Limits and Possibilities of Resilience as a Psycho-Sociological Strategic Game: An Interdisciplinary Approach

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The aim of this paper is to analyze the psycho-sociological complexity inherent in the exercise of resilience. The concept of resilience has become so popular that it is usual in academic publications, in popular self-help publications, and in everyday conversations. This monographic issue shows the variety of empirical studies of resilience in different fields. However, my contribution is fundamentally theoretical insofar as it tries to analyze the limits and possibilities of the very concept of resilience. Indeed, human society is inherently ambiguous and ambivalent. This requires a capacity for flexible adaptation in which risk and uncertainty are always present. However, resilience or the ability to adapt to adverse situations is a quality that can only be adequately analyzed within the complex etiological triangle of human behavior. Resilience is an exercise in which biology, culture, and environment establish the framework that enables or frustrates its success. Resilience is a relational and ambivalent dynamic process in which people are both passive and active subjects. Overcoming adversity means ceasing to be who we were and becoming different people. Therefore, resilience calls in question the sameness approach to human beings. This complexity of resilience always requires an integrated interdisciplinary approach that accounts for human reality. The most important conclusion is that resilience is a useful concept as long as it is sufficiently rooted in a realistic anthropological model such as the one I will try to develop throughout the article.

Keywords: Resilience, adversity, etiological triangle, social actor, ego multiplicity, sameness.

1 Introduction

Resilience is a fascinating ability. It is generally considered as the ability to overcome adverse situations. However, when a concept spreads, it becomes blurred, as do its boundaries. The simplicity of the concept of resilience hides an extraordinary multidimensional complexity that has been analyzed in specialized literature [1]. Resilience is always present in our lives. Adverse situations are not only radically dramatic events, such as the death of a loved one or the experience of a violent situation. Life is characterized by

the fact that more or less adverse situations emerge every day that, to a greater or lesser extent, have the power to permanently or temporarily destabilize the subject. Risk and complexity are often seen as fundamental properties of contemporary societies. However, the human historical epic – reflected in the current *Big History* narratives — has always been fraught with risk and complexity [2]. Resilience is precisely the built-in capacity of living beings to manage the risk and complexity of their lives. In humans, risk and complexity are particularly related to social life. Human sociality is ambivalent, complex, fractured, and tense [3]. Therefore, resilience is essential in social life. This forces us to think of resilience as a *psycho-sociological strategic game* and not as a simple biological ability or ontological property of individuals. Thus, resilience is at the same time a bio-psychological, sociological, and environmental dimension, which requires an interdisciplinary analysis. Hence, this paper aims to reflect on three aspects related to the theoretical debate about resilience as a "trait", "process" or "result". First, I review what I consider the general premises underlying the concept of resilience. Second, I explain the triple etiological constitution of resilience (resilience as a trait). Third, I develop the idea of resilience as a dynamic and ambivalent interaction (resilience as a process). Finally, I reflect on the consequences of resilience on the anthropological problem of "sameness" (resilience as an outcome). My objective is to insist on the complexity of the social actors, their actions and their identity.

2   Methodology

The methodology used in this paper aligns with the ontology of the object of study and with the objectives of the research. The ontological complexity of resilience is based on the fact that it is determined by the three fundamental etiological factors: biology, culture, and environment. For this reason, the first feature of the methodological approach we follow here is *interdisciplinarity.* Secondly, this paper is fundamentally a conceptual work following a *theoretical approach,* which is conducive to the objective of the paper, that is, the exploration of the limits and possibilities of the concept of resilience Thirdly, since resilience is an anthropological, cultural, and environmental property, it is necessary to *integrate the micro-macro and subjective-objective dimensions.* The paper attempts such an integration. Finally, following the dramaturgical logic of the sociology of Erwin Goffman, we present situations in which resilience is put into play as a strategy for adapting to adversity. Thus, the fourth feature of our methodology is its use of a *situational description.* Therefore, this paper is an attempt at theoretically exploring the micro-macro and objective-subjective dimensions of resilience from an interdisciplinary epistemological approach through a situational description. In addition, elements of the philosophical debate about the human condition are introduced in the last two sections.

3   The Exercise of Resilience

3.1   Resilience as a Trait, Process, and Outcome

Since it spread in the study of human and animal behavior, three different ways of conceptualizing resilience have been distinguished [1, 4]: a) as a trait made up of a set of personal qualities that make a subject able to overcome adversity; b) as an *outcome* or as the achievement of overcoming adversity; c) as a *process* that reflects the dynamic complexity of the interrelationship between the subject and the adverse event over time. The three approaches are complementary. *Resilience is a strategic, relational, and ambivalent "exercise" or "game" in which all three aspects are included.*

3.2   Premises and Corollary of Resilience

Thus, the game of resilience can be analyzed as a set of five premises and one corollary.

PREMISE 1. *Resilience is a specific case of adaptive flexibility.* In a strict sense, resilience is a positive adaptation or recovery capacity that is possible due to the flexible nature of the living organism. The

aim of resilience is an adaptation to *adverse situations* through *flexibility*. That is why resilience is not an exceptionality, but a universal and ubiquitous property in nature. However, resilience is not an "undifferentiated" capacity but "qualified", depending on various factors. Like any general capacity, it does not become effective in the same way or with the same intensity and fullness in each specific person. In fact, George Bonnano [5] applied the label of "copying ugly" or "pragmatic copying" to those responses to adversity that do not fit what is considered a normal response (hate, self-aggrandizement, repression, or laughter[1]). Thus, the generic potential of resilience capacity is realized in one way or another depending on many factors.

PREMISE 2. *An adverse situation produces a negative destabilization in the subject's homeostasis or virtuous balance.* This destabilization has different degrees of intensity and duration, but adversity is inherent in the dynamism of life. There is no life without potential and real destabilization. Evil is a by-product of an evolving cosmos [7]. That is why adversity always has an ambiguous and ambivalent quality: something apparently adverse can emerge as an opportunity for personal progress. Hence, adversity can be tragic or dramatic depending on its development. We are faced with a drama if the adverse situation has a hopeful end, but if it is constitutively impossible to overcome in a good direction then we speak of a tragedy [8]. *Resilience is a tool to make life a drama by escaping tragedy.* The person who has failed to adapt or overcome adversity (that is, has failed to be resilient) is precisely the one whose life has become a tragedy.

PREMISE 3. *The adverse situations that generate traumas can have an endogenous or exogenous source.* 1. *Endogenous.* A change in the subjects themselves that produces a destabilizing brake: 1.1. For example, people develop a disease (biological endogenous source) that prevents them from carrying on their life in the way they have until now. 1.2. For example, people may live a process of ideological conversion or a process of ascending social mobility (cultural endogenous source) that produces a maladjustment with their social environment. 2. *Exogenous.* A change in the configuration of the environment in which the life of a subject unfolds. 2.1. A change in the *physical* environment where the subject lived: from a tropical zone to a northern country or a climatic change that modifies the economic way of life of that subject. 2.2. A change in the *artificial* environment: an elderly person suffers the digitization of banks. 2.3. A transformation of the social environment: a person goes from living in a social structure that allows freedom to one with greater control, as in total institutions or in the passage from a democracy to a dictatorship. Therefore, resilience can be activated when people change and do not fit into their old circumstances or when circumstances change and do not fit the subject. The changing situations produced by endogenous and exogenous factors are adverse because they create a negative imbalance or destabilization. Resilience means regaining virtuous stability or homeostasis.

PREMISE 4. *The resilience capacity to overcome this negative imbalance can be active and/or passive.* The etiological triangle (biology, culture and environment) also provides the tools for overcoming adverse situations. There are specific biological, cultural, and environmental mechanisms that favor or hinder the subject's resilience and the recovery of homeostasis. Resilience, therefore, has both a passive and an active side. In a sense, resilience is the ability to maintain a balance by preventing adversity from damaging homeostasis (passive dimension). In another sense, resilience can also face up to adversity in a positive way, looking for ways to escape or to learn from it and integrate it into the subject's life through "cultural homeostasis" (active dimension).

PREMISE 5. *Resilience is a relational and ambivalent property.* In the same way as power and freedom are not individual properties but relational [10, 11], resilience is also relational. It is a neuro-psycho-sociological exercise and not simply a bio-psychological one. It takes place *before, beside, in front of* and *against* others. It does not occur in a social vacuum. The social structure itself enables and limits it. This supposes a continuous complex social game in which the resilience of one person can be the adverse situation of

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[1]Viktor Frankl [6] highlighted the importance of humor as a way of surviving in the concentration camp. For him, "humor is another of the weapons of the soul in its struggle for survival". In the concentration camp, humor allowed distancing from the adverse real situation and helped to imagine a different future.

another, the resistance of one can be considered as the betrayal of another, and the resilience of one can be related to the impediment of the other, etc. For this, resilience is not only relational but also an ambivalent property.

COROLLARY A. *Resilience is equivalent to an ontological transformation of the subject.* This is the inevitable "output" of resilience. Of course, there will be other "outcomes" expected by the resilient subject. However, the most important result is that the person is not the same *before* and *after* overcoming adversity. For this to be so, human ontology itself must be open and plastic. The anthropological model that can account for this plastic opening is what I call the "uni/multi-selves psychic structure" that fundamentally disputes the usual way of conceiving human "sameness".

4   The Triple Etiological Influence on Resilience

A very important limit of some usual scientific approaches is that they consider resilience to be a property (trait or state) of the psychological dimension of a person. However, resilience is a complex property that is determined by the three vertices of the etiological triangle. *This means that the effective resilience capacity of each subject is determined by the specific configuration acquired by the components of these three etiological factors in each individual person, which creates a certain "state" that may be more or less appropriate to face adversity.* I will now give some indications about each of the vertices.

4.1   The Biological-organic State

Biological mechanisms are the precondition for resilience. The biological-organic state is the mechanism that all living beings share to recover after an adverse event [12]. I would like to stress three of them.

The first is the stress mechanism. In a situation of physical or emotional stress, the hypothalamus triggers a hormonal release process through corticotrophin, which in turn triggers the release of cortisol (along with other substances) that influences the neurons of the hippocampus and the amygdala. This endocrine mechanism is a way of coping with adversity by preparing the body for fight or flight. However, a long-term uninterrupted flow of cortisol can have devastating effects on the parts of the brain associated with memory and emotion. In fact, the stress caused by comparative poverty can have a very important influence on the decision-making neural centers of the lower classes, creating a vicious circle of poverty that limits the recovery from the social adversities in which they are trapped [13][2]. However, biology itself has created mechanisms that interrupt the hormonal flow of stress to avoid these consequences. People with a higher biological capacity for resilience also have biological markers that counteract or limit the effects of stress hormones. Substances such as dehydroepiandrosterone, the neuropeptide Y or testosterone are stress modulators that prevent pathological responses favoring resilience. Genetic inheritance and epigenetic markers are fundamental when evaluating the specific response to the adversity of a subject [14].

In addition, from a neuro-psychological point of view, resilience is closely related to the way in which emotions are managed. Human beings have created a variety of emotional states that are at the root of their complex and ambivalent sociality. As a species, we lack biogrammers to build strong bonds. Emotions allowed the expansion of human sociality with positive and negative consequences [15, 16]. At any rate, the amygdala makes associations between primary and secondary reinforcements that create connections between events and emotions. However, sometimes these connections can be an impediment to resilience. For decades, it has been known that the orbitofrontal cortex is involved in the task of correcting or disconnecting these inadequate stimulus-reinforcement associations that generate frustration in subjects or make it difficult to recover after trauma [17]. The malfunction of this region can prevent this associative disconnection, making it difficult to exercise resilience. However, emotions or feelings associated with an event are stored in memory as symbolic and cold information. Hence, the real feeling that we experience

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[2]The human being is possibly the only animal species that can live in chronic stress caused by "thinking" about past or even future adverse situations.

is linked to the real experience that we live, but that link is purely *informative.* Feelings are not stored, only the information that those feelings existed is stored. For this reason, when a memory emerges along with it, "current" feelings arise regarding that memory, but not the "past" feeling that we experienced [18]. This means that it is possible to *decouple* the emotions and feelings that something produced in us in the past from what we feel now at a different age, through training and experience. Resilience allows us to provide new positive emotions to what aroused a negative emotion at another time in the past.

Finally, a biological mechanism that does not derive from natural selection, but from human technological capacity, is important. The previous biological tools play a passive and enabling role because people have little control over them. Nevertheless, this third biological mechanism can be actively managed. It is hardly noticed because it is considered a *cultural* factor, but its objective is to reform the organic equipment to overcome the imbalance generated by the trauma. Two types of reform can be distinguished: 1. Those that imply deep anatomical-physiological transformations (operations, chemical interventions in the processes of neurotransmitters and endocrine components, transplants, etc.). 2. Those others that are more superficial because they are additions that do not imply deep organic modifications (the use of glasses, contact lenses or hearing aids, wheelchairs, aesthetic modifications through pigments or technologies that superficially mask or conceal certain bodily aspects of the subject). These two types of reform aim to increase the control that people have over their processes of resilience and overcoming adversity.[3] Treating them as insignificant or ridiculous means ignoring the psychological difficulty involved in the decision to use some of them. If people suffer an accident that has left them paralyzed, passive biological mechanisms are essential to reestablish the homeostasis and the vital balance with the environment. However, the possibilities of resilience are not the same for a subject without economic resources who suffers from the deterioration of multiple sclerosis and for the physicist Stephen Hawking. Surely, the underlying natural biological mechanisms are the basis for both of them to initiate emotional overcoming of their trauma, but Hawking has also managed to reform some aspects of his biology to be able to do it more efficiently. This mechanism is also useful for people who, due to a fire, have suddenly found themselves with a large part of their body disfigured by burns. The natural tools are reinforced if that person has the possibility of fixing the disfigurement through surgery. A psychological trauma caused by the removal of a breast can also be alleviated more efficiently through this active organic reform. An endogenous or reactive depression can be overcome naturally with more or less effort, but the use of anti-depressants or other types of drugs that act on the chemical mechanisms of the brain will help in this process. In the same way, the problems associated with more or less serious gender dysphoria can be overcome through a process of neuro-chemical, aesthetic and anatomical transformation, something unthinkable in past times or in other places in the world. For this reason, it should be taken into account that the potential for resilience will not be effective in the same way in those people who have the possibility of adding certain organic reforms (whether significant or superficial) that facilitate readjustment and overcome the adverse situation. Although they are not natural mechanisms, but rather technological ones, their objective is to transform the biological tools that have been damaged by the trauma or complement them to make resilience faster or more effective.

4.2 The Cultural-ideological State

There is another set of specifically cultural-ideological tools. In order to distinguish them from the environment and from the artificial reform of body, I consider culture here only in its *ideological dimension.* Culture is the set of empirical ideas (what is or is not), aesthetic (what is beautiful or ugly), normative (what is good or bad) and prospective (what we can or cannot expect) that people receive, modulate and internalize. These four sides of culture have a specific feature that makes them different from merely theoretical ideas. Culture has a "dynamogenic" character (*dynamogénique*). A feature that Durkheim

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[3]These transformations are the result of the technological capacity of the human being. The modern movement of transhumanism has proposed, in fact, through biological reform — therefore, neither cultural nor environmental — the enhancement and the overcoming of some constitutive adverse situations to nature: death, illness and unpleasant memories [19]. In some way, transhumanism aims to provide the human species with new biological tools to face adversity or, if possible, eliminate it.

attributed to religious beliefs and whose main function is to provoke acts [20]. Culture has a pragmatic character. They are ideas that are reflected in acts and behavior, which guide human action in two ways: (a) proposing ideas of the kind "Do X" or "if you have done Y, then do X" (*homo sociologicus*) or (b) proposing ideas of the type "If you want to achieve Y, do X" (*homo economicus*). If biology generates an organic state, ideas create a *cultural and ideological state* that can also help or limit the potential capacity for resilience. Hence, not only biology but also ideas play an essential role in recovery processes from adversity. Cultural ideas (religious, philosophical, political, anthropological, etc.) act as a hermeneutic pre-understanding that conditions the way in which people interpret adversity and can face it.

For more than a century, sociology and social psychology have studied whether cultural ideas about oneself are different depending on various factors, including social class. The social psychologist Philip Zimbardo stated that the temporal categories of past, present, and future are linked to the socio-demographic features of the subjects. Giving up the future and focusing on the present are fundamental traits of the lower classes who have nothing to look forward to. Nevertheless, the future opens up bright and hopeful for the middle classes. Meritocracy is also an ideological idea fundamentally present in the elite. Beyond the macro-processes of legitimation through cultural industries, there are more subtle mechanisms —socio-psychological processes— through socialization, educational training, and the position that each subject occupies in the job structure. For this reason, the elite has integrated cultural ideas of excellence while the lower classes have assumed a certain fatalism in their lives [21].

Ideas influence the ability of a subject to face or resist adversity differently. Two possibilities may occur: those people who have assumed a world in which pain, misery, and suffering are constitutive of their lives since they were born may have a greater ability to overcome adversity than people who, having habitually lived in situations of comfort, suddenly find themselves immersed in the trauma of health, violence, economic crisis, etc. However, it could also happen that those people who have felt a world with happy experiences, in which there was love and support, have forged a strong personality that allows them to cope with traumatic breaks [22]. The ideas of a subject regarding his place in the world seen as a project are very important to resilience. For example, pro-social and altruistic ideas, a philosophy of life with a sense of coherence, meditation, more flexible and less dogmatic philosophies, or an active lifestyle in which exercise is important, are fundamental ideas for overcoming adversity. Although simple and deterministic causal links cannot be established, there are powerful correlations between these ideas, the configuration of the brain, and psychological well-being [23, 24, 25, 26, 27]. Even meditation and prayer are beneficial because they generate positive attitudes toward adversity. Regardless of the reality or not of the supernatural dimension, evolutionary biologists have considered religion as an adaptive ideological-pragmatic factor, precisely because it provides coherence, meaning, and the possibility of coping with adverse situations. These factors are connected to a biological endowment, but they are more than biological.

4.3   The Environmental-contextual State

The external environment — the intra-organic environment is excluded because it belongs to the biological dimension — is the board on which the organisms — with their biology and their culture — play their cards [28]. The external stimuli that constitute the environment can be of three types: natural, artificial, or social [29]. To biological-organic and cultural-ideological states, the environmental-contextual state must be added. While biology provides physiological tools and culture provides ideological tools, the environment provides a contextual configuration that can also favor or hinder resilience. In adverse situations, there are natural, artificial, or social environments that help people to recover and overcome or, in contrast, to suffer more hindrances.

The most important trait that can contribute to resilience is the *degree of elasticity or resilience* of the environments themselves. If rigid biology or an impoverished culture hinders resilience, an inelastic, rigid or impoverished environment also places limits on it. This is important. To consider resilience as a capacity solely of the individual is to misrepresent the problem. Two people can have the same potential resilience capacity from a biological and cultural point of view. However, one lives in a rigid, strongly authoritarian,

stratified, and absorbing social environment, while the other lives in a more flexible, liberal, egalitarian, and elastic one. The possibility to overcome adversity is also influenced by the type of environment that is more appropriate to face trauma. Being resilient can mean that people, through their biology or their culture, are capable of managing a situation that harms them and that they cannot change. However, being resilient also means being able to flee from the environment that harms me, to transform it or to resist it. The resilience of a woman abused by her husband or a daughter abused by her parents not only depends on the fact that their emotions or their optimistic culture allow them to handle blows or mistreatment. In this situation, resilience is also determined by the ability to flee, transform or resist their abusers. Here is where the type of elasticity of the environment takes on its full importance. If that woman is financially dependent on her husband, the possibility to escape offered by that social environment is inelastic. Another woman with the same biological and/or cultural potential but with economic independence would have greater elasticity. The same is true if a woman's social environment supports her decision to divorce or pressures her not to do so. In the same way, a socio-economic environment with high rates of youth unemployment would make it more difficult for the mistreated young daughter to flee, transform or resist the abuser.

Sometimes, in certain circumstances or adversities, the only possibility of being resilient is to create a bubble-environment where the damage is minimized in some way. A fascinating example is a concentration camp, a social environment structured with enormous rigidity and inelasticity, which is both the cause of adversity and the limitation for overcoming it. For example, Viktor Frankl [30] confirms an old intuition: that "people of greater sensitivity, accustomed to a rich intellectual experience" despite their suffering, experienced less damage to their personality thanks to the ability to "abstract themselves from the terrible environment and plunge into a world of inner richness and freedom of spirit". This was no exception. During the years of German occupation in Krakow, some people became "lice feeders" with their blood (to get a typhus vaccine) through boxes with a mesh on one side where there were 400-800 lice larvae that were fed on the blood of the thighs of some people. Many Polish intellectuals dedicated themselves to this task, avoiding being taken to concentration camps. Among them was the mathematician Stefan Banach who, along with other colleagues, had enriching conversations on topology and number theory while the larvae fed on his blood [31]. These are examples of bubble-environments that are created to overlap those real environments that are inelastic and do not allow flight or transformation. Her resilience is exercised through the search for a parallel environment that allows some resistance.

However, a "passive" resilience in which the full weight falls on the subject should not to be the *paradigm of resilience*. A more "active" resilience, favored by a more elastic environment, implies transforming the environment that harms us when possible, fleeing to another environment when it cannot be changed, or even resisting it through social processes in which support is essential. For example, people from a country where, due to their sexual, religious, or economic condition, live in permanent difficulty, are not obliged to "learn how to manage" that situation. They can be resilient by making the decision to emigrate to another country. If their environment is elastic, the flight will be easier for them than if they live in a country where migration is prohibited and persecuted. But they may also want to transform their social and structural environment through political activity to avoid discrimination. Only by taking into account this dialectic of resistance/transformation/flight with the environment, can resilience overcome adversity. If not, resilience would become cynical advice to accept adversity submissively, which blames people who are not capable of stoically assuming the damage that their environment inflicts on them, creating a kind of "sociodicy" or social justification for evil [32]. Resilience requires personal properties (both biological and cultural) that are sometimes the only ones that can help people not to destroy their life. Nevertheless, the exercise of resilience is always a dynamic process in which people interact with other people inter-personally or through social structures and institutions. Neglecting the social aspect can lead to considering resilience as a control mechanism of social elites over citizens. This is the background criticism of the well-known book *Happycracy* [33] that summarizes the arguments of a good part of the criticism that has been directed against the very concept of resilience: extreme individualism; neglect of the social conditions of the environment; resilience as unlimited flexibility in the face of the demands of the socio-economic system; resilience as a synonym of submission to harmful situations that do not change but must be assumed by the subject, etc. To assume stress, anxiety, and other "diseases of civilization" as

inevitable and as the responsibility of people is to legitimize trauma as a *status quo.* Biology and culture allow us to deal with adversity, but we must also leave open the possibility that the environment must be transformed to avoid trauma.

In summary, the exercise of resilience implies the existence of fundamental qualities that, from biology, culture, and the environment, make a difference to the possibilities and ways of facing adversity. The three etiological factors are interrelated. For this reason, there is no room for purely *idealistic resilience* (only ideas allow one to face adversity), nor *biological resilience* (only biological traits allow one to face adversity), or *materialist resilience* (only a change in the environmental structure allows one to overcome adversity). In fact, "learned helplessness" reflects this complex mixture of psychological and sociological, organic, cultural, and environmental elements, which create a mental state in which people feel overwhelmed by a painful or unpleasant stimulus and consider it impossible to avoid it. It is an extreme kind of resignation to pain. It is learned because it does not take into account the biological mechanisms that nature has incorporated into the organism. People abandon themselves to the tragedy in a resigned way. Although there is the possibility of fleeing from an unpleasant situation, people do not take advantage of it. They have been trapped in the tragedy. The experiences have been translated into defeatist ideas that have been neuro-psychologically wired. For this reason, analyzing resilience always means taking into account this triple etiological constitution of its basic properties, which will be conditioned by other factors such as age, marital status, previous pathologies, economic resources, etc. The differences in the way of coping with the Covid crisis, for example, between an adolescent and an adult, between a married person or a widower, between people with dependency or not, with a predisposition to anxiety, or with larger houses equipped with gardens, etc., shows that each specific situation is different in the way it helps or hinders resilience. For this reason, the response to the pandemic required a transdisciplinary effort [41].

5   The Relationality and Ambivalence of Exercising Resilience

Analyzing all these "traits" or factors is essential. However, we must not forget that resilience is also a dynamic and interactive "process" between the person, the adverse situation, and other people. This process is characterized by two qualities: relationality and ambivalence that make resilience a complex and strategic exercise or game. For this reason, resilience is not an individual quality, but rather a strategic exercise in the midst of a complex social configuration. The sociologist Norbert Elias coined the concept of "figuration" to refer to a network of interdependent people that adopts a concrete pattern configured by conflictive and cooperative relationships. Figurations are a "fabric of tensions" ("Spannungsgefüge") that acquires a shape of specific interdependencies. These figurations can be analyzed through game models of different types [34]. People "play" (they act) within those specific figurations that enable and constrain their actions, decisions and identities.

In fact, the individual-society relationship is ambivalent [35]. Human sociality is complex because humans are a social species while we maintain our specific individuality. Human groupings are always "half-societies" in which the links between individuals are braided with thick seams that never fit together in a coherent, perfect and harmonic way. Therefore, human sociality is inherently ambivalent and this conditions the exercise of resilience. On the one hand, due to our neurological wiring, the social brain is so constitutive of our well-being that one of the main factors that facilitates a subject's resilience is to have a social support network [36]. These networks act as a form of protection that buffers the trauma or helps to overcome it through emotional strengthening. For decades, empirical research has shown that there is no correlation between an increase in GDP and the "happiness" of people in a country. Once a certain level of economic prosperity has been reached, there is a decoupling between the trend lines of economic progress and personal well-being. The same has been shown by the sociology of work. When subjects feel well paid, successive wage increases fail to increase productivity or worker satisfaction. What is "missing" in the equation is precisely the social support network. That is why poor countries — where there is less individualism, more family and neighborhood support networks, and where personal fulfillment is not based purely on professional and economic success — usually score higher on happiness scales than rich countries.

The dramatic increase in mental illness caused by isolation in young people, adults and the elderly is an example of this during the Covid emergency. In fact, this social network includes animals, which also belong to the emotional support group of people [38]. However, while these social relationships are essential to increase people's emotional well-being, they also generate the greatest number of traumas. Paradoxically, the most widespread social harm is that which comes from our family and friends. The very people who are support networks may become the ones inflicting harm or trauma. Interpersonal relationships can be at the same time — using the terminology of Randall Collins — generators of interaction rituals that increase or decrease our emotional energy.

However, the interrelationships between people do not always occur at a level of co-presence and interaction. As the social psychologist Allport rightly pointed out, in addition to *physical* presence, people condition us as *imagined* presences (the image we make of others or that we believe others make of us) and as *implicit* presences (institutional, cultural or normative creations stemming from others). Both also have an ambivalent impact. Sometimes they facilitate resilience; for example, imagining my deceased grandfather can give me wings to overcome adversity or taking advantage of normative regulations against parental abuse of children can make it easier for me to flee from a toxic home. But sometimes they complicate our recovery; for example, imagining what my family will say if I stop talking to my father who mistreats me or if the legislation is benign with rapists and that leaves a woman unprotected. Therefore, whether through everyday physical interactions, through their imagined presence or their implicit influence, "society" and "others" create a complex figuration in which the exercise of resilience is not reduced to a simple decision of "I want to recover from this adversity". This ambivalent quality of resilience is like the dynamics of social transformation processes or the creation of public policies: in any transformation process, there will always be some actors who are beneficiaries and others who are harmed directly or indirectly. For this reason, resilience is not a simple "trait" but a true "process" or strategic game. Perhaps some brief examples can clarify what I mean.

Migratory processes can be seen as resilient processes. However, the migrants who seek to overcome adversity can find different scenarios. Sometimes their own country prevents them from migrating. Other times, the recipient country prohibits them from immigrating. On other occasions, even if they manage to settle in another country, they may face situations of economic, political, cultural, and social discrimination. Finally, although they have managed to integrate into the new society, they may find themselves emotionally torn by the imagined presence of those they left behind in their country. All of this, instead of allowing them to overcome adversity, creates new and deeper traumas. Can the failure of resilience be attributed to the subject or to the physical, imagined or implicit presence of others? The same can be applied to a woman abused by her husband or a daughter who wants to flee from the trauma inflicted by her alcoholic father since childhood. What for that daughter or woman is a *brave act of resistance* to adversity through flight or the transformation of her living conditions, for the father or husband is an act of *betrayal and infidelity.* The murder of the women who pretended to be resilient tragically demonstrates that resilience cannot be analyzed as a neuro-psychological property but as a strategic relational exercise. Processes of ideological conversion or social downgrading can be understood from this approach. The *Intimate Diary* of the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno shows in a dramatic way that a subject who intends to give an existential turn to his life can find resistance from his loved ones who do not accept the resilience of the one who seeks to live another way. Downgrading has also been widely studied in social theory: people who grew up in a lower class than they now belong to feel that others accuse them of not being faithful to their humble origins. The feelings of guilt generated by this type of "social control" of a subject's resilience can aggravate the trauma or create a new one. The cruelty of others toward the individual's resilient attitude can be personally assumed and convert these external social processes into internal psychological processes of cruelty toward oneself, "I should never have left my husband", "I should never have stopped talking to my father", "I should never have migrated to another country", "I should never have left my old job", etc.

In addition to these examples, another relational factor determines recovery from adversity. It is not the same processes or the same qualities that determine the resilience of an individual actor or of a collective actor. The ontological dimension that emerges from "groupality" constitutes a fundamental nuance: it is not the same for a person or for a family to overcome the death of a loved one. The sociological complexity

of a resilient family is exponentially more intricate than that of an individual person. The resilience of a single parent who loses a child is also sociologically simpler than the same loss in a marriage. In these cases, it is not that an individual subject pretends to be resilient and finds himself with relational difficulties that prevent him from doing so. Now the group itself has to exercise resilience. The fact that specific people in this group face adversity in different ways (with tears or laughter, with hatred or tenderness, fleeing or staying, speaking or keeping quiet) and at different paces, can destabilize the exercise of resilience of each subject. All this shows that resilience as a "process" is fundamentally relational and ambivalent.

6 Resilience and the Anthropological Problem of "Sameness"

Finally, together with its "traits" and its "processual" nature, it must be taken into account that the ultimate meaning of resilience is an "outcome": overcoming adversity and recovering homeostatic balance. Everything said so far has emphasized the factors that constitute resilience and its relational and ambivalent qualities. However, the final corollary shows specifically anthropological consequences. Resilience means *overcoming adversity.* In the popular imagination, resilience is often illustrated by the example of a bamboo cane (or a metal rod) that bends when a force is exerted on it but returns to its position once the force is removed. The cane is resilient because instead of breaking, it is flexible enough to adapt to that adverse force and recover again. This image corresponds to the very etymology of the term resilience, which is made up of the Latin words "re" (back) and "salire" (jump). That is, it is a "rebound" or return to a previous position. In a sense, this is true because resilience means "recovering" the homeostatic balance. However, this image, although poetic, is misleading and anthropologically false. The resilient human being is not the same before and after overcoming adversity. One of the accusations that others can make to resilient subjects is that they have changed and that they have stopped being who they were, seeing life as they saw it, defending the same ideas, or looking the same. That is, people cease to be who they were. Not metaphorically, but ontologically.

For me, a single/multi-selves psychic structure is the biological possibility condition that makes resilience possible.[4] This multiplicity, dynamism and openness to change are what make a traditional way of understanding the "sameness" of the subject unfeasible. Sameness usually implies "uniqueness" and "permanence". For this reason, we normally consider ourselves "unified" and "essentially the same". These are the characteristic properties of the traditional concept of the "soul" of theology or the "self" of philosophy. But the "Self" and the "Personality" are changing neurological processes. Neither the self nor the personality can be the "sameness" of the subject that works as a factor of permanence through all the changes that are suffered throughout life. The selves are more dynamic and the personality more stable, but neither of them is "permanent". From a metaphysical point of view, the pre-eminence of the Greek metaphysics of uniqueness and permanence has surely influenced the problem of the unique and unalterable essence that constitutes us as a person. However, it becomes increasingly more difficult for me to maintain a position of uniqueness and permanence with respect to human sameness. There is an interesting insight in Derek Parfit's work about the concept of personal identity, in which the sheer identity of oneself over time is replaced by degrees of similarity. The important thing is the *degree of connection* that we perceive and feel between our different phases of life. The problem of sameness as uniqueness and permanence is now the problem of what temporal coherence exists between the different multi-selves of the subject throughout his life. Perhaps this way of understanding the problem of sameness makes it possible to explain existential and psychological experiences in a more realistic way, such as that of resilience.

The philosophical problem is deep. I do not intend to reduce the complexity of the problem to these brief notes that I have been able to indicate in the space of these pages. I simply wanted to insist that the concept of resilience destroys the self-understanding of people from the categories of "uniqueness" and "permanence". Only if we are multiple and changing can we be resilient. Precisely for this reason, resilience becomes more difficult in those subjects who, like those on the autistic spectrum, have difficulties in managing change and social relationships. The restricted and repetitive behavior and interests of autistic

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[4]In these pages, I cannot develop my single/multi-self-hypothesis [39, 40].

people are a dramatic example of what uniqueness and permanence entail when it comes to overcoming adversity. Being resilient implies ceasing to consider ourselves from the sameness category as a unified and permanent self.

7   Conclusion: the Human Subject as Action and Passion

Everything said so far leads us to a final reflection on the exercise of resilience and on the underlying anthropological model. Resilience reflects the way in which human life swings between action and passion, between what I intend and what I get, between what comes from me and what comes from others. Thus, on many occasions, people act practically unconsciously. The life of a person is the automatic result of the *integrated tension* of the three vertices of the triangle (biology, culture, and environment). From a philosophical point of view, we could say that the person (behavior and identity) merely emerges from this etiological framework. A large part of what we do has this passive nature. Whether we like it or not, we must assume this dimension of passivity in our lives. We are what our biology gave us, what our parents and friends taught us, and the environmental context in which we develop and live. It is important to clarify that this does not mean that we are determined and condemned to what others have made of us. However, to reduce everything to this passivity would be to make people a simple puppet of their organism, their socialization, and of their environment. This is not true. The subject is also an active agent who tries to manage, balance, or modify the influence of the etiological triangle, choosing some ideas instead of others, weighing and analyzing them, transforming the environment or choosing another, and putting the means at our disposal to modify or resist our biological impulses. This is where rationality and the ability to reflect come in. In this case, the subject is not a puppet hanging from the three strings (biology, culture, and environment), but rather it plays a leading role in its construction. But rationality is never pure. When people at certain moments in their life act or create an identity in a deliberate, conscious, and actively reflective way, they always do so in conflict with what was already given to them. For this reason, their remodeling of themselves is not absolute, and they will never be able to create themselves in a total way. There is always a previous material base with a given biological, cultural, and environmental content. The current ideological approach in self-help books is based on a somewhat absolutely malleable anthropological model without limits as if the subject could be reconstructed from previous total destruction of what it is. However, this is an ideological fallacy with perverse consequences, because it makes people solely responsible for their life project, their achievements, and successes, their failures, and mistakes [40].

Therefore, not everything we are and do is the result of an active, deliberate and conscious exercise. Neither our successes nor our failures are absolutely our own. A realistic anthropological model must be prepared to integrate this ontological and psychological duality and ambivalence, in which human reality is both a passive outcome and an active project. The tension between the two is what often constitutes the ambivalent tear of the human being who sometimes wants but cannot and sometimes can but does not want to. The biological sciences have taught us that biology is both destiny and project, limitation and possibility, passive reception and active projection. In the same way, the social and human sciences have shown that culture and environment are also destiny and project, limitation and possibility, passive reception and active projection. The ontology of human reality is ambivalent because it requires assuming both traits. People manage their etiological triangle torn apart by this inevitable fracture between what they are and what they project to be. The project of "becoming" is always a management of the previous content of "being". Resilience is only possible in the midst of the anthropological tension that tries to find ways so that the drama of human existence is not trapped in a tragedy that prevents people from overcoming adversity.

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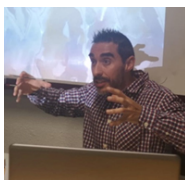
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