

# From Subjectified to Subject

Power and the Possibility of a Democratic Politics

By Todd May

IN A LATE INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL FOUCAULT, HE WAS ASKED WHY HE THOUGHT the Soviet Union did not change more radically after the Russian Revolution of 1917. His answer was this: "In Soviet society one has the example of a state apparatus which has changed hands, yet leaves social hierarchies, family life, sexuality and the body more or less as they were in capitalist society."<sup>1</sup> It is in keeping with Foucault's thought that changes at the top of a power structure are not enough to ensure that the power arrangements themselves will change. What I would like to do here is to discuss Foucault's views on power, and to see some challenges they lead to. And then I would like to turn to the contemporary French thinker Jacques Rancière in order to suggest how we might meet those challenges.

Stepping back from the immediacy of events to ask questions about power and how it operates is an important aspect of political reflection. It allows one to look beneath the surface appearances of things and ask what else might be operating that needs to be considered or addressed. Michel Foucault was always looking beneath what presented itself to us as obvious or inevitable. He did so not in order to discover some deep mystery. In fact, what he often found was, although surprising, hardly mysterious. What he discovered is that power operates in our everyday lives in ways that we might not have expected, but that have more influence on who we are and who we become than many of our political theories would lead us to believe.

Perhaps Foucault's most important contribution to political thought lay in the idea that power does not just stop things from happening, but instead produces or creates things. More specifically, it produces us, as the kind of beings we are. This does not mean, of course, that it creates us biologically. It does not create something that was not there before. Rather, it molds us to be certain kinds of beings. What makes this idea important is that many of our ways of being seem to us, at least at the time, to be natural. That's just what human beings are like. What Foucault shows us is that what appear to us to be natural or inescapable

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ways of being are in fact historically created, and historically created through certain power relationships.

One of Foucault's examples, detailed in his book *Discipline and Punish*, is that of the difference between the normal and the abnormal. We tend to think that human beings exist on a scale that runs from the more or less normal to the abnormal, and that that scale is a feature of human existence. That is to say, there is something it is like for human beings to be normal, and any deviation from that is abnormal, and therefore subject to treatment. Now we may disagree about what is normal and what is abnormal, but that there is a normal for human beings is something we often take for granted. Foucault questions that idea. He does so through a detailed examination of the rise of the prison system, which is where he believes the distinction between the normal and the abnormal arises. What he seeks to show is that the very concept of normality is a historical product of certain power relations rather than a natural category for human beings.

How does he do this? Very briefly, the story is this: before the rise of capitalism and modern states, punishment occurred mostly through various forms of physical torture. Every crime was an offense against the body of the sovereign, and so the sovereign had to establish his power over and against the body of the criminal. And that generally took the form of death and/or gruesome torture. However, with the rise of capitalism and the necessity of protecting property, spectacular punishments such as torture came to seem both needlessly cruel and inefficient. After all, it took a lot of resources to engage in some of the elaborate tortures of the pre-modern period. What was needed instead was a form of punishment that would be gentler and more efficient. And one of the ways it would need to be more efficient would be that it would be able to fit people who committed crimes back into society as productive members.

This fitting back into society required a lot of intervention. There had to be an enclosed place—that is, the prison—and the techniques for assessing an individual, finding out what he was like, and then training him to be different. As Foucault recounts it in *Discipline and Punish*, these techniques migrated from monasteries, hospitals, the old leper houses, and the military to the prison. The techniques helped give rise to certain kinds of knowledge, which later became known collectively as the human sciences. In particular, the study of psychology helped get its start in the prison. Psychology's job was to contribute to understanding what people were like, what made them perform optimally, and what ways people deviated from the normal.

In the course of all this, the twin concepts of the normal and the abnormal were established. Whereas earlier in the history of punishment, the key distinction was between the permitted and the forbidden, now it was between the normal and the abnormal. These two sets of concepts function very differently. With the earlier distinction, if one committed a crime, then one was punished mercilessly. Otherwise, one was ignored, left alone. With the rise of the distinction between the normal and the abnormal, however, things change. Almost nobody is completely normal; or, otherwise put, almost everyone is abnormal in some way, deviating from optimal functioning. Therefore, almost everyone is subject to being watched, monitored, intervened upon, trained, and rehabilitated.

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There are two lessons we might draw from this quick overview of *Discipline and Punish*. The first is that what might appear to be a natural way of looking at human beings—as being more or less normal—is instead a historical one. The second, and more important for our purposes, is that this way of looking at human beings has important political implications. The distinction between the normal and the abnormal is not just politically neutral. It functions to allow various authorities, whether they are psychologists or social workers or school personnel or human resource managers, to check up on us, study us, mold us in the image of optimal functioning.

Foucault calls this disciplinary way of seeking to intervene upon us *subjectification*. And he means two things by this. First, subjectification is a way of subjecting us to various forms of power. But note, this subjection to various forms of power does not happen as a result of some conspiracy. It's not as though there are a bunch of people sitting around a room and discussing how to make people more normal so that they can fit into the capitalist system. The kind of power Foucault is discussing here doesn't belong to anyone. It arises from the history of practices of punishment. Its effects are to try to *normalize* people—to use Foucault's term—but it isn't because there is some kind of political conspiracy to normalize. We are subject to powers that mold us, powers that arise from various practices, of which the discipline we have described is just one. That subjection is pervasive, but also anonymous. There is nobody behind the curtain pulling the strings.

But if we are subjectified by becoming subject to power, we are also subjectified in the sense of becoming subjects. That is to say, it is in our becoming subjects that we are subject to power. What does this mean? Roughly, power molds us to become who we are, the kinds of people we are, the kinds of agents we are. Power influences the way we see things, how we treat ourselves and one another, what we view as our world and our options in that world. It influences us in our very being.

This is not difficult to see. If power operates not just through some sovereign that exercises it upon us, but lies in the very character of our practices and our knowledge, then we might say that it helps craft us, produce us, from within. Within what? Within those practices through which we live our lives. The normal, for instance, appears in school practices, in factory practices, in office practices, and elsewhere. We are subject to it just as we make ourselves and are made into subjects. In Foucault's view, we should not see power just as something that comes from the outside, pressed upon us and stopping us from becoming what we otherwise might become. It also helps produce us as the kinds of beings we are.

But if this is true, then the question can be raised, and it has been raised, of how to think about political emancipation. Here is the problem. We are produced by practices that are at least partially the product of power relationships. And so who we are and how we see things is partially a product of those relationships. But if we are a product, or a partial product, of power, how are we to emancipate ourselves from that power? If we see the world according to that power, how are we to be able to take a critical stand with regard to it? It would be like wondering

whether the glasses through which we look at the world are the right ones without being able to take them off.

Now Foucault has argued that not all power arrangements are bad. He once said, "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism."<sup>2</sup> There are power arrangements that are bad, ones he would describe using the word "intolerable," and others that are not, although we must be vigilant. The power arrangements associated with normalization that he recounts in *Discipline and Punish* would surely be among the ones he would call intolerable. They mold people into uncritical cogs in a political and economic system of which he did not approve. Moreover, by getting us to worry about how normal we are, we are discouraged from experimenting with ourselves, from asking ourselves whom we might be. All of this would make the power arrangements associated with normalization bad. But there are certainly other power arrangements that would not be so bad. Foucault himself does not describe any of these, because he sees his job as contributing to a critical consciousness rather than giving an analysis of all the power arrangements in a society. But he does claim that even if we are partially the product of power, that does not mean that all power is bad.

But the problem, unfortunately, runs deeper than this. It is not just that power might be good or bad, depending on the circumstances. It is rather that, since we are the products of power, how are we to distinguish the good and the bad, except from the perspective of the power arrangements themselves? Doesn't the fact that we are produced by practices that are molded by power mean that we can only see power from within the framework of those practices, and therefore that our judgments about good and bad power arrangements must take place from within arrangements of power themselves?

We should be clear here. Foucault did not argue, and I am not claiming, that who we are is *simply* a product of power. We are molded and produced by practices that are suffused by power, but are not solely matters of power. There are other things going on in our practices besides power. The problem, then, is not that we are nothing more than products of power. It is a little more complex than this. The problem is that we are the product of practices that *involve* power, that don't stand entirely outside of power. And if that is the case, then it seems that we cannot stand entirely outside of power either. And if we can't stand entirely outside of power, then how can we judge power relationships except from a perspective that is necessarily inside them? To put the question in Foucault's terms, if we are subjectified by power, how are we to judge which arrangements of power are intolerable if not by the very standards accorded to us by power?

This is a problem that has been raised to Foucault by many thinkers, such as Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and others. It is an important issue to address, and not just in order to save Foucault's thought. I think Foucault is right to claim that our practices are suffused by power arrangements. And if that's right, then we need to address the problem not for Foucault's sake but for ours. We need to ask how, if power is not just something that comes from the outside but is within us, we can take up a critical political stance to power arrangements.

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If power is not just something that is done to us, but also something of which we are the vehicles, then how can we reflect upon it adequately?

In approaching this problem, the first thing to recognize is that our task is not to try to exit from power arrangements. If Foucault is right, this is simply not possible. As Foucault points out in his writings, our knowledge is inseparable from our practices, which means that how we know ourselves is also inseparable from power arrangements. That is his famous concept of power/knowledge. So if we are to take a critical stand toward power arrangements, we have to concede that there is no place outside those arrangements from which to take a perspective on them.

People have assumed that this presents a problem to reflecting critically upon power. "Does it? I'm not convinced that it does." It assumes that to reflect on power arrangements adequately then one must be able to take a position outside of all of them. But power arrangements are not the only thing that limits our perspective. As an analogy, consider language, for example. Our various languages help create perspectives from within which we see things in certain ways and not others. To be sure, languages do not entirely determine our perspective. But they help frame it. And we can't have a perspective, at least an intelligent one, on ourselves and our world without utilizing language. Because we are linguistic beings, our take on the world must be one that incorporates whatever opportunities and limitations our language offers. As the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argued, language necessarily gives us prejudices, but the alternative to linguistic prejudices is not a pure, untainted view of things, but no view at all.

We might say the same of the kind of power Foucault describes. Power helps mold us into who we are. Without such molding, we wouldn't be some kind of pure human beings, humans as they were meant to be. Instead, we would be unmolded, unproduced. We would be without character. This does not mean that the power arrangements that mold us are always good. It means only that we are necessarily subject to some kind of power arrangements. So the question for us, in assessing our situation, is not the question of how to get outside of the power arrangements that have molded us into a pure space without any power arrangements whatsoever. It is instead to ask how we have been molded, which among those moldings we like, which among them we find intolerable, and how we might experiment with alternatives to the intolerable.

But still, is this possible? Can we reflect critically on the power arrangements that have molded us? After all, don't we see ourselves by means of them? Let's use language as an analogy again. Certain words don't seem right to describe particular situations we find ourselves in. Other words, although we have been taught them, don't seem appropriate to use ever. Think here of racial slurs or demeaning phrases. Even if we were raised in an environment where people used racial slurs, we might come to think of them as, to use Foucault's term, intolerable uses of language. A language, or more precisely a particular cultural context of language, is not a seamless whole, with every word supporting every other word in a way that traps us. Rather, it is a loose whole, one where certain aspects of it may be connected to or supporting others, and other aspects of it in tension. Even though our perspective on the world is inseparable from an

appeal to language, language in its use is diverse and sometimes contradictory phenomenon. Because of this, we might use some aspects of language to criticize other aspects, as when we describe *in words* the harm that racial slurs cause in order to convince people not to use them.

We might say of language use what the philosopher Wilfrid Sellars says of empirical knowledge: “empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once.” The idea here is that we exist within a web of beliefs, but this web is not without its tensions. On the basis of some beliefs, or in the case of science some experiments combined with some beliefs, we might put other beliefs in question. There is no particular belief that stands outside the web and that can’t be put in question, or at least potentially be put in question. What we can’t do is put everything in question all at once. The reason for this is that we would have nothing on the basis of which to judge any particular belief. We wouldn’t be able to judge whether a belief is true without other beliefs to test it against, just as we wouldn’t be able to ask about whether certain words were appropriate or useful without the background of a whole linguistic context against which to see them.

The same goes for power. We are formed in practices that are themselves suffused by power. But this formation isn’t seamless. It has its tensions. We can question some aspects of our formation on the basis of others. We can look critically at particular parts of ourselves. What we can’t do is step outside ourselves to ask critical questions about ourselves as a whole. If we tried to do that, then, as with knowledge and language, we would have no basis for asking or answering the critical questions in the first place.

But if we can ask critical questions about aspects of ourselves, in the name of what should we do so? What should we hold constant in order to question other aspects of who we are or how we think about ourselves and our world? Here is where the thought of contemporary French historian and philosopher Jacques Rancière becomes relevant. His idea is that we should hold the value of equality as our constant, or at least one constant, on the basis of which we can question current arrangements of power. In particular, he holds that we should presuppose the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.<sup>3</sup> And, more particularly still, he holds that “the equality we should presuppose is the equality of intelligence.”

The idea of the equality of intelligence may sound strange to many of us. It certainly did for me the first time I read Rancière. But when he writes of the equality of intelligence, he does not mean that we are equally capable of scoring the same on exams or getting the same scholastic grades (although he does argue that we are all much more capable of that than current social arrangements might lead us to believe). He does not mean that we can all understand advanced quantum theory, thank goodness. What he is after is more pedestrian. We can all talk to one another, reason with one another, and construct meaningful lives on the basis of this reasoning and our own reflections. While our specific intellectual skills may differ from one another, we are all equally capable of using those skills to communicate, to discuss, to make decisions, to take account of the world around us, and to act on the basis of all this. The presupposition of the equality

of intelligence is the starting point for all politics. “[O]ur problem,” he writes, “isn’t proving that all intelligence is equal. It’s seeing what can be done under that supposition. And for this, it’s enough for us that the opinion be possible—that is, that no opposing truth be proved.”<sup>4</sup>

For Rancière, we all find ourselves in what he calls a *partage du sensible*, a partition or distribution of the sensible. We can think of the partition or distribution of the sensible this way. We experience our world not only through a set of beliefs but often more immediately as a matter of sensation. We *see* and more generally *perceive* the world in certain ways. Some things stand out as foreground and others remain in the background. This is true not only of inanimate objects but also of people. For many men, when it comes to serious discussion it is only other men that are in the foreground; women become background for them. As Rancière sometimes puts it, there are those who count and whose voices are counted, and those who do not.

Not only do certain things stand out for us, but also the things that stand out for us do so in particular ways. Some things stand out as threatening, others as inviting, or interesting, or as challenges or obstacles or opportunities or whatever. Why do things stand out in these ways, or others? Foucault provides the answer here. Certain things stand out as foreground and others as background, and stand out in certain ways, because of the ways we have been subjectified. The ways in which we have been formed as subjects give us a view of ourselves and one another and our world. It is at this point, at the point of the *partage du sensible*, that Foucault’s and Rancière’s thoughts touch.

The fact that there is a partition or distribution of the sensible is not, in itself, a problem. What *is* a problem is the hierarchical character that many of us come to experience in this partition. That is to say, we experience it in such a way as that some people count, or count more than others, and that some people, even when they count, count not as fellow human beings but as superior or inferior, as greater or less than equal to us. We are all familiar with some of these ways. Men are often experienced as greater than women, whites as greater than people of color, heterosexuals as greater than homosexuals. We are subjectified to experience our world in these ways. But this hierarchy is more fine-grained than that. We experience certain men, say those who are taller or better looking or more athletic, as superior. It is not that we believe them to be superior. We do not reflect upon our world and say to ourselves that the world is arranged according to this hierarchy. The experience is more immediate than that: it is direct, in our perception, in the *partage du sensible*.

Such experience is, as Foucault would have it, intolerable. It is the product of an arrangement of power that needs to be criticized and challenged. In the name of what should we challenge it? This we have already seen. We challenge it in the name of equality. We challenge it in the name of the presupposition of the equality of all speaking beings. And this challenge cannot simply be an individual one. It is not just that I challenge these hierarchies or that you challenge these hierarchies. It must be that *we* challenge these hierarchies.

And when we challenge these hierarchies in a collective action, an action that presupposes the equality of all speaking beings, we engage in what Rancière calls *politics*. He writes, in an admittedly difficult passage, “I...propose

to reserve the term *politics* for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part that has no part...political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption, that of the part who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.”<sup>5</sup>

The idea here, if not the passage itself, is simple enough. Politics is collective action that emerges out of the presupposition of the equality of speaking beings. It challenges what he calls the police order, by which he means the *partage du sensible* that privileges certain hierarchies.

This challenge should not be seen simply as a request or a demand to be treated equally. To ask that someone else treat you equally is already to place yourself in an inferior position to them. Instead, the challenge is to act as though you were equal to those who are placed hierarchically above you in the partition of the sensible. That very action is itself a challenge to the partition, to the police order. You may make particular demands, but among them will not be the demand to *be* an equal. In political action as Rancière conceives it there is no need to demand that, because it is already presupposed in the action one takes alongside others.

Rancière has a name for this collective action out of the presupposition of equality, this action that people take together in their own name and in the name of solidarity with others. Strange to say, it is a name that Foucault already used in a very different way. Rancière calls this type of collective action *subjectification*. Subjectification, in this sense, is very different from, although not opposed to, subjectification in the sense Foucault uses the term. Subjectification, for Rancière, is a process, the process of forming a collective subject of action out of individuals. It is an active process on the part of the individuals involved, rather than the more passive process of subjection to power that Foucault describes. It is, of course, possible that subjectified individuals in Foucault’s sense can join together into a collective process of subjectification in Rancière’s sense. In fact, that’s how it happens. What distinguishes Rancière’s form of subjectification from other political movements is the presupposition of equality that animates it. It’s not, of course, impossible that people join together in movements that do not presuppose equality. In the US, for instance, the Tea Party does not seem to display any particular fondness for the idea of the equality of all speaking beings. However, subjectification, as Rancière uses the term, happens on the basis of equality.

I should note here that the presupposition of equality is not necessarily something that is recognized as such by the participants. Rancière writes, “Equality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it.”<sup>6</sup> Not only is equality a presupposition rather than a goal, it can also be a presupposition that is acted upon without people’s saying this to themselves. That is why, as an assumption, it needs to be, as he puts it, “discerned” within the movement that is afoot. This



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leaves open the possibility that a movement can be a process of subjectification without thinking of itself in terms of equality; and, by the same token, a movement might think of itself as based on equality, but actually not be one. For instance, again in the US, the Christian right often thinks of itself as seeking equality while at the same time it is comfortable with denying it to others.

In order to see what Rancière is on about here, let us contrast his politics with another kind of politics, one that was prevalent in the US and elsewhere particularly in the 1990s. It came to be called "identity politics." This was the politics, often associated with movements of gay or women's rights or the rights of people of color, that privileged one particular group, rarely in theory although often in practice. Identity politics started with the accurate recognition that different groups are oppressed in different ways. In contrast to the mainstream of Marxist theory, different oppressions are not reducible to a single analysis, such as a class analysis. This idea seems correct, and it was motivated in part by Foucault's discussions of the various ways power operates. From there, however, there evolved a tendency to privilege either a particular group's characteristics or its oppression as special relative to others. It is one thing to say that a group's character or its oppression is *unique*. One can do that without violating the presupposition of equality. However, when, for instance, movements for black equality deny the importance of gay rights or vice versa, then the presupposition of equality is no longer operative.

This is not only a moral problem; it is also a political one. In addition to the moral blindness of failing to recognize the oppression of another, various groups splinter off and become isolated struggles. This blocks solidarity, which in turn makes each movement less effective. Progressive political struggles succeed not when they isolate themselves from one another but when they recognize their common ground. What the presupposition of equality does, and what identity politics did not do, is to offer a common political ground on the basis of which to build political struggle.

Now we can see why it is that equality has to be a presupposition of struggle rather than, or at least as a foundation of, a demand. If equality remains a demand, if it is to be given, then it places people in a passive position relative to those who are supposed to give it. Whether that passivity is the result of a request or a demand is irrelevant. It relies on the giver rather than on the movement in order to be realized. And that division, into the active giver and the passive receiver, is already a presupposition of inequality rather than equality.

This does not mean that movements cannot demand equality in one thing or another. They can. However, they must do so from the position of already presupposing equality in their action. Let me offer a quick example. During the Algerian civil war of the 1990's and early 2000's, many Algerians fled to Montreal, Canada. This would be natural, since Algeria was occupied by France and therefore many Algerians spoke French. Moreover, France was not open to refugees from the civil war. However, in 2002 Canada announced that the violence had subsided and that there was no reason for Algerian refugees to stay in Canada any longer. This was not true. What was true was that the month following the announcement, the Canadian company SNC Lavalin, an engineering

and construction giant, signed a contract with the Algerian government worth an estimated 141 million dollars.

The Algerian refugees struggled to stay in Montreal. But their struggle did not simply take the form of a demand to stay. The refugees acted as though they were already citizens. At the risk of being recognized for deportation, they demonstrated publicly, held open meetings, and generally acted, and this is the key point, as though they were already Canadian citizens. They acted as equals. As a result of this struggle, Montreal was allowed to adopt special procedures that resulted in most of the refugees' being allowed to stay.

In this case, then, there was a demand for a specific kind of equality. But what made the movement one of subjectification, and therefore self-emancipation, was that the demand was not merely a demand, but also an activity based on the presupposition of equality. As Rancière says, working from the presupposition of equality "is the definition of a struggle for equality which can never be merely a demand upon the other, nor a pressure put upon him, but always simultaneously a proof given to oneself. This is what 'emancipation' means."<sup>7</sup>

When we see that equality as a political value must be fundamentally a presupposition rather than a demand, we can also see why an often competing value, that of liberty, will not do in founding a political movement. Equality presupposes that each actor in a movement is to be treated as an equal. It requires respect for the dignity of the other. I have argued elsewhere that Immanuel Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative—that one should treat others as an end and not solely as a means—is best demonstrated at the political level by movements of subjectification in Rancière's sense, movements that presuppose the equality of everyone. It is in those movements that the dignity of each actor is preserved, and dignity was precisely what Kant thought was the intrinsic value of a human being, or, more precisely for Kant, a rational creature.

Liberty does not require that kind of respect for another person. Even if I am required to respect that other person's liberty, I am not required to respect them as a person, equal to me. I am only required, to one extent or another, not to interfere with them. As a result, liberty is not a promising value upon which to form political movements. This is not to say that there is no room for people to act freely within political movements, or that there can never be a demand for some sort of liberty that has been denied. It is to claim that the fundamental value that animates political movements must be equality rather than liberty. If I may put it this way, the value of liberty should be folded into the value of equality, giving the latter pride of place.

In this latter part of the paper, I have argued, in line with Rancière's thought, for the presupposition of equality as the founding value of a politics that recognizes that we are all in part products of power. I have claimed that presupposing equality allows us to move from being subjected to subjectifying ourselves as active political participants while still recognizing that we are formed by practices of power that help give us the beliefs we have. Suppose, as a final challenge, someone were to ask about the value of equality itself. Isn't our embrace of that value just the product of power, and if so, why should we embrace it as opposed to any other value?

In addressing this challenge, the first thing to recognize is that the value of equality is, like other values, in part the product of power. This is because, like other values, it arises from our practices and, as we have seen, our practices are imbued with power. But, as we have also seen, to say that something is or is partially the product of power is not to say that it is bad or false. The holism we discussed above says that we can question or challenge any value or any belief, but we can't question all of them at the same time. In arguing for the presupposition of equality, I have given you reasons to believe that it should be a fundamental political value. Those reasons come from within our web of beliefs. Where else could they come from? I have not made the claim that the presupposition of equality is immune to criticism, or that it can't be put into question.

The task, then, for those who would like to challenge my view here, would be to offer reasons for rejecting it as a value. One cannot just baldly say that equality is a product of power and conclude from that that we should reject it. The question would be, as it always is in philosophy, what are the reasons for this rejection, and are they good ones? At this moment, I can see many good reasons to accept the presupposition of equality, and so I have made my case on this basis. I have not tried to argue that it should be our sole political value, but that it should be a founding one. And I have argued that endorsing such a value maintains Foucault's recognition that even when we are subjectifying ourselves in Rancière's sense we are still subjectified in Foucault's sense. However, like all philosophical discussion, these claims are open to further reflection and debate.

Elsewhere I have argued that one can see the presupposition of equality operating in a variety of contexts, from the struggle of Algerian refugees in Montreal to the Zapatista movement in southern Mexico to an anarchist book collective in California to a local food co-op near my home town in rural South Carolina. It can be glimpsed in the immigrant movements in Europe and in the United States. Wherever those of us who are subject to intolerable exercises of power—as well as those in solidarity with them—rise up, not in the name of their superiority or their specialness, but simply in the name and through the example of their equality, the values Rancière has described are present. The future of politics, of a truly progressive politics, then, perhaps lie not so much in the election of less egregious politicians—although in the US that would already be an advance—but with the molding of our subjectivity into collective subjectification.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Questions of Geography, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Random House, 1988, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984, p. 343.

<sup>3</sup> Rancière, Jacques, *Disagreement*, tr. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 29–30.

<sup>4</sup> Rancière, Jacques, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, tr. Kristin Ross. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 29–30.

<sup>6</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> *On the Shores of Politics*, tr. Liz Heron. London: Verso, 1995, p. 48.