete— even as its inherent incompleteness drives disciplinization to increasingly draconian measures.

Discourses of Resilience
The concept of "resilience" has received significant critical attention over the last several decades. For the past year, I have worked at a Virginia Tech research institution devoted to the subject: The Global Forum on Urban and Regional Resilience (GFURR). There are several similar institutes in the country and around the world devoted to studying "resilience" in one form or another. At GFURR alone, we hosted three research clusters: financial resilience, resilient infrastructure, and socio-political dimensions of resilience. The term emerged in a scholarly setting in the life sciences, specifically ecology, during the 1970s, where it described the ability of an ecosystem to recover and "bounce back" from shocks to its overall composition.[xvii] Over the past forty years, the term has migrated into a variety of other fields, including engineering, psychology, and the various social sciences. With the variety of fields comes a variety of different valences of the term. As Phillippe Bourbeau details:

Different disciplines have proposed different definitions and understandings of resilience. In psychology, resilience usually refers to the capacity of an individual to adapt positively after a traumatic event. Criminologists and social workers have proposed to "de-individualize" resilience and to move away from the psychological understanding of resilience as a set of dispositional qualities; they defined resilience as a "dynamic process" of positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity. From quite a different angle, ecologists have employed resilience to describe how an ecosystem can cope with a change of state, return to a previous state, or maintain its function in the face of disturbances.[xviii]

The study of politics, specifically in international relations, has, according to Bourbeau, only recently come face to face with the term.[xix] Scholars of politics, fulfilling their duty as the great caretakers of Minerva's owl, are themselves following in the wake of political adoption of the term as "an operational strategy of emergency preparedness, crisis response and national security"[xx] as well as its use in sustainable development and disaster management discourses.[xxi] In the realm of international politics, as Brad Evans and Julian Reid have detailed, "Resilience is defined by the United Nations as 'the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazard, to adapt by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure.'"[xxii]

Within the politically oriented fields studying resilience, it is a highly contested term. Many scholars use the term "resilience" without a second thought. To these thinkers, it is simply a term representing a positive trait worth inculcating. Others, however, are more critical. As Bourbeau summarizes, "At the same time as these issues are being explored, new terms of dispute are drawing a dividing line among IR scholars working with or on the concept of resilience. Scholars attuned to Michel Foucault's governmentality thesis argue that resilience is a product of contemporary neoliberalism and constitutes a strategy permitting states to abdicate responsibility in times of crisis."[xxiii] The critical camp is the more interesting, by and large. Rather than benignly accepting the positive value of resilience, they instead seize the Nietzschean baton and race ahead to dethrone the vaunted value of our values. As Evans and Reid observe, "[R]esilience is key to this new ethics of responsibility" in which "the vulnerable subject" is cast as "the author of its own planetary endangerment."[xxiv] Importantly, they argue, "resilience" is not encouraged for all but only for those who cannot afford to free themselves from the bonds of apparent necessity. The wealthy are able to fly themselves and their valuables out of harm's way well before disaster strikes. The poor and middle class, on the other hand, are left with miles-long traffic jams at best, no exit at worst. The "subject of security" replaced in neoliberal ideology by the "subject of resilience" is only replaced for those who lack the necessary resources to secure themselves.[xxv]

Yet there is, on the whole, something missing from this perspective as well, which treats the "resilient subject" as if it were a wholly new phenomenon on the field of history, solely the product of a neoliberal responsibilization of the subject. This critique is, when boiled down, relatively straightforward. By emphasizing the need to "become resilient" in the face of environmental, psychological, and economic calamity, economic and political elites ignore the structural conditions that produce the calamities in the face of which one is to be resilient. The irrational exuberance of capitalist markets is ignored, the need of consumers to "save for a rainy day" emphasized. Global climate change and ecological degradation are forgotten, but the cities and towns near the coast or under the face of volcanoes must find ways to cope when their

livelihoods have been destroyed. Those subject to the constant strain of life under capitalism need to learn mental techniques that prepare them to adapt to long hours, constantly being on the clock, and the requirement for constant self-valorization, exchanging their anger for E*TRADE. In all spheres of life, subjects are encouraged not to question the structural conditions that require them to become resilient but instead to be on the lookout for how they can enhance their own value.[xxvi] While this description does not necessarily capture the nuances of the many arguments against resilience, which take such a variety of tacks that any short summary is incomplete, it does provide the basic outline of the critical group's attack on the term.

There is certainly value in the social critique levied by this group of scholars. It would be foolish to deny that contemporary strategies of governance are oriented toward removing social mechanisms of support from non-bourgeois subjects. How deep, though, can this critique effectively penetrate? Must "resilience" be so negatively construed?[xxvii] Or can we both acknowledge the ways in which it is often politically deployed while still hoping to salvage something of it?

Etymologically, "resilience" contains within itself fundamental definitional tensions that offer multiple potential meanings. According to D. E. Alexander, the "etymology of *resilire*, *resilio* [the Latin predecessor of the term] is unknown, which indicates that it was probably a part of standard Latin — as much as any such thing existed — in Classical times, and was thus a word used occasionally by accomplished men of letters."[xxviii] Félix Gaffiot's *Dictionnaire Illustré Latin-Français*, on the other hand, asserts that *resilio* is the combination of "*re et salio*."[xxix] *Re*, as in English, means "again, against." Lewis and Short add that it "denotes either, A turning back ward (Engl. back) … or, An opposition … A restoration of a thing to its original condition (e.g. a freeing or loosing from a state of constraint)." It may also be used to indicate a "transition into an opposite state" or a "repetition of an action." *Saliō* means "to leap, spring, bound, jump, hop" or "to leap, cover." *Resiliō* draws from the former of these sense of *re* to take the meaning "to leap or spring back," "to spring back, start back, rebound, recoil, retreat," or "to recoil, start back, shrink from." [xxx]

Clearly, the common political usage of the term privileges the sense of a return to a state that is in some sense identical to the state that has been abandoned. But there is a second sense of the term available as well, which, draws from a sense of *re* as "transition into an opposite state." The combination of *re* and *saliō* might perhaps then indicate the notion of "leaping or springing into an opposite state" rather "springing back." Resilience as "springing back" captures the longing for a return to some past form of social organization, or at least alterations that can be interpreted as a return from the perspective of those advocating it. It may thus also be a "return" for those who are against such a "bouncing back," as their prior conditions of existence within such an imaginary may be, on the whole, negative. Contrarily, resilience as "springing or leaping into an opposite state" contains within it an emphasis on transformation over time. It implies an alternative response to the conditions or predicaments that characterize the plight of existence: namely, the fundamental insecurity of continued being, both in terms of the instability of identity (who "I am" is always under pressure) and in terms of mere perpetuation as a "thing" or "subject" of some type.

"Resilience" does not merely imply a passive acceptance or passive transformation into newness, though. This response to the fundamental precarity of human existence lies between total resignation to the flows of history (*amor fati*)[xxxi] and total rejection of one's own emergence (nihilism). There is within the *re* something that is becoming otherwise, something stable that transforms itself into something new. These two poles, stability and newness, constrain the agentic possibilities open to the subject. To be forbidden the right to protest what one has been made or what one is becoming makes the project of being wholly inactive, passive, and Bartlebyian. The subject leaps forward again and again, constantly becoming wholly alien to itself.

On the other hand, nihilism functions as the absolute rejection of what one is, often expressed in attempts to securitize an identity that come under pressure (a return to a "City on a Hill"; "Make America Great Again"; "-phobic" or otherwise reactionary identities of all kinds). To accept new social–political–identitarian formations as legitimate is to relinquish the desire to constitute one's own identity against modes of alterity one had previously rejected. As Evans and Reid explain, "Nihilism, thus understood [by Nietzsche], referred to the triumph of *reactive thinking*. It was all about the negation of life as it appeared to be incapable of affirming that which is properly and creatively different to human existence."[xxxii] It is the perpetual longing for a "springing back."

The definitional duality of "resilience" consequently positions it between these two poles of acceptance and rejection of what one is, although in ongoing tension with each of them. Resilience is at its simplest nothing more—but also nothing less!—than the dialectic of identity itself. "To be" is to be in relation to other transient formations of meaning (which always, of course, are only enabled to exist in relation to material practices) such that "being" is always-already "becoming." If one imagines, though, that "becoming" is always subservient to "being," operating teleologically in the pursuit of eventually reaching some previous or future social formation that will permit becoming to cease, then we move in the politically dangerous direction of totalitarian identities: the tautological and positivistic fascism of Enlightenment that generated so much consternation for Horkheimer and Adorno. Because I have existed in relation to certain modes of social organization, such an imaginary posits, it must always be the case that I maintain such an existence. "I am who I am" because existence, my existence, is a necessary perfection.

Contrarily, to acknowledge "being" as always-already "becoming" is to deny the regulative fiction of a permanent "doer behind the deed" that is somehow prior to the "deeds" in which the doer is both manifested and constituted. It also permits the opportunity, which some will treat as liberating, some as petrifying, that "self-overcoming" is never complete (this, perhaps, is the fate that we must learn to love). Work on the self is perpetual. The chaos within oneself is only ever partially organized, and even that only from particular perspectives. The self is never shown to be the work of a single intellect.

The crucial questions here are twofold: who is the "we" that survives, and what is the sense in which the "we" survives? Given that there are no "identical actions,"[xxxiii] neither can there be identical or permanent socio-cultural assemblages. There can be neither total preservation of past identities *nor* subject that has totally reconstituted itself. There is instead only the "resilient" subject: one that is always-already both itself and otherwise.

Political Theory and Resilience

From this point of view, the call to "resilience" is not new. Rather, like the dialectic it reflects, it lies at the foundational division between "being" and "becoming" perplexing Western philosophical thought. In political theory, we can trace the first of these terms at least as far back as the utopian vision of Plato's Republic. The question that Plato seeks to answer is not the sort of life that an ethical subject ought to live, a question to which any answer would be diachronic because it would address the subject's ongoing relationship to a fluctuating context. Plato's subject of inquiry is instead the internal structure of the just soul as understood through the imaginary of the just city (the soul and city's proper "being"). The just city is one in which everything is located in its proper place: the craftspeople, the auxiliaries, and the guardians. This of course includes the presumption that all those who are dwelling in the city are dwelling in their proper locations and are doing so "properly," which is why Plato, via Socrates, spends so much time obsessing over the regulations subject to which his city's guardians will live.

But what does it mean for someone to live "properly" and in their "proper place"? Any answer to this inquiry will be synchronic in the sense that it implies a single, perfect arrangement to which the fluctuating interactions of individuals only imperfectly correspond. Plato's model attempts to forestall the dangers associated with "becoming" by concerning itself first and foremost with an idealized "being" that can function as the model for social organization.

Such an attempt is perhaps obviously self-defeating in that the perpetuity of a city or state requires constant activity in order to ward off too-significant deviations from an idealized and fictive form of "being" according to which the city or state is organized: it requires constant "resilience" in a sense that is always actually a "springing toward otherwise" cloaked in a rhetoric of "springing back" and supported by a variety of disciplinary mechanisms. But this observation, that even preserving what already is requires ongoing dedication to its renewal, goes back at least to Machiavelli, who concludes *The Prince* with a discussion of the need to deploy *virtu* in order to forestall the vicissitudes of *fortuna*. According to Machiavelli, roughly half of what occurs in the world is the result of human activity and agency in the world, whereas half is the effect of chance and fortune, which demands that humans respond to it:

> Nevertheless, since our free will must not be eliminated, I think it may be true that fortune determines one half of our actions, but that, even so, she leaves us to control the other half, or thereabouts. And I compare her to one of those torrential rivers that, when they get angry, break their banks, knock down trees and buildings, strip the soil from one place and deposit it somewhere else. … But although they are so powerful, this does not mean men, when the waters recede, cannot make repairs and build banks and barriers so that, if the waters rise again, either they will be safely kept within the sluices or at least their onrush will not be so unregulated and destructive.[xxxiv]

In Machiavelli's sense, then, the virtuous subject is the responsibilized subject is the resilient subject. To take the preparatory steps permitting oneself to endure against forces larger than the control of any single individual is to have virtue. This maintenance is, more or less, what is today expressed as "resilience." For Machiavelli, it was the heart of *virtu*.

Whose virtue, though, does *The Prince* contain? It is a treatise examining how a monarchical ruler can best go about securing *his* rule over a delimited people contained within a specific

territory. We might call it a discourse on governing for a proto-sovereign or pre-liberal sovereign subject. When Foucault returns to Machiavelli's writings in the former's famed lecture on governmentality, he contends that "government" here and in similar texts was about the "proper disposition" of "men and things."[xxxv] There are sections of Machiavelli's discourses, such as Machiavelli's account of a virtuous army as one that is tactically well-ordered, that make this link between virtue and order quite clear.[xxxvi]

Contra Plato, however, the form of order defended by Machiavelli is never quite static. The same organizational decisions will not work in all instances, so the specific facts of each historical situation must play a role in the lessons one draws from them. Consequently, the virtuous principality or republic is one that is constituted such that the "right manner of disposing things" will involve dynamically responding to the vacillations of *fortuna*. The virtuous prince possesses not a specific plan of order but a dynamic capacity for ordering. Plato's *Republic*, on the other hand, is concerned with situating all and each in his or her proper role, presuming, it would seem, that the capacity for preservation will be derived from this plan of order. The virtue of the city is found for Plato in the fact of proper situation, not in whether the situating that has occurred permits the maintenance of the city over time. Machiavelli's account is diachronic, Plato's synchronic.

Foucault's governmentality lecture, though it references Machiavelli and not Plato, perhaps draws out a more Platonic account than a Machiavellian one. Governmentality is characterized by its disposing of "men and things" after the fashion "proper to them." There is here the supposition that objects and subjects imply the set of social relations according to which they ought to be ordered. Populations and economies should be increased. Health and hygiene should be maintained. Markets should be left to self-regulate. Yet Foucault was acutely aware that discourses, of which discourses of governance are one, do not merely find their subjects and objects of management ready-made but instead bring them into being.[xxxvii] The "manner proper" to "men and things" is only ever "proper" in relation to a supposed *telos*, which is either explicitly enumerated or left hidden. For Machiavelli, the *telos* is clear: it is the maintenance of the principality and republic because the endurance of the government over time is the basis of its greatness. As such, there is no single set of synchronic relations that could be sufficiently virtuous for ensuring the "resilience" of a political order; resilience is situational because it is coterminous with life (here the life of the republic) itself.

The perniciousness of governmental rationality is that it consistently obscures its foundational lacuna: the lack of a robust *telos*. Wealth and the population must be increased and kept healthy. Why? What is health? Whose health? Is "increase" qualitative or quantitative? These ends inevitably become socially coterminous with specific practices of management, and these practices of management in turn become unquestionable ends in themselves rather than contingent social formations that have emerged out of the relation of objects to the systems of meaning that constitute their conditions of possible legibility, conditions that are always shifting (genealogically) at the same time that they enable a specific set of relations at a certain moment in time (archaeologically).[xxxviii]

Resilience as neither solely being nor becoming, as always related to contingent and shifting circumstances that privilege (but not absolutely) the continuation of some already-existing

subject embedded in an already-existing social formation, opens up the possibility of resilience as a perpetual transformation that re-embeds substantive rationality of the form, "What is to be done? Who am I, and thus who are we, to be and become?" What element of the already-existing subject is to be saved, and what element is to be discarded? What is the mode of being toward which we hope to spring? Why should we desire it? Emphasizing these questions displaces functionalist forms of reason that treat certain goods as natural, given, and desirable, taking as their only question how we are to maximize in a utilitarian sense the "good" of the presumably stable object in question (population, health, life, etc.).

The Ethical Subject of Resilience
In the final chapter in their book critiquing resilience, Brad Evans and Julian Reid gesture at a figure they describe as the "poetic subject," a figure that goes beyond resilience on behalf of generating new, potent worlds mysterious to us now but comprehensible from some future perspective. Crucial to the poetic subject is its knowledge of "how to die," or its ability to learn how to do so. The project of philosophy, Reid and Evans assert early in the book, is that of learning how to die: how to come to terms with death, but also how to become a subject other than you are when you can no longer be who you have been.[xxxix] Resilience, they claim, cheats us of who we can become by refusing us the right to be exhausted, which they take pains to distinguish from being merely "tired."[xl]

These authors are not alone in their assault on the requirement to remain the same that is implied by the forms of resilience demanded by governing authorities. Let us here remember Foucault's anathematization of perpetual similitude: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write."[xli] This element of Foucault's thought has been taken up in great detail by Sergei Prozorov, whose highly engaging *Foucault, Freedom, and Sovereignty* draws from Foucault's account of "concrete freedom" along with Giorgio Agamben's arguments on "whatever being," the "politics to come," and "potentiality" to advocate a perspective on sovereign freedom as the capacity to refuse what one is, to "escape the camps" of predication that seek to enact a diagrammatic abduction of identity. For Prozorov, freedom is found in this capacity to refuse what one is, though the capacity alone is not enough. The messianic "politics to come" involves the rejection of any predication so that one remains in a state of "whatever being" alongside all the other "whatever beings" who have likewise maintained their freedom. Prozorov acknowledges that this final stage probably exists only as an ideal, yet it does seem to be *his* ideal, the maintenance of the potentiality in a suspended state free from commitments.[xlii]

Prozorov's subject is not quite the subject to which Evans and Reid commit themselves. Evans' and Reid's subject is a subject becoming exhausted, a subject that must "die" in the sense that it cannot continue as the subject that it is, the subject that it has been made to be. But it is not for that reason a subject without commitments. As they write, "Poetry does not emerge free forming, it is itself a craft."[xliii] The poetic subject, it would appear, cannot "emerge free forming" either. Instead, it draws, they argue, from both the "prophetic" and "parrhesiastic" modes of truth-telling. The parrhesiast, per Foucault, "reveals and discloses what people's blindness prevents them from seeing, but who does not unveil the future," [xliv] while the prophet "is always positioned between the present and the future, functioning to reveal what is hidden in the future."[xlv]

Evans and Reid "argue for their [prophecy and *parrhēsia*'s] renewed use, and aim to show how they are in effect already in use, in constitution and deployment of a more poetic aesthetic, the dictum of which is that in seeing the end we do not fear it, that we live out the end in full knowledge of it, while we renounce any call to organize with a view to trying to survive the end in a game whose rules are written against us from the start."[xlvi] Working together, these modes of truth-telling permit the poetic subject to imagine the possibility of alternative worlds (prophecy) while honing its power of discernment to determine which among those possible worlds it will work to achieve (*parrhēsia*). Discernment of this sort must be undertaken by the subject from the position it inhabits, even as the subject aims for new possibilities. This subject is one who is capable of affirming parts of what it is while rejecting others. It is the subject that pines not merely for a return to the past or its own survival but for the death of part of itself and the development of that which is good.

There is no creation *ex nihilo* here, nor could there be. Instead, the poetic subject must cling to what is good while throwing off the old and putting on the new. As Nietzsche put it in a section of *The Gay Science* entitled, "One thing is needful":

> To 'give style' to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. … In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! … Conversely, it is the weak characters without power over themselves that *hate* the constraint of style. … Such spirits—and they may be of the first rank—are always out to shape and interpret their environment as *free* nature: wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising. And they are well advised because it is only in this way that they can give pleasure to themselves. For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight. For the sight of what is ugly makes one bad and gloomy.[xlvii]

Nietzsche is a deft and agile thinker; he avoids privileging any specific ethos in this elaboration of his ethical commitments. It is neither the stylistically coherent nor the stylistically fluid subject—this itself is a coherence—that is necessary or desirable. It is the subject who finds itself beautiful, who loves itself. This is subject who, for itself and for those who observe it, proves that "it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*."[xlviii]

But does this subject not at a minimum *require* the subject of resilience? Is it not necessarily a resilient subject, even though not all resilient subjects achieve the level of poetry? Is not the remnant of "original nature" in Nietzsche the element of the subject that survives every prior transformation, even as the subject constantly springs forth anew in a dialectical transcendence and preservation of its prior conditions of possibility? Evans and Reid claim their account is not

fatalistic, that they reject the "liberal" demand to be resilient on behalf of the poetic subject. But to the extent that the liberal subject exists any more or less than the poetic subject, it exists, as Reid and Evans seem to acknowledge, as an ideal that offers us a specific interpretation of the world of experience. The ideal of the liberal subject is not necessarily either accurate or inaccurate. Rather, it is dangerous because it slaughters the imaginative part of the human that might "go beyond" as an arrow of longing and desire for some "higher" form of the self.[xlix] Nevertheless, the biocultural assemblage known as the "human" remains more or less the same irrespective of whether it imagines itself to be liberal or to be poetic, even as the imaginary through which humans are made legible continuously (re)constitutes them. Consequently, the death of any subject identified as human, even if it takes the form of a total exhaustion and transformation into something else, is neither free nor unfree. Freedom is an existential, ontologically inalienable capacity of beings that maintain themselves as existing things. This, in fact, is liberalism's greatest philosophical contribution to how we understand subjects: the capacity for autonomy is expressed when we choose our attachments, a choice that history and contingency always renders partially determined because it is thoroughly socially situated. We imagine ourselves as free to be imaginative, even if the sources of our own constitution render our imagination dull and insipid rather than lively and incipient.

The opposite of necessity is freedom, and with freedom comes the danger of power and its capacity to unmake the subject. We are always more dangerous to ourselves and others than we realize. This power exhausts at every moment our capacity to be the subject we understand ourselves to be, but it is also the source of the capacity at each moment to cling to some part of the subject we have been. We again inhabit the dialectic. Everything that exists is maintained only as long as its constitutive elements, the elements said to be constitutive of it, attend to each other.[l] Only images die. The materialities that collectively assemble to form the subject go on. "For souls it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; out of earth water arises, out of water soul," Heraclitus writes.[li] Death and birth are simultaneous, perhaps even overlapping. But for a subject—even a poetic subject—to create and master itself, its subject-ness must survive. *Bios* needs *zoē*; more life needs mere life; the creative subject requires a subject capable of first resisting that which threatens to overwhelm it so that it can move onto more vibrant modes of being: it requires the resilient subject.

The critique of the resilient subject is well-made if the critique is of a subject that is *only* resilient in the narrowest sense—a subject that works to survive so that it can continue clinging to the form of life it could barely inhabit prior to catastrophe and can hardly hope to maintain in the wake of it. Resilience is crucial, though, for any subject that would seek to transcend itself on behalf of new and creative modes of existence. The not-yet-Absolute subject that must become absolute. The potentiality constantly becoming actuality. The unfinished subject of freedom, for whom the end only comes when the subject is finally forgotten. This is not a subject who is *forced* to be resilient; it is a subject that *must* be resilient if it hopes to remain a subject in the first place.

Notes

[i] See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (London: Cambridge UP, 1981): 1.

[ii] Paul Connerton, "Introduction," *Critical Sociology*, ed. Paul Connerton (New York: Penguin Books, 1976): 17–18.

[iii] Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," interview Paul Rabinow, in *Power (The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3)*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000 [1982]): 356.

William Connolly took up this line of inquiry in an essay entitled "Nothing is Fundamental…", which appears as the first chapter in *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota UP, 1995): 1–40.

[iv] Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," interview by various historians, in *Power (The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3)*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000 [1978]): 256.

[v] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977 [1867/1873]): 103.

[vi] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002 [1944/1947]): 11, 18.

[vii] Ibid. 22.

[viii] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'," trans. H.B. Nisbet, *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991 [1784]): 54–60.
E.g., "If it is now asked whether we live in an *enlightened* age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*. As things are at present, we still have a long way to go before men as a whole can be in a position (or can even be put into a position) of using their own understanding confidently and well in religious matters, without outside guidance. But we do have distinct indications that the way is now being cleared for them to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer." *Ibid.* 58.

[ix] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?", trans. Catherine Porter, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 32–50. E.g., "[T]his criticism is … genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological—and not transcendental—in the sense that it will … seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will … separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. … [I]t is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom." *Ibid.*, 46. Also, "I do not know whether we will ever reach mature adulthood. Many things in our experience convince us that the historical event of Enlightenment did not make us mature adults, and we have not reached that stage yet. However, it seems to me that a meaning can be attributed to that critical interrogation on the present and on ourselves which Kant formulated by reflecting on the Enlightenment. … The critical ontology of ourselves has to be … conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them." *Ibid.*, 49–50.

[x] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 20.

[xi] See Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992): 3–7.

[xii] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 20.

[xiii] *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Charles H. Kahn (New York: Cambridge UP, 1979): 53 (fragment LI). Kahn notes that this phrasing is from Plutarch and thus likely not to be verbatim.

[xiv] "For this reason neither coming to be / nor perishing did Justice allow, loosening her shackles, / but she [Justice] holds it fast. And the decision about these things is in this: / is or is not; and it has been decided, as is necessary, / to leave the one [route] unthought of and unnamed (for it is not a true / route), so that the other [route] is and is genuine. / But how can what-is be hereafter? How can it come to be? / For if it came to be, it is not, not even if it is sometime going to be. / Thus coming-to-be has been extinguished and perishing cannot be investigated."
Parmenides of Elea, as recorded by Simplicius in *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, excerpted in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, Fourth Edition, eds. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011): 44 (lines 13–21).

[xv] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Volume 1, The Founders*, trans. P.S. Falla (New York: Oxford UP, 1981 [1978]): 12.

[xvi] Ibid., 23.

xvii "Developed within systems ecology in the 1970s, 'resilience' as a science of complex adaptive systems and an operational strategy of risk management has since flourished, progressively asserting itself as a dominant discourse in national resource management." Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper, "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42.2: 143 (internal citations omitted).

xviii Philippe Bourbeau, "Resilience and International Politics: Premises, Debates, Agenda," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 17.3 (2015): 374.

xix Ibid., 375.

xx Walker and Cooper, "Genealogies of Resilience," 152.

xxi Ibid., 154. See also Kevin J. Grove, "From Emergency Management to Managing Emergency: A Genealogy of Disaster Management in Jamaica," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 103.3 (2013): 570–588; Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014).

xxii Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 71.

xxiii Bourbeau, "Resilience and International Politics," 375. Internal citations omitted.

xxiv Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 5–6.

xxv "[Hurricane] Sandy … in particular showed how the idea of a natural catastrophe is itself open to many interpretations depending upon racial, class, and gendered differences. Vulnerability was not a uniform, let alone universal, condition. Like Katrina before it, those already insured with the financial means and capabilities to 'escape' impending change in climatic conditions experienced the event as a mere inconvenience in the ongoing accommodation to rapid environmental change. For those, however, on the margins of existence, those populations violently contained within deeply segregated ghettos which offer no credible means for escape, the raw reality of the devastation was all too apparent. In the absence of social protections, such populations were precisely the ones asked to evidence their resilience capacities. *There is no resilience asked of those who can afford to take flight. That was an exercise in security.* … The resilient, in other words, were not security prepared; they had to learn to adapt and live through the catastrophe on account of the fact that their insecure predicament became altogether more amplified and, for a moment at least, brought into the public gaze before being left to their poverty as usual without questioning wider social implications." Ibid., 87–88 (emphasis added).

xxvi Wendy Brown explores this tendency in her work *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books, 2014), where she examines the remaking of "the soul" on the model of the firm: "This book will suggest that neoliberal reason has returned [Plato's homology between city and soul] with a vengeance: both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm, both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value, and both persons and states do so through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors." Ibid., 22.

xxvii I am not the first to ask this question. Various other authors have digested the critique of resilience and found it lacking, wondering whether there might not be other senses of or histories for the term and considering certain of the more aggressive critiques to be too tendentious. See Bourbeau, "Resilience and International Politics"; James Brassett and Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Security and the Performative Politics of Resilience: Critical Infrastructure Protection and Humanitarian Emergency Preparedness," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 46.1 (2015): 32–50; Olaf Corry, "From Defense to Resilience: Environmental Security beyond Neo-Liberalism," *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 8.3 (September 2014): 256–274; Jessica Schmidt, "Intuitively Neoliberal? Towards a Critical Understanding of Resilience Governance," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 21.2 (2015): 402–426.

xxviii "Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction: An Etymological Journey," *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences*, Vol. 13 (2013): 2708.

xxix (Paris: Hachette, 1934) (accessed online at http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/gaffiot/resilio). The following argument is based on belief in the correctness of Gaffiot's account of the etymology *contra* Alexander's assertion of its mystery, but Gaffiot need not be correct for the philosophical implications developed from the etymology to hold weight. I am not an expert in etymology, nor do I pretend to be. As I see it, etymology is primarily evocative. I am searching not for originary, pure meanings but for illustrative expansions of the meanings we presently accept. It is my belief that turning to the history of the terms we deploy can be useful in this regard.

xxx These definitions are taken from *Numen: The Latin Lexicon*, which draws from *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* by Charlton T. Lewis and *A Latin Dictionary* by Lewis and Short. Accessed at http://latinlexicon.org/index.php. The definition of *resiliō* is as provided in *Lewis Elementary*, the definitions for *re* and *saliō* as in Lewis and Short.

xxxi The *amor fati* is probably better construed as learning to love the history by which one has been constituted instead of seeing it as blithe acceptance of how one enters the future, but there is the finest of lines at the intersection of willing to be otherwise and yet loving who one is.

xxxii Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 116.

xxxiii See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974 [1887/1882]): 265 (IV.335).

xxxiv Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994 [1513–1516]): XXV (74–75).

xxxv Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power (The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3)*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000 [1978]): 211.

xxxvi Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Manfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [ca. 1517]): 160–168 (II.16–17, "How Much the Soldiers of Our Times Do Not Conform to the Ancient Orders" and "How Much Artillery Should Be Esteemed by Armies in the Present Time; and Whether the Opinion Universally Held of It Is True").

xxxvii "Political rationality is thus a specific development of Foucault's long-standing insistence that truth, knowledge, and forms of reason are never outside of power relations. Power itself does not exist either as raw domination or in a material substratum of existence independent of thought and language. Rather, power always governs or acts as part of a regime of truth that is itself generative of power, yet not identical with its exercise. *Moreover, power always brings into being the subjects and orders that it may be seen only to organize or to rule*." Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 115 (emphasis added); See also Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1972 [1969]), especially II.3 (40–49), "The formation of objects."

xxxviii The division between these elements of Foucault's methodology captures the duality of existence that forms the basis of the dialectical problem I have been exploring here. The genealogical element recognizes the fluctuating character of social practices and meanings, while the archaeological element relates specific social meanings to the structures within which they are made legible. Archaeologies of knowledge will always be frustrated to an extent by the genealogical movement of terms. The map, or perhaps matrix, of meanings required to situate even a single term alters the historical position of that term in relation to practice. The matrix would eventually need to contain itself. And this is only the most immediate of difficulties, leaving out the breadth and depth of knowledge even the simplest of such excavations would require. At the same time, to undertake genealogy of any sort requires an archaeological, with is to say relational, sensibility, though the genealogical element discerns how apparently stable relations have moved over time.

xxxix Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 13–14.

xl Ibid., 176–180.

xli Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 17.

xlii See generally, Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom, and Sovereignty* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

xliii Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 202.

xliv Ibid., 145 (quoting Foucault).

xlv Ibid., 145.

xlvi Ibid., 166.

xlvii Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 232–233 (IV.290).

xlviii Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin, 2003 [1872/1886]): 32 (§5).

xlix Evans and Reid, *Resilient Life*, 197: "When one reads back through the history of liberal thought, what's striking is the extent to which this project of constituting a subject of limits required a wholesale pathologization of the human imagination."

l "Nothing can ever be kept in place but can only be attended to. That this takes a constant mutual orientation among things that cannot be things except within this mutual orientation and aren't because no one can know how far they stretched nor if they have leaked – things like sand or ocean spray or radioactivity and chemical contamination. They refuse the psychotic olive branch continually extended to them – tell us what you are in essence above and beyond separate from the world you are inhabiting." Elizabeth A. Povnelli, Mathew Coleman, and Kathryn Yusoff, "An Interview with Elizabeth Povinelli: Geontopower, Biopolitics, and the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture, & Society*, Vol. 34.2–3: 182.

li Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 75 (fragment CII).

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