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# THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT: RESILIENCE AND THE ART OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY\*

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## ABSTRACT

While security has functioned historically as the major rationality for the subjection of populations to liberal governance, the rationality enabling that subjection is fast changing to that of resilience. This is not just a semantic shift. Resilience entails a fundamental change in conceptions of the relationship of human beings to danger. To be secure, classically conceived, means to be free from danger. The discourse of resilience functions to prevent humans from conceiving danger as a phenomenon from which they might free themselves from and, in contrast, as that which they must now expose themselves to. This is because the modelling of human subjectivity under conditions of neoliberalism reifies its biological life as the domain of agency and governance. In this sense resilience represents a significant extension of the biopolitical drivers of neoliberal modernity. Contesting the global injunction to give up on security requires a subject capable of imagining itself as something more than merely biological material. A political subject whose humanity resides in its freedom to secure itself from the dangers that it encounters. In context of which it is necessary we turn from the mere analysis of biopolitics to the theorization and practice of psychopolitics.

**KEYWORDS:** Security, Resilience, Liberalism, Danger, Subjectivity, Biopolitics

## EL SUJETO NEOLIBERAL: RESILIENCIA Y EL ARTE DE VIVIR PELIGROSAMENTE

A pesar de que la seguridad haya funcionado históricamente como la racionalidad

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fundamental para la sujeción de poblaciones a la gobernanza liberal, la racionalidad que posibilitaba aquella sujeción se encuentra cambiando rápidamente a una de resiliencia. Esto no se trata de un cambio semántico solamente. La resiliencia implica un cambio fundamental en las concepciones referentes a la relación de los seres humanos con el peligro. Desde la concepción clásica, el estar seguro significa estar libre de peligro. El discurso de la resiliencia funciona para evitar que los seres humanos conciban al peligro como un fenómeno del cual podrían liberarse, sino por el contrario, como uno al que ahora deberán exponerse. Esto se debe a que la modelización de la subjetividad humana bajo las condiciones del neoliberalismo reifica a su vida biológica como el campo de la agencia y la gobernanza. En este sentido, la resiliencia representa una extensión significativa de los motores biopolíticos de la modernidad neoliberal. Contrariar el mandato global de renunciar a la seguridad requiere de un sujeto capaz de imaginarse a sí mismo como algo más que meramente material biológico. Un sujeto político cuya humanidad reside en su libertad para garantizar su propia seguridad frente a los peligros que se encuentra. En un contexto tal resulta necesario virar del mero análisis de la biopolítica a la teorización y la práctica de la Psicopolítica.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Seguridad, Resiliencia, Liberalismo, Peligro, Subjetividad, Biopolítica

### I. INTRODUCTION

While security has functioned historically as the major rationality for the subjection of populations to liberal governance, the rationality enabling that subjection is fast changing to that of resilience.<sup>1</sup> As such the policy problematic of liberal regimes of governance is undergoing a global shift from that of how to secure the human to how to render it resilient. This is not just a semantic shift. Resilience entails a fundamental change in the conception of the relationship of human beings to danger. To be secure, classically conceived, means to be free from danger. Policy-makers engaging in the discourse of resilience do so in terms which aim explicitly at preventing humans from conceiving danger as a phenomenon from which they might seek freedom from and, in contrast, as that which they must now expose themselves to. This owes, I will argue here, to the ways in which the modelling of human subjectivity under conditions of neoliberalism reifies its biological life as the domain of agency and governance. Life, biologically understood, is a difficult entity to secure. It has a habit of dying on you, undergoing change,

1 Julian Reid, 'The Disastrous and Politically Debased Subject of Resilience', *Development Dialogue* (58, 2012), 67-80; Mark Neocleous, 'Don't Be Scared, Be Prepared': Trauma-Anxiety-Resilience', *Alternatives* (37, 3, 2012); David Chandler, 'Resilience and human security: The post-interventionist paradigm', *Security Dialogue* (43, 3, 2012), 213-29; Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper, 'Genealogies of resilience: From systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation', *Security Dialogue* (42, 2, 2011), 43-60; Mark Duffield, 'Total War as Environmental Terror: Linking Liberalism, Resilience, and the Bunker', *South Atlantic Quarterly* (110, 3, 2011), 757-69.

eluding your grasp, defying your will to control it. Not only is it difficult to secure but the very attempt to secure it can, it is said, have deleterious effects on it. The more you try to secure it the worse you make it, even to the point of eventually killing it. Security is dangerous, paradoxically, because it defies the necessity of danger, preventing the necessary exposure to danger, without which the life of the neoliberal subject cannot grow and prosper. Since life, it is said, cannot be secured without destroying it, so the framing of the human in terms of its capacities for resilience functions to disqualify its capacities to claim or pursue security. Once the practice of freeing oneself from danger is rendered, as it is now, a pathological disposition of humans, so the problem becomes not how to secure the human but how to enable it to outlive its proclivity for security: how to alter its disposition in relation with danger so that it construes danger not as something it might seek freedom from, but which it must live in exposure to. Resilient subjects are precisely these. Subjects that have learnt the lesson of the dangers of security, in order to live out a life of permanent exposure to dangers that are not only beyond their abilities to overcome but necessary for the prosperity of their life and wellbeing. In this sense resilience represents a significant extension of the biopolitical drivers of neoliberal modernity that I have explored extensively elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The implications of the shift from security to resilience for conceptions and practices of human subjectivity remains unexplored in the existing literature.

In this article, however, I also want to pursue this aspect of the biopolitics of neoliberal subjectivity onto the terrain of another concept and capacity, dear to the liberal tradition; that of autonomy. Because an interconnected shift applies with respect to the problem of autonomy. Traditionally, we are taught to think about the liberal subject as the autonomous subject. By autonomous I mean a subject defined by its disconnection from other human beings, and a non-adaptivity to the will of others. Disconnection and non-adaptation were once understood as conditions of possibility within the liberal tradition. As Isaiah Berlin describes in his classic essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', the liberal wishes 'to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are his own, not by causes which affect him, as it were, from outside. He wishes to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if he were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of his own and realizing them'.<sup>3</sup> In contrast with Berlin's classical vision, when liberals engage today in promoting the resilience of

<sup>2</sup> Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live* (London and New York, Routledge, 2009); Julian Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror: Life Struggles, Liberal Modernity and the Defence of Logistical Societies* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

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human beings they do so in terms that aim at preventing us from conceiving our capacities to determine our own ways of life in freedom from others as a state to strive for and, in contrast, as a potential risk unto ourselves. Autonomy, it is said, equals a diminished capacity to connect with and adapt to others, and so to be autonomous has become conceived less as a condition to strive for, and more as a source of danger to oneself and the life of others. Exposed to the dangers on which its life is said to thrive, the neoliberal subject is nevertheless called upon to fend off the formation of anything like an autonomously determined way of life, on account of the risks said to be posed by autonomy to the sanctity of life. These, I will argue, are the paradoxical stakes of the contemporary and ongoing shift in discourses of governance and subjection characteristic of neoliberalism.

As with the pathologization of security under conditions of neoliberalism, so the pathologization of autonomy and subsequent valorization of resilience and connectivity has been fed by ideas and discourses deriving not just from outside of political science, but from beyond the social sciences strictly conceived. It is the life sciences that account for much of the thinking concerning the problematic nature of autonomy and importance of resilience and connectivity as requisite capacities for the development of neoliberal subjectivity. The ongoing pathologization of autonomy began, as I will show, not in the political discourses of liberal practitioners or thinkers, but in the context of scientific studies of non-human living systems. To a certain extent the pathologization of autonomy follows on from the pathologization of security and shift to resilience. Ecology has played a particularly powerful discursive role in enabling the rise of the latter concept.<sup>4</sup> But the life science of biology has been equally important in shaping the critique of security within neoliberal discourse, as well as enabling the proliferation of ideas concerning the importance of connectivity and correlate arguments for the diminishment of autonomy. Understanding how neoliberalism has problematized and pathologized autonomy thus requires contextualizing that move within the deeper scientific problematization and pathologization of security.

## II. RESILIENT LIFE: THE ART OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

While ecology has been particularly vocal in pronouncing the finitude of human life, the fragility of its dependence on the biosphere, and its consequent exposure to the dangers of ecological catastrophe, it is molecular biology which has been most powerful in expressing faith in the potential

<sup>4</sup> Reid, 'The Disastrous and Politically Debased Subject of Resilience'.

of the human to be able to go on living and thriving in a context of such finitude, vulnerability and potential catastrophe. Indeed the very idea of life as a phenomenon of finitude, vulnerability, and exposure to danger has been valorized by molecular biology throughout its history as a condition of possibility, rather than an obstacle, for human development. To the extent that theories of economic growth have, over the last ten years, tended to merge and benefit from their intersection with theories of how life grows and develops, at the molecular level, through exposure to danger, especially.<sup>5</sup> I am not going to recount the history of molecular biology here. There are already some excellent such histories written.<sup>6</sup> But significantly it was in the 1990s that influential molecular biologists such as Stuart Kauffman, for example, began to argue that living systems cannot, by definition, be secured from dangers, because their very capacity to go on living depends, fundamentally, not on their *freedom from* danger but on their *exposure to* danger. The evolutionary development of living systems, Kauffman said, is dictated by the fundamental law of 'emergence', which requires that they engage in a continual process of exposure to danger even to the point of potential catastrophe.<sup>7</sup> Without that exposure to danger, living systems it is said, cannot evolve, and those which do attempt to disconnect themselves from their dangers will lose touch with their own powers of propagation, to the extent that they will finally wither away and die. The concept of resilience refers to the 'buffer capacities' of living systems; their ability to 'absorb perturbations' or the 'magnitude of disturbance that can be absorbed before a living system changes its structure by changing the variables and processes that control behaviour'.<sup>8</sup> Living systems develop not on account of their ability to secure themselves from dangers, but through their abilities to absorb the perturbations that occur on account of their necessary exposure to them. Exposure to danger is a constitutive process in the development of living systems, and thus their problem is never how to secure themselves from it but how to develop the resilience which enables them to absorb the perturbations, disturbances, and changes in their structure which occur in the process of their exposure to it. And so the human, it is said once conceived in accordance with the laws that determine the life of other living systems, must develop the selfsame capacities for resilience, enabling it to avoid the temptation to secure itself from danger, exposing itself in contrast

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5 Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Washington D.C.: Washington University Press, 2008), 48-50.

6 Lily Kay, *Who Wrote the Book of Life: A History of the Genetic Code* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); N.K. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

7 Stuart Kauffman, *Investigations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157.

8 W.N. Adger, 'Social and Ecological Resilience: Are They Related?', *Progress in Human Geography* (24, 3, 2000), 349.

to danger, while learning how to absorb the perturbations that occur to it in that process of exposure.

The policy discourse of resilience is but an aspect of a much wider machinery of conceptual proliferation. Go on to any book purchasing website and type in 'resilience' and one receives information on a plethora of texts from any number of different domains. Self-help books geared to help us become resilient in our daily life and practices abound. Boris Cyrulnik, in his 'international bestseller' *Resilience: How Your Inner Strength Can Set You Free From the Past* explains to the reader how it is that 'before the disaster occurs, we believe that life – and happiness – is something that is owed to us' and how after 'we have survived the ordeal, life tastes different, because it is a process that destroys life, any extreme situation contains, paradoxically, a potential for life...an invisible spring allows us to bounce back from the ordeal by turning the obstacle into a trampoline, fragility into wealth, weakness into strength, and impossibilities into a set of possibilities'.<sup>9</sup> Michael Neenan in his *Developing Resilience: A Cognitive-Behavioural Approach* describes resilience in terms of the capacity to 'endure suffering and still remain largely optimistic and happy'.<sup>10</sup> Tom Morris in his *The Stoic Art of Living: Inner Resilience and Outer Results* reveals to his readership 'one of the deepest truths about life' - 'inner resilience is the secret to outer results in the world (2004: 1).<sup>11</sup> The esteemed French Philosopher, Alain Badiou even conceptualizes 'love' as a practice of resilience through which couples can adapt to one another in order to withstand disasters.<sup>12</sup> 'One of the deepest truths about life' and 'a natural process',<sup>13</sup> resilience is the human art of living (and loving) dangerously.

Such accounts of how life connects and grows in exposure to danger in the biological domain may hold some truth. It is not my interest to question knowledge and laws deriving from the life sciences as they are applied to the study of the interface between biological species and the ecological systems with which they are said to co-evolve. My concerns are for what happens when such frameworks are transferred to the human world of peoples. Because the results are debasing. Not least in terms of the relation of the human subject to the regime that governs it. For it is on account of such an errant transfer of assumptions that the subject is denied the capacity to demand of the regime that governs it that it provide it with freedom from the dangers which it perceives as threatening. This element of the terms

9 Boris Cyrulnik, *Resilience: How Your Inner Strength Can Set You Free From the Past* (London, Penguin, 2009), 283.

10 Michael Neenan, *Developing Resilience: A Cognitive-Behavioural Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.

11 Tom Morris, *The Stoic Art of Living: Inner Resilience and Outer Results* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2004), 1.

12 Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012), 44.

13 Cyrulnik, *Resilience*, 13.

of legitimation of modern regimes of political power has, of course, been fundamental historically, and yet is now rapidly eroding, on account of the influence of these discursive ways of thinking about life and danger. The neoliberal subject is not a subject which can conceive the possibility of securing itself from its dangers, but one which believes in the necessity of life as a permanently struggle of adaptation to dangers. Indeed a subject that accepts the dangerousness of the world it lives in as a condition for partaking of that world and which accepts the necessity of the injunction to change itself in correspondence with dangers now presupposed as endemic. Building neoliberal subjects involves the deliberate disabling of the aspirations to security that peoples otherwise nurture and replacing them with a belief in the need to become resilient.

This shift is functioning to govern the very human aspirations of so-called 'developing peoples' to secure themselves not simply from 'dangers' but 'disasters'. Leading the way in the elaboration of strategies for the diminishment of the aspirations of peoples for security from disasters is the United Nations (UN). It is a fact that to demonstrate their 'good governance' to the UN developing states must prove that they are able not to secure their societies from dangers but render them resilient in their exposure to them. Resilience is utilized by the UN to describe the capacities by which peoples 'exposed to hazard' instead of securing themselves from disasters, learn how to adapt to them.<sup>14</sup> This shift from security to resilience has tremendous implications for the subjectivities of developing peoples. When the UN preaches the necessity of peoples becoming 'resilient' they are, arguing in effect for their development of the entrepreneurial practices of subjectivity and self which became the mantra of neoliberal regimes in Europe and North America in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>15</sup> 'Resilient' peoples do not look to the regimes that govern them to provide them with security because they have been disciplined into believing in the undesirability of such an apparatus. Indeed so convinced are they are of that undesirability that they proclaim resilience to be a fundamental 'freedom'.<sup>16</sup>

Once exposure to danger becomes a condition of possibility for the subject, whether collective or individual, so the question posed of the subject is no longer can you exercise freedom in securing yourself from the dangers that you are faced with in living, but can you construe your freedom to live in the form of exposure to danger? Can you, in other words, as Michel Foucault detailed brilliantly in his *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, accept and rise to the neoliberal injunction to 'live dangerously'? At its classical origins,

14 United Nations, *Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives* (New York, UN Publications, 2004), 17.

15 Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

16 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Exploring the Links: Human Well-Being, Poverty & Ecosystem Services* (Nairobi, UN Publications, 2004).



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however, and as Foucault detailed in those lectures, the liberal subject, while living on the basis of an understanding as to the necessity of and even stimulus of danger, nevertheless aspired to achieve a condition of 'least exposure to danger'.<sup>17</sup> Its exercise of freedom was problematised as a dangerous activity; one that could have dangerous effects, for itself and those affected by it, but which could nevertheless be managed in a way that enabled it to minimize the extent of its exposure. Thus was the emergence and development of liberalism as an art of governance conditioned by what Foucault described as 'strategies of security'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the displacement of the very aspiration to security and shift to a discourse of resilience tells us a lot about the changing nature of liberalism; indicating as it does the extent to which danger has become that which the subject is governed to seek rather than minimize its exposure to. It is no longer a question of how to secure freedoms for the subject in the condition of their potential to become dangerous, either to the individual or the collective, but how the subject might practice freedom so that it achieves exposure to danger on behalf of itself and that population to which it belongs. Because danger, it is now said, is productive of life, individually and collectively.

The submission of the subject to this injunction to expose itself to danger requires, however, its prior subjection to the biological lore that, in spite of its humanism and discourses on freedom, actually underwrites liberalism. In other words its conception of relations between its own life and the dangers it encounters must conform to the demands of liberalism's biological account of life. Because biological life cannot free itself from danger without endangering its very capacities to go on living, so, it is said, must the liberal subject accept the same terms and conditions for the exercise of its political freedom in determining its way of life. Its freedom to determine the way in which it lives must be circumscribed by the biological imperative to expose itself to danger. It cannot live a life premised upon achieving freedom from dangers because to do that is to oppose the laws of life as determined by biological necessity. Recognizing the constitutive function of the biological lore of liberalism means we can only obtain a superficial grasp of how neoliberal regimes of governance achieve this dual debasement of the subject's capacities for security and autonomy by focusing on the so-called economic dimensions of the injunction to 'live dangerously'. There has been much talk, since the publication of *The Birth of Biopolitics* lecture series, of how Foucault abandoned his prior ideas of how to approach liberalism and gave himself up to a quasi-Marxist understanding of liberalism as a regime of economy. To the contrary, Foucault's discussions of neoliberalism do not suggest 'that the security sought by biopolitics is mediated by a

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17 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave), 66.

18 *Ibid*, 65.

fundamentally economic horizon of thought'.<sup>19</sup> The incitement of the subject to 'engage in risk taking and entrepreneurialism' is only explicable in context of the biologization of the subject that liberalism is founded on, and subsequently, the shift in thinking concerning how biological life profits in the world through a continual process of exposure to danger. Even if there is not much reference to the 'biopolitics' of the liberal subject as such, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and in spite of the focus on the economic rationalization of liberal governance in these lectures, it is clear that his understanding of liberal economy remained committed to revealing its biopoliticization. In no sense can 'the inculcation of an entrepreneurial spirit'<sup>20</sup> be considered the end of biopolitical governance. To think so is to fail to grasp the depth of the concept of biopolitics. The incitement of the liberal subject to take risks is the means by which the life of that subject, it is assumed, can be saved from itself and all that threatens its prosperity. It is life, not economy abstractly understood, that mediates the horizons of liberal thought and practice, for Foucault. The concept of economy is merely one powerful and important discourse within which liberal understandings of the nature of life, as such, operates.

### III. REVALORIZING SECURITY

It has, of course, become a commonplace, in critical traditions of political theory to denounce the political functions that the concept of security has played in constituting the discursive conditions which modern regimes of power require in order to legitimate their governance of particular populations. Discourses of security cannot function without constituting a differentiation between an inside and outside. The offer and undertaking to secure something or someone always assumes the delineation of another that is the threat or obstacle to such security. These problems with the discourse of security are well rehearsed by now and many critics of security have taken their cue from Foucault in developing their approach.<sup>21</sup> Foucauldian analytics of liberal regimes of power have contributed much through their examination of how the discourse of security has functioned to dislocate liberal claims to be concerned with promoting freedom, demonstrating why

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19 Nicholas Kiersey, 'Neoliberal Political Economy and the Subjectivity of Crisis: Why Governmentality is Not Hollow', *Global Society* (23, 4, 2009), 365.

20 *Ibid.*, 381.

21 Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Anthony Burke, *Beyond Security, Ethics and Violence: War against the Other* (London: Routledge, 2007); David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); RBJ Walker, 'The Subject of Security' in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London, UCL Press, 1997), 33-60; Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security* (London: Routledge, 1996).

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liberalism is better understood as dedicated to determining the conditions for the securitization of human freedom rather than to simply enunciating the imperative to be free.<sup>22</sup> In an interview given towards the end of his life, titled 'Risks of Security', Foucault constructed the problem of security in ways that undercut such well-worn utilisations of his thought.<sup>23</sup> Rather than seeking to condemn the concept of security, denouncing it as a merely ideological or discursive construct, or exploring how it functions as a prop for power, Foucault asked the question of what security might yet become. How it might be reconceptualised to perform different functions in constitution of a counter-liberal politics. Here Foucault did not see the claims of political authorities to provide security to their populations as necessarily mendacious or merely discursive. Nor did he, as has become so popular for Foucauldian theorists of security, seek to detach political imaginaries and projects from the concept of security as such by simply stripping it from our political lexicons, as if political power would miraculously become something less exclusive and violent in its operations. Indeed he warned here against buying into influential 'antisecurity arguments' that perform their rejection of the concept of security 'in a somewhat simplistic manner'.<sup>24</sup> Instead he asked a different kind of question in seeking to constitute a different kind of politics of security. One by which the nexus of relations between security and freedom would be given a new affirmative twist. Specifically he asked how we might create a new concept and practice of security; one which will perform a double function to 'free us from dangers *and* from situations that tend to debase or to subjugate us...a security that opens the way to richer, more numerous, more diverse, and more flexible relationships with ourselves and others, all the while assuring each of us real autonomy'.<sup>25</sup>

In this sense, and right at the end of his life, Foucault saw the future development of liberalism; so geared as it has become, to denying subjects the abilities to seek freedom from danger, demand it from their regimes, as well as making us suffer an ever increasing diminishment of autonomy.

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22 Michael Dillon, 'Governing Terror: The State of Emergency of Biopolitical Emergence', *International Political Sociology* (1, 1, 2007), 7-28.

23 Michel Foucault, 'Risks of Security' in Michel Foucault, *Power: The Essential Works* 3 (London, Allen Lane, 2001), 365-81.

24 Foucault, 'Risks of Security', 366. The simplicity of 'anti-security' arguments might be compared thus with the simplicity of 'anti-war' arguments, which likewise presuppose that war can simply be condemned. The point, especially when thinking from Foucauldian grounds, is not to condemn war, but to reconceptualise war, as well as discover the minoritarian forms which war has, can, and does still take. Foucault's own late works, as well as that of others influenced by him, entail a significant interrogation of what I have called the counter-strategic tradition. See Julian Reid, 'Re-appropriating Clausewitz: The Neglected Dimensions of Counter-Strategic Thought' in Beate Jahn (ed.), *Classical Theory and International Relations: Critical Investigations* (Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 2006).

25 *Loc cit*.

These arguments do not make Foucault a classical liberal. He was not interested in returning to some outdated model or discourse of liberalism, as if it was just a question and problem of remembering what historical texts said about a true nature of liberalism that has somehow been forgotten or lost. He understood and saw the ways in which liberal discourses on security, freedom and autonomy could not possibly survive or legitimate themselves in context of their being underwritten by biopolitical rationalities concerned fundamentally with the collateral effects of practices of security, freedom and autonomy for the life of the subject. Set in context of the earlier arguments Foucault had made concerning the importance of discourses and practices of security, freedom and danger for the legitimisation of liberal regimes of governance in particular,<sup>26</sup> and against the backdrop of how Foucauldian theorizations of security have themselves laid siege to the concept, this was a significant gesture. In two fashions. Firstly, it demonstrates, as we might expect of Foucault, a cognizance of the potential, and in his own period, actualized dangers, that problematizations of security have posed to the life of the subjects secured, in so far as strategies of security, in their provision of freedom from danger, can also serve to diminish the autonomy of the subjects being secured, by turning them into dependents. But secondly, it demonstrates an acceptance of the political potentialities of regimes of security organized around problematics of dangers and the practice of freeing subjects from them. In other words his approach to security, here, presupposes the actuality of dangers from which subjects, in spite of the degradations and subjugations that they risk in accepting it, can demand provision of 'freedom from'. Danger, here, is not assumed to be a merely discursive construct, functioning to shape the subject of security in legitimisation of the regimes that govern it. Instead it is assumed to be an irreducible problematic that subjects may 'expect' their regimes to provide them with freedom from.<sup>27</sup> Instead of simply denouncing security, Foucault called into question the particularity of regimes of security that in their practices of security 'impose a determined way of life that subjugates individuals.'<sup>28</sup> The problem with security is the particularity of those regimes that subjugate in the process of securing. But crucially he insisted on the contingency of the relation between the ways in which a given regime provides subjects with freedom from dangers and the means by which, in the very process of doing so, it risks subjugating them, diminishing their autonomy.

The question he implored us to ask, then, and which in the current context deserves to be reposed, is not simply how to free subjects from

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26 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2008).

27 Foucault, 'Risks of Security', 366.

28 *Ibid.*, 369.

apparatuses of security in the simplistic manner asked by 'antiseconomy' forms of political critique, but how subjects can demand and receive security without conceding the conditions for their own subjugation.<sup>29</sup> How can we think and practice security such that we can free subjects from the range of dangers that are posed to their biological life and well-being in combination with freedom from the dangers which that apparatus of security poses to the subject's capacities to determine its own 'way of life'? Indeed the fundamental distinction drawn, by Foucault, between the *biological life* of the subject and its psychic capacity to determine its *way of life* is as crucial today as ever. The problem isn't how to render contingent the relation between biological life and security, through what Sergei Prozorov simplistically calls a 'refusal of care' (2007: 59-67),<sup>30</sup> but how to forge a politics via which subjects can demand that their regimes provide them with security for their biological life, without, in the process, enabling those regimes to encroach upon the psychic life of the subject wherein autonomy is exercised and through which ways of life are determined. The relationship between autonomy and security is poorly conceived, in other words, as either/or. Indeed Foucault is clearly also posing the issue of that terrain of autonomy in terms of its security. How to enable the existence of regimes the legitimacy of which depends on their capacities to secure the biological life of subjects while also rendering secure the autonomy of the selfsame subjects from those regimes? As of danger, so is the problematic of security doubled, here, then. The renovation of the political subject depends on its capacities, he argues, not to subtract itself from problematics of danger and security, nor simply to offer 'an attitude of indifference'<sup>31</sup> to biopolitical regimes, but to perform these parallel and deeply interconnected double moves, to each of which the modern political problematic, *par excellence*, of life, is indispensable as foundation and horizon.<sup>32</sup>

Foucault posed the possibility of such a different apparatus of security only in the form of a question. What would it involve, or how to go about, creating such an apparatus was his question. He berated the absence of, while calling for, innovative thinking and practices through

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29 There is an important difference here, then, between the problematisation of apparatuses of security as elaborated by Foucault and that pursued by Giorgio Agamben, via a very partial reading of Foucault, whose assumed task is that of freeing 'living beings' from the apparatuses in which they are, as subjects, captured. See, especially Giorgio Agamben 'What is an Apparatus?' in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

30 Sergei Prozorov, 'The Unrequited Love of Power: Biopolitical Investment and the Refusal of Care', *Foucault Studies* (4, 2007), 59-67.

31 *Ibid.*, 63.

32 Prozorov's argument for 'indifference' as condition of resistance to biopolitical regimes would be much better argued via Baudrillard than Foucault. See especially my account of Baudrillard's theorisation of indifference as strategy of resistance to biopower in Reid, *The Biopolitics of the War on Terror*, 62-81

which to develop it. Today the urgency of the question is much greater. The contemporary and more or less global hegemony of neoliberalism has grown off the kind of critique of the problem of dependency and valorization of autonomy that Foucault articulated in this late interview. Foucault's aims were not, of course, to advocate a neoliberal approach to the problem of security, but to avoid the blackmail of a choice between regimes which offer security to the biological life of their subjects combined with diminishment of their autonomy on the one hand, and those which withdraw security of biological life in exchange for a supposed (but, in actuality, *faux*) increase in the autonomy of subjects on the other. The intolerability of that choice means, he argued, we need to conceive a subject capable of demanding both security from the dangers posed at its biological life and well being combined with security from the danger of the loss of its autonomy. In spite of the time that has elapsed since Foucault originally posed this problem, and in spite of the changes in the problematisation of security that have occurred under the duress of neoliberalism, the question remains, therefore, a very contemporary one; which is why his work remains so useful.

Not only, then, is the problem not security as such, nor is the problem that simply of life as such. Life, like security, is not an ontological category, but an expression of changing regimes of practices that are historical and political in formation. Life can be expressed, thought, constituted, and indeed *secured*, in many different ways. Discourses on life are subject to revision on account of our capacities for political engagement with the problematic of life and what distinguishes it. The struggle with liberalism requires us not simply to reject but to contest its biologized account of life. Liberalism, as Foucault demonstrated, understands life, fundamentally, in biological terms.<sup>33</sup> Liberal governance was biopoliticized from its beginnings; its object of governance that of the biological life of human being and its governmental practices guided by what it can know of that biology. In governing so it has served to reduce the life of the human to its biological capacities, conceiving the human in the form of 'the biohuman'.<sup>34</sup> Once human life is conceived in terms of the properties and capacities it is said to possess on account of its biological existence, suborning the life of the individual to its species existence, so the human is constituted as the biohuman. As a political project the hegemony of neoliberalism depends not on its capacities to secure the biohuman, because no such subject of security in actuality exists. It depends in contrast on its capacities to govern us as subjects who fail to conceive of our life potentials in anything more

33 Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.

34 Julian Reid, 'The Biopoliticization of Humanitarianism: From Saving Bare Life to Securing Biohuman Life in Post-Interventionary Societies', *Journal of Intervention and State Building* (4, 4, 2010), 391-411; Julian Reid 'Politicizing Connectivity: Beyond the Biopolitics of Information Technology in International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (22, 4), 559-75; Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*.

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than merely biologized terms. It requires making us believe, in other words, in the impossibility of being anything more than biohuman subjects. For liberalism to legitimate itself the horizons which determine our ways of living must be successfully biologized; which is why the political discourses of global politics are so replete today with values deriving from biological sources. The contemporary valorization of capacities for resilience and adaptive capacity, nationally and internationally, are symptomatic expressions of this strategy.

Neither to argue against security or life, nor is this to argue against the human as such. On the contrary it is to revive the question of the human and its relation with life, and conditions of its security, anew. Can we conceive a subject that seeks and achieves security for its biological life without sacrificing its psychic capacity for autonomously determined ways of living? A subject the properties and capacities of which are not governed by what can be known of its species existence. Equally, to pose the problem of the subject of security in this way is not to inaugurate yet another attempt, via a reading of Foucault and others, to 'move beyond subjectivity' as if subjectivity were merely just another problem to be solved by theoreticians.<sup>35</sup> This is not, and clearly Foucault did not subscribe either, to simplistic arguments against subjectivity just as he did not subscribe to naïve anti-humanisms.<sup>36</sup> It is to pose the political problem of the hegemony of biohuman accounts of subjectivity that, on account of the power and influence of liberal discourses and practices globally, have come to colonise contemporary political imaginaries. Likewise it is to invest in the potential and political necessity of alternative accounts of subjectivity capable of constituting peoples in ways, collectively, which might enable them to emancipate themselves from regimes whose authority rests on the discursive power of the biohuman subject. Human subjectivity and biohuman subjectivity are not the same, and to attempt to move beyond the former is to risk suborning oneself to the latter.

Renovating the human subject in ways that can enable it to contest the biohuman requires not, therefore, that we simply argue against the conjugation of its life with security, but develop the means to diversify our understanding of what its life comprises, recognise the conflict which exists between that life when read biologically and when read in terms of the human capacity for autonomy. Once we do so the problematic of how to secure its life becomes that much more complicated as well as urgent. Not only because the life being secured is doubled and at conflict with itself, but

35 As argued, for example, by Jenny Edkins and Veronique Pin-Fat, 'The Subject of the Political' in Jenny Edkins, Nalini Persram & Veronique Pin-Fat (eds.), *Sovereignty and Subjectivity* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 9.

36 For a very nuanced account of Foucault's position see Beatrice Han-Pile, 'The "Death of Man": Foucault and Anti-Humanism' in Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (eds.), *Foucault and Philosophy* (Oxford, Blackwell), 118-42.



because, nowadays, the life of the biohuman, regimes of liberal governance preach, is antinomial to the very practice of security. Security presupposes *freedom from danger*. The sources of danger may change in constitution of different regimes of security but once the practice of achieving freedom from what we regard as endangering us disappears so we are no longer doing, in effect, security. Foucault, in his reformulation of the problematic of security, doubled the problem of danger. Its not enough, he argued, to construe security in terms of the freedom of the biological life of the human from danger, we also have to account for the reformulation of the problematic of what is dangerous to the human, when the apparatuses which provide its biological life with security degrade and subjugate it, threatening its capacities for autonomously determined ways of life.

But what to do when, as we have seen, the practice of attempting to provide the biological life of the human with freedom from that which endangers it is said to function to destroy it? How does the rise of resilience impact on Foucault's diagnosis of the problem? For it is not the case that, today, we can say, simply, that subjects are degraded in so far as their capacities for autonomy are diminished by regimes that subjugate them through the provision of security to their biological life, and that we therefore need to secure the terrain of autonomy on which subjectivity grows from the hold which any given security apparatus achieves over that terrain on account of its interventions upon the biological life of its subjects. Nor is it simply the case that the provision of security to the biological life of subjects has been withdrawn in return for disingenuous offers of an increase in their autonomy, and that we therefore need to renovate the capacity of subjects to demand provision of security to biological life from regimes that govern through the discourse of autonomy. Today the terms and conditions of subjection are different. For once the subject is conceived in biohuman terms - the account of the freedom of which it is capable so thoroughly determined by what can be known of its biology - so the very aspiration to free oneself from danger, becomes deemed as dangerous. Not because to be provided freedom from danger would risk diminishing the autonomy of the subject, but because exposure to danger is now conceived as fundamental to the potentiality of its biological life to grow and prosper. The biohuman subject must be prepared to undergo permanent exposure to danger because it understands such an exposed relation with danger as fundamental for its capacities to profit from the world.

Likewise, while liberalism may traditionally have espoused the value of autonomy for the subject, understood in terms of its capacities to determine its own way of life free from interference by others,<sup>37</sup> so we must also address the reproblematisation of autonomy that has occurred

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37 Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*; Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).



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on account of the biologisation of the liberal subject and the consequent emergence of discourses on, and practices surrounding, the biohuman. For once the subject is conceived in biohuman terms so autonomy is construed less as a state of being that subjects may strive for and protect than as a sign of incapacity from which they must be saved. One of the most significant, if as yet still under-explored mechanisms by which liberalism has learnt to produce and govern the human-as-biohuman is via its cross-fertilisation of concepts and theorems concerning how biological life evolves from the life sciences.<sup>38</sup> And so the political authorization for such problematizations of autonomy derives from what the life sciences tell us about the dangers of autonomy. Living systems evolve and prosper, it is said, not on account of their capacities to achieve autonomy from other systems, but to connect and adapt to them.<sup>39</sup> Thus now, given that the power to connect and adapt is said to be fundamental to the evolutionary development of all forms of biological life, so liberalism, in the throes of its biologized account of the subject, has come to reconceptualise the freedom of the subject in terms that radically undercut its traditional espousals of the value of autonomy. Freedom, under conditions of belief in the biohuman, is construed not as *autonomy from others* but capacity to *connect to others*. Far from preaching the value of autonomy from others, liberalism has come to espouse an account of the subject predicated on its radical interconnectivity with others.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, to be regarded as autonomous is to be regarded not just as unfree, but as dangerous, for autonomous individuals and peoples are said to be risks unto themselves and to others. One can encounter this reproblematisation of autonomy as dangerous occurring within International Relations as well as every other form of science concerned with the necessary conditions for healthy subjectivity, not least among which is psychology.<sup>41</sup>

In addressing the contemporary problematic of resilience one is no longer, then, faced with the form of blackmail Foucault was concerned with thinking beyond in the early 1980s. It is no longer the question of how the subject might claim security from the dangers posed at its biological life along with security from the subjugations and degradations that develop out of its reliance on the regimes that do the security provision. The problematic is how to conceive freedom from danger as a political aspiration, capacity, and potential practice in the face of the fact that we are governed by regimes which declare that our growth and prosperity in the world consists in our necessary and continuous exposure to danger. Likewise it is how to reclaim

38 Walker and Cooper, 'Genealogies of Resilience'; Cooper, *Life as Surplus*.

39 Kauffman, *Investigations*.

40 Reid, 'Politicizing Connectivity'.

41 See, for example, K. C. Pinto, 'Intersections of Gender and Age in Health Care: Adapting Autonomy and Confidentiality for the Adolescent Girl', *Qualitative Health Research* (14, 1, 2004), 78-99.

the political value and capacity of autonomy from regimes that declare connectivity and the absence of autonomy as necessary conditions for our health and governability as subjects. In other words the problematic today isn't simply how to conjugate security and autonomy anew, but how to stake out a subject position from which we can reconstitute both these practices given their contemporary and dual denigration. Voices from within International Relations calling for the further dismantling of the sign of security because it is 'the supreme concept of bourgeois society and the fundamental thematic of liberalism'<sup>42</sup> miss the point. Calling for a new politics to take us 'beyond security'<sup>43</sup> does little to solve the problem; indeed it obfuscates the very nature of the problem, which is that liberalism itself is outgrowing its traditional correlation of life with security, and locating new discursive foundations for its biopolitics. The longstanding critique of the discourse of autonomy in liberalism will also have to be rethought *inter alia* with this task.

#### IV. RESOURCING THE POLITICAL SUBJECT: FROM BIOPOLITICS TO PSYCHOPOLITICS

Revalorizing autonomy and security are both techniques with which we can begin to renovate explicitly political subjectivity. Political subjects do not merely live in order to adapt to and grow from their experiences of suffering. In contrast they seek out the sources of their suffering, with a view to destroying them. The task is to affirm the confidence of our abilities to think and act politically; the hubristic trust in ourselves and others by which we decide what we want, assert what we possess, and celebrate what are able to do, in accordance with truths which transcend our existence as merely biological entities.<sup>44</sup> This task requires sourcing the psychic life of the subject in contrast with its biological life, and a psychopolitics not a biopolitics. Biopolitics as we know concerns itself with the powers that determine the life of the human in its species being; the biological powers that account for the evolution of its species life, including its capacities for connectivity and resilience. Psychopolitics, on the other hand, is concerned with the powers that determine the life of the human psyche. These two forms of life, the species life and psychic life of the subject are entirely different and hostile to one another.

'Psychic life' has of course had a life in political theoretical discourse at least since the publication of Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*. Her

42 Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, 186.

43 Burke, *Beyond Security*.

44 Julian Reid, 'The Vulnerable Subject of Liberal War', *South Atlantic Quarterly* (110, 3, 2011).

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account takes the psyche as the source of subjection and more specifically the 'peculiar turning of a subject against itself' through which we are said to come to desire the terms of our own subjection.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly vulnerability is the core property that Butler assigns to the psychic life of the subject on account of its being dependent on that which by necessity exploits it.<sup>46</sup> More fundamental than vulnerability to the psychic life of the subject, I argue, are the powers of imaginative action through which we are able to overturn power relations. Imaginative action does not entail human beings melancholically suffering conditions of exploitation, or enable human beings to adapt to their environments a la the biopolitical subject of liberal modernity. Nor does it enable them in the style of the 'neuropolitics' of William Connolly simply to cultivate a more cosmopolitan ethical sensibility as if politics simply required a kind of widening and deepening of present world conditions.<sup>47</sup> In contrast imaginative action is what enables human beings to forsake the current courses of their worlds in constitution of new ones. Foucault was not explicitly committed to such a sourcing of imaginative action, and in order to move beyond the political problems he posed it is necessary that we depart from him.

If we put to one side Foucault's legacy where else might we look in order to source the psychopolitical subject of a modernity yet to come? It would seem to me that the work of Peter Sloterdijk is one of the richest and most promising theoretical resources that we have today to make use of for this task, and that in reading him we also re-encounter the riches of the legacy of another French thinker, somewhat marginalized in comparison with Foucault, Gaston Bachelard. One of the questions which both Bachelard and Sloterdijk's work pursues, is that of the importance of the imaginary to psychopolitical subjectivity, and explanation for its relative degradation in an era of biopolitical modernity.<sup>48</sup> What is the imaginary? What is imagination? And what is it to engage in imaginative action? In political discourse and theory we speak often enough of the importance of imaginaries. I myself have written often of the power and importance of both liberal and biopolitical imaginaries in shaping modern political horizons and sensibilities.<sup>49</sup> We speak likewise of the need to develop alternative imaginaries; the need to imagine the world differently, in order to struggle for such alternatives. In other words we presuppose the existence of dominant imaginaries, we demand alternative imaginaries, but rarely do we think closely about the political nature of the imagination as such; even

45 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1997), 18-19.

46 *Ibid.*, 20.

47 William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Politics, Speed* (Minneapolis and London; University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

48 See especially Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles* (New York: Semiotext, 2011); Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (Putnam; Spring Publications, 2005).

49 See especially Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War*.

though, obviously the imagination is the very source of the imaginaries we have available to us.

'The imagination' is quite literally, as Bachelard tells us, 'a psychological world beyond'.<sup>50</sup> It is not only that power within the human psyche for the projection of being beyond, but that element within the human psyche which is always *already* a world beyond. The human, fundamentally, in committing to imaginative action is that which is always, already existing beyond, bound to and bound for a world beyond. How does this peculiar capacity of the human psyche for beyondness relate to the political problem today of struggles for a post-liberal world? It would seem obvious that imaginative action is the absolute precondition for the struggle for a world beyond liberalism and that the power of the imagination is of all the attributes of the human psyche that which is most fundamental. The imagination if we follow Bachelard is not only the promise of a world beyond, conditional upon the adoption of a particular dispositif in the present, but the actual existence of the beyond in the psychic life of the subject. It is the enactment of the beyond now. It is not the promise of a security to come, but the enactment of a security in the present. As Bachelard himself puts it, 'the most revolutionary manifestos are always new literary constitutions. They make us change universes, but they always shelter us in an imaginary one'.<sup>51</sup>

Within the history of liberal modernity there have been many different struggles. But the struggle to snuff the imagination, psychic font of the political subject would seem to me to be absolutely essential, organizing each of them. Dominic Colas has, in a brilliant study, shown how the modern war on imagination has effectively entailed the will to pathologize all political utilizations of the imagination as fanatical and mad.<sup>52</sup> But is there a danger that in theorizing psychopolitical subjectivity we get pulled into a valorization of the imaginary in neglect of the real? I think the reverse. What would the histories of political struggles be without the immensity of the imaginaries that fuelled them? Take away the imagination and you stultify the subject of resistance. Invigorate the material of struggle with an inner imaginary and you intensify the reality of struggle tenfold. How do we navigate the relation between the imaginary and the real? A politics of resistance to liberalism, today, requires more than ever a psychopolitical subject capable of transcending the biopolitical horizons of liberal modernity; one that will free us from its biologisms, and enable us to dream and imagine in ways that are proper to the human psyche. But in order for an imaginary to continue with enough persistence such that it produces a revolutionary manifesto with a new literary constitution, for it to be more than the vacuous pastime of poets, the imaginary must find its matter, its

<sup>50</sup> Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: A Conjoined History* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997).

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reality. A material element must give the imaginary its own substance. Note it is not the question of which material precedes the imaginary, but how the imaginary finds its material, such that it is able to realize itself. The political theorization of resistance to liberalism, if it is to advance, has to proceed onto these terrains and in doing so lose its idle fascination with biological properties and capacities.

### V. CONCLUSION

Rather than read Foucault with a view to ossifying already essentialized post-structuralist positions with regards to demands to move 'beyond subjectivity', dismantle security, or deconstruct humanity, I have sought to pursue the question of how the human subject might be reinvented - so that it can contest the limits and conditions of liberal imaginaries on some of the terrains which liberalism holds most dear; life, humanity, security, freedom and autonomy. We get nowhere politically by simply attempting to condemn concepts. The doubly political and philosophical problem is how to reinvent them, by breathing new life into them.<sup>53</sup> The question of how to reinvent the subject is, when opened up to inquiry via a more properly Foucauldian methodology, a question not of how to refuse the care for life via which biopolitical regimes facilitate subjection, but to rethink the relations of the subject to its life differently, with a view to being able to reconstitute practices of freedom and security; so that it might recover a more fundamentally human capacity for autonomy. Once we recognize the contingency of the debasement of practices of freedom and security which follow from the biologization of the human on which the liberal project proceeds, based on the demand to constitute the human as 'biohuman', so we create for ourselves the capacity to recover human powers of autonomy; a power otherwise denied to us on the basis of the dangers that autonomy supposedly poses for us, individually and collectively. As I have sought to explore, this is not merely a theoretical problematique. We live in an age when the practice of security, that is to say aspiring to and achieving freedom from danger, is increasingly pathologized by liberal regimes of governance, and in which the governability of subjects, collectively and individually, is said to depend, in contrast, on their exposure to danger. Contesting the global injunction to give up on aspirations for security and rethink freedom as exposure to danger requires a subject capable of imagining itself as something more than merely biological material. A subject whose humanity resides in its freedom to secure itself from the dangers that it encounters both in living and in being so secured. Foucault's

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53 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London and New York: Verso, 1999).

works poses this problem at us, starkly. They do not solve them for us. In context of which it is necessary we turn from the mere analysis of biopolitics to the hitherto under-theorised resource of psychopolitics.

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