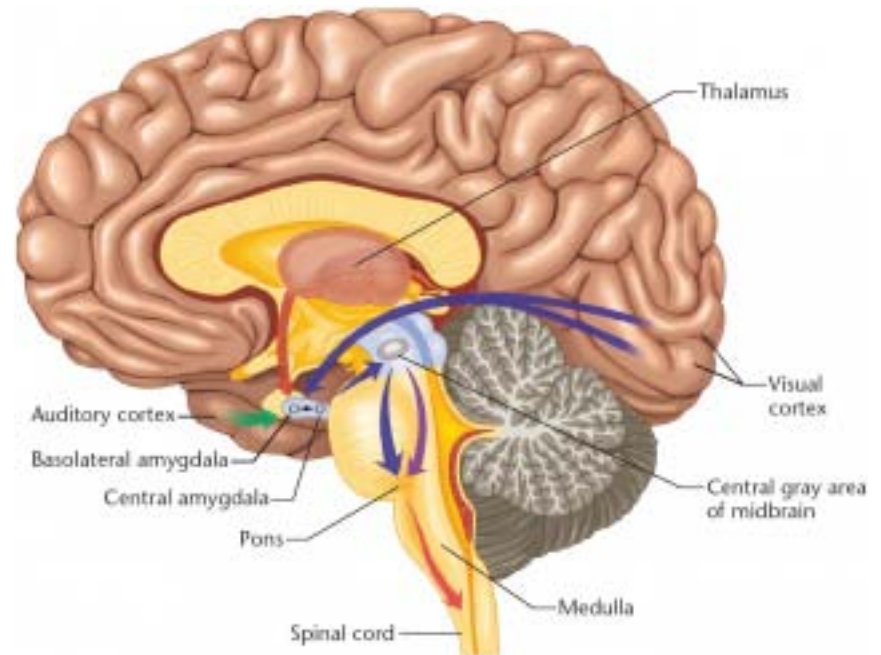


Libertarian paternalism and the governance of irrationality: the rise of the psychological state

Rhys Jones, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences,
Aberystwyth University

Governing the soul...then and now



Seeking to understand the “interior lives of citizens” (Rose 1999: 1)

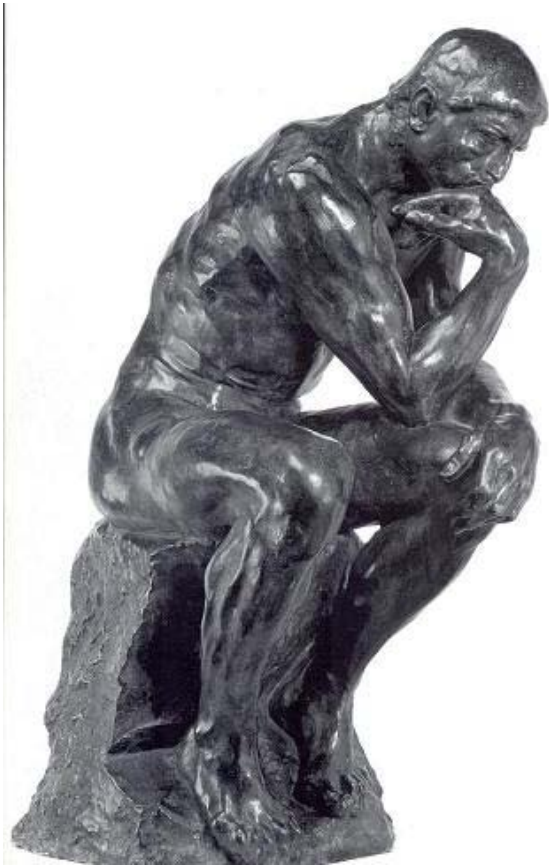
Governing the soul...then and now

- “Notions of what it means to be particular kinds of persons, populations and political subjects are increasingly bound up with the meanings, explanations and theories of contemporary neurosciences” (Vrecko 2010: 2).
- The birth of a “neuromolecular gaze” (Rose 2010)
- “Screening and intervening” (Rose 2010)

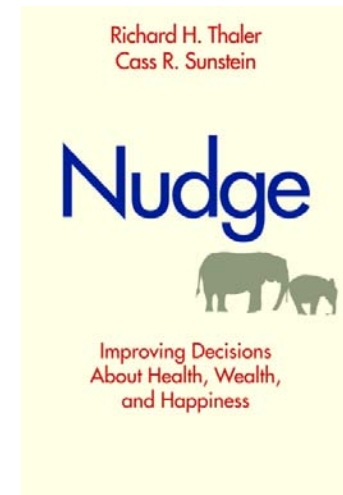
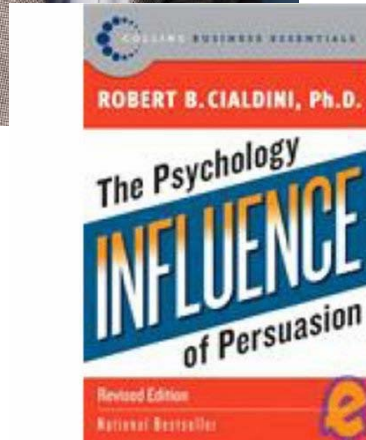
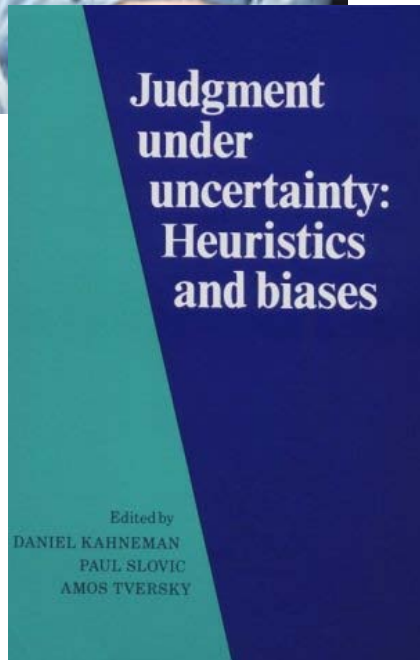
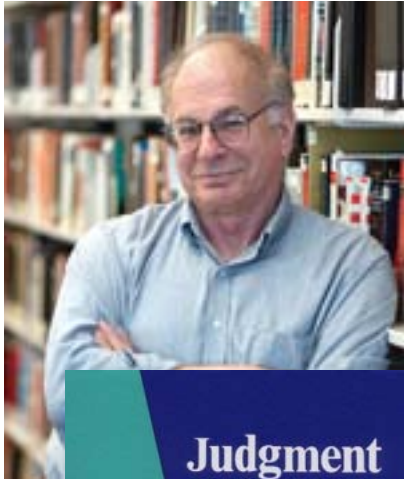
'Psy' sciences as technologies of government

- a. We are not rational actors - in fact we are predictably irrational (Ariely 2008)
- b. Emotions play an important part in decision making (Damasio 1994)
- c. Decision-making environments or 'choice architectures' can be designed to enable us to make better decisions (Thaler and Sunstein 2008)

'Psy' sciences as technologies of government

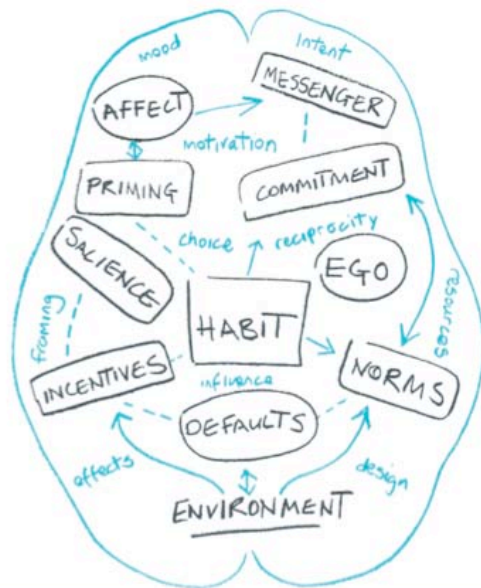


From academia to public policy?



MINDSPACE

Influencing behaviour through public policy



“Influencing people’s behaviour is nothing new to Government, which has often used tools such as legislation, regulation or taxation to achieve desired policy outcomes. But many of the biggest policy challenges we are now facing – such as the increase in people with chronic health conditions – will only be resolved if we are successful in persuading people to change their behaviour, their lifestyles or their existing habits. Fortunately, over the last decade, our understanding of influences on behaviour has increased significantly and this points the way to new approaches and new solutions” (Dolan et al 2010, iii).

Philosophical antecedents

Behavioural economics
Behavioural psychology
Psychological engineering
Ethology
Neuroeconomics
Social marketing
Theories of Affect
Time Preference Theories
User Centred Design
Visual Perception Theory

Modes of operation

Non-conscious Priming
Incentives
Intelligent Assignment
Presumed Consent
Mandated Choices
Anchoring
Culture Change
Channelling Factors
Collaborative Filtering
Disclosure
Feedback
Self-Registered Control
Strategies
Peer-to-Peer Pressure
Norm Formation
Choice Editing
Default positions

‘The metaphor I sometimes use is you know, it’s a bit like post-war clothes for women were really ill-fitting but functional, and the difference between those for us is a really well-tailored suit. You see, they’re both clothes and they sort of do the job, and behavioural economics sort of does that compared to classical economics, in relation to policy design. It moves you from rather rough, crude, stick-man type clothing, into one which is really fitted, to change the metaphor, which *goes with the grain of human cognition.*’

(Former member of the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, 2010)



Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy

February 2004

David Halpern and Clive Bates, Geoff Mulgan and Stephen Aldridge with Greg Beales and Adam Heathfield

Note: This is an issue paper for discussion purposes and does not represent Government policy



GSR Behaviour Change Knowledge Review

Practical Guide: An overview of behaviour change models and their uses

www.gsr.gov.uk

NHS
National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Issue Date: October 2007

Behaviour change at population, community and individual levels

NICE public health guidance 6

GCN
Government Communication Network

COI
Communication Outcomes Institute

Communications and behaviour change

www.defra.gov.uk

A FRAMEWORK FOR PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOURS

REPORT

January 2006

defra
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Public Health White Paper

“When it comes to improving people’s health and wellbeing, we need a different approach. We cannot just ban everything, lecture people or deliver initiatives to the public.”

Aims of the White Paper on Public Health:

- “strengthening self-esteem, confidence and personal responsibility;
- positively promoting ‘healthier’ behaviours and lifestyles;
- adapting the environment to make healthy choices easier.”

The emergence of new forms of governance?

- With regard to work on governance, the increasing use of the ‘psy’ sciences within policy is questioning:
 - The location of governmental power
 - The centrality of informed choice as a mechanism of rule
 - Notions of active subjects

Locating power

- ‘This growing realisation has led to a shift of interest towards models of ‘*co-production*’...Government and its agencies may often have more impact on key policy outcomes by using their limited resources to engage, involve and change the behaviour of users and other parties, rather than concentrating on traditional modes of providing services’ (Halpern et al 2004: 7 original emphasis).

Locating power



Appetite for Life Action Plan and the reconfiguration of school canteens in Wales: input from pupils and especially from the School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs)

Locating power

- ‘MINDSPACE effects depend at least partly on the Automatic System. This means that citizens may not fully realise their behaviour is being changed – or, at least, how it is being changed. Clearly, this opens up government to charges of manipulation’ (Dolan et al 2010: 66).

Locating power

- ‘Now, the best argument in *Nudge* remains that choice architecture is not neutral [...] you have to twin it to collective responsibility, so you have to get the permission of citizens to use the techniques, rather than just banning Mars bars from by checkouts, you have to say, “what are we going to do about Mars bars by checkouts?” should it be fresh fruit, or something, so you’re kids don’t nag you because you can’t do that just at the individual level [...] you have to collectively reach a view, so that means you need some kind of collective mechanisms, by which you give government or its agencies, permission, as it were, to do the manipulation’ (Former Cabinet Office Strategy Unit Member, interview 2009).

Locating power

- Are policy-makers wholly rational (Tasic 2011)?
- Governing harm to self and not just harm to others (Mill 2002 [1859])?
- By-passing any real decision-making process and a re-centring of governmental power?

The significance of informed choice

- ‘While it is recognised that information is inadequate on its own, it clearly has an important role as part of a package of supporting measures, for example not only helping consumers but also procurers to make more sustainable choices.’

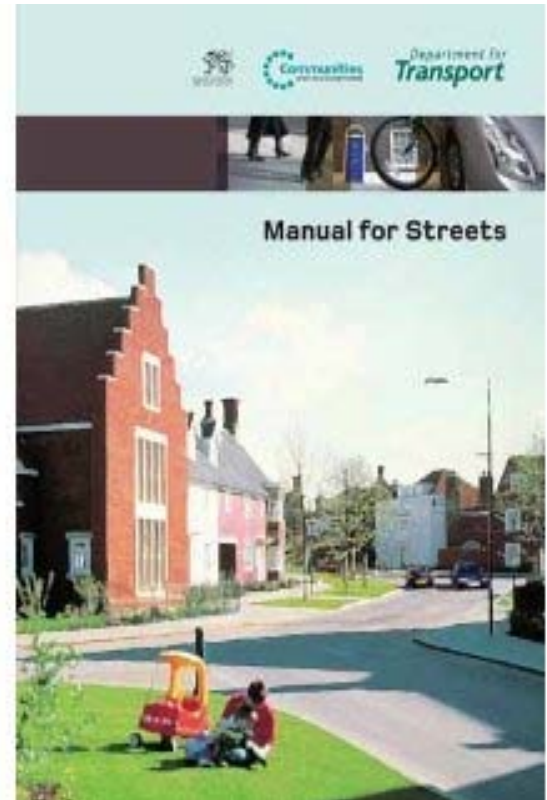
DEFRA’s (2008: 1) *Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours*

The significance of informed choice

- ‘Automatic enrolment introduces a presumption to save but does not mean that employees will be compelled to save – they will be able to opt out of the scheme if they wish. But unlike the present situation in most pension schemes, where an active decision must be taken to join, with automatic enrolment people need to take an active decision to opt out’ (DWP 2006: 62).

The significance of informed choice

- Manual for Streets (DoT and DCLG 2007)
- The need to use design features and architecture to show that streets are places where people live, work and play



The significance of informed choice

- Psychological speed bumps on the street?



The significance of informed choice

‘For people who are relatively intelligent and sophisticated it doesn’t really matter because if you’re being nudged and you understand you’re being nudged and you know what’s in your best interests and all the rest of it then you can work round the nudge fairly easily.’

(A member of the Institute of Economic Affairs, 2009).

Notions of active subjects

Idea of co-production and also a possible increase in the significance of communities:

‘centralisation has failed’ and, as such, there is a need to ‘free up local government and local communities to decide how best to improve the health and wellbeing of their citizens’ (Public Health White Paper, DoH 2010: 25).

Notions of active subjects



Who should be nudging...or what kind of planters?

Notions of active subjects

- DEFRA's (2008: 8) *Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours*: segmentation
- Seven different kinds of people:
 - Some possess a high ability and high willingness to become greener (e.g. 'positive greens' and 'concerned consumers')
 - Others possess a low potential and willingness to change (e.g. 'stalled starters').

Conclusions

- Growing significance of ‘psy’ sciences
- Malleable and variegated
- Implications for understandings of governance:
 - Role of state/political authority
 - Choice and the infantilisation of subjects
 - The emergence of a post-Enlightenment citizen?
 - The emergence of new kinds of political rationality?