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First of all, let me say how honored I feel to receive such thoughtful and intellectually generous reviews. *The Democracy Project* was mostly written in the early months of 2012. At the time I had no idea where the whole project of OWS was ultimately going – none of us did – and what its long-term impact might be. Of course, in a way we still don't. But if I am right that one of the chief aims of revolutionary activity is to transform political common sense, then the very fact that conversations like this are going is already something of a victory; the questions being asked are at this stage more important than the (always provisional) answers we can provide; for this reason, the quality of the critical reflections here is if anything even more gratifying to me than the praise (however pleasant to read) because they raise such important questions in such a constructive way. Let me try to respond to one or two points from each in the spirit in which they were given.

Jonathan Dean

Let me first of all take up the question of optimism, pessimism, celebration, or critique. I must admit, I find it difficult to see the question of strategic optimism as something that makes a lot of sense to debate – precisely since, being largely questions of affect, we are talking about dispositions, life experience, fundamentally incommensurable questions of temperament, and perspective that are largely immune to argument, at least, of the sort one can make in an exchange like this. I often say it's impossible to convince a skeptic that direct democracy is possible by logical argument alone; one can only show them. But at least in that case there's something one can show. If one is speaking of the possibility of a genuinely free or just society, or the likelihood we can move toward such a society within our lifetimes, you don't even have that. Even that most rationalist of anarchists, Noam Chomsky, admits there's no way to prove that a just society is possible; he argues, compellingly, I think, just that given the impossibility of such knowledge, it is better to simply decide to proceed as if it were. That's essentially my take on the matter too, though I would personally go further, I feel if there's any possibility, there's an actual ethical imperative to try. But there are so many imponderables here, it would never even occur to me to think of that ethical imperative as applying to anyone else disposed to feel the weight of such matters differently.

As for the question of how much to emphasize the positive aspects of the OWS experiment, and how much to take on the very real tensions of sexism, white supremacy, class privilege, and internal hierarchy and forms of oppression… well, that's a very different question. All these things are very real and very important, and it's certainly true that I did not take them on particularly in this particular book. Early on, there was a widespread sense that OWS was the first 'post-identitarian' movement, that the issue of class power and formulation of the 1% and the 99% gave us a new language with which all those old

divisions became irrelevant. Obviously, this could never have been really true and none of the experienced activists involved in OWS, myself included, believed it was more than the product of an initial moment of euphoria. Still, it raises the question. Do you really want to mess such an initial moment up? Do you really want to step into the middle and say, for instance, 'um, it's lovely to see such a diverse crowd like this, with Black and white people, Palestinians and Jews, making common cause in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood but come on, how long do you think this is going to last?…' On the one hand, you shouldn't have to disguise what you think, and you do what you can to create structures that *can* address the problems you know will emerge, but you also don't want to destroy the thrill of an experience whose potential, at least, almost everyone involved will remember fondly for the rest of their lives (even if also mixed with justified rage at that promises' eventual betrayal.)

I'm not saying this because I think writing the book presents a precisely analogous problem – it doesn't – but to make the point that these are pragmatic questions. To take another example, in my ethnography of the Direct Action Network, I included a 30-page description of one mini-crisis over race, class, and gender, to illustrate how more general structural issues of privilege intersected and worked themselves out. I remember meeting an undergraduate at Yale who had read the book, an artist – if I remember – of half Korean half Irish ancestry, who told me 'I was so excited learning about these new forms of direct democracy, the idea of direct action, I really wanted to get involved… but then I read that section and I thought, "gee, if this is not the kind of group where someone like me would feel comfortable, I guess I'd better not" '. In fact, I had every reason to believe she was exactly the sort of person who would feel comfortable in DAN – and even more, the sort we could use a lot more of – and hastened to reassure her that was the case. This is no doubt

an extreme example. But it made me keenly aware that there is tension between denying or dismissing the importance of structural forms of oppression entirely and highlighting them in such a way that one ultimately ends up reinforcing them.

This was a constant problem during the days of the global justice movement. Anarchists, in particular, produced a vast literature of self-criticism on issues of racism and sexism in particular, but almost nothing about what they considered positive or appealing about their movement. I remember thinking, after sifting through the essays on one informational web page, that the message to a curious stranger seemed to come down to: 'we're racist, we're sexist, and we hate the Left! Join us!'

Then there's the fact that so many years of attention, so many critiques, so many self-analyses, so many essays and debates, and anti-oppression trainings seem to have had little, if any, overall effect of the problems they seek to address. It's hard to escape the impression that the problem is not that we don't talk about it enough, but that we are going about something wrong. Especially on matters of race, it often seems that what's really going on is a kind of moral game being played among the most privileged white activists – I think it must trace back to the heritage of puritanism – who end up competing to display their superior awareness of and condemnation of their own privilege, ultimately to score points against other privilege white activists, with the result that actual victims of oppression become further marginalized by being relegated to the role of oracles or props. On the few occasions, I had a chance to be on the other side of this (here in the UK, where, as someone of a working class background, I've occasionally been forced to listen to long protracted rounds of speeches by activists of middle-class origins reflecting on their class privilege), I realized just how infuriatingly self-indulgent these habits really are. (I occasionally felt like screaming 'I really don't care about how you feel about your class privilege! It's hard to think of a less interesting topic. What about

of philosophical reflection – and, for that matter ethnographic observation – to bear on 'those real, immediate questions that emerge from a transformative project' – a dialogue between abstract reflection and concrete practice in which the latter is the driving force. The phrase didn't really catch on at all. Probably it's not a very good one. But I have been trying to follow my own advice, and see what I'm doing is putting my intellectual resources at the services of those pursuing a project of human liberation I find makes some sort of deep, intuitive sense to me, without telling them what 'liberation' necessarily has to mean.

It's in this context it makes sense to me to emphasize the lack of structures of physical coercion. I did not do so because I believe that's all freedom comes down to. In fact, I have argued elsewhere (my Debt book again) that freedom is best conceived not as the absence of commitments to others, but the ability to make such commitments to begin with. (The word 'free', it is often noted, derives from the same word as 'friend'; the logic is that slaves cannot have friends, since they cannot make promises, or any other meaningful commitments to others.) But in a way this argument runs parallel to my argument about democracy as problem solving: that in a sense, the framers of US Constitution were right that such a vision of democracy is impossible in situations of vast inequality of wealth and property, but that this is a reason to eliminate inequalities, not to abandon any idea of popular democratic deliberation. I was describing conditions of possibility. Similarly with freedom. Freedom is that which can emerge in the absence of structures of systematic coercion – and, I should emphasize, I include forms of structural violence that hold hierarchies of gender, race, and sexuality in place as structures of systematic coercion as well. This is not to say freedom consists in that absence. But from a practical perspective, we have to start by creating spaces at least to some degree free of that violence before we can even begin the process of experiment that will allow us to discover in what the practice of freedom actually consists.

a form of science. If they can't even agree with each other over what the objects of their science even are, it's very hard to take such claims seriously. Anarchists, and anti-authoritarians more generally, are trying to develop a form of practice – a practice of freedom – which, while it's obviously theoretically informed and has theoretical implications, is not simply an attempt to enact some preconceived model of freedom.

In an earlier book (*Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*), I observed that historically, there's an interesting difference between schools of Marxism and schools of Anarchism. Different varieties of Marxism almost invariably claim authority from the writings of some Great Thinkers – there are Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyists, etc. – while anarchists almost never identify themselves as 'Bakuninites' or 'Malatestians'. Insofar as they form sects and denounce one another, which of course historically they have often done, they always do so in reference to some principles of organization or form of practice: they are individualists, anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, insurrectionists, and so on. My conclusion was that Marxism has largely been a theoretical discourse about revolutionary strategy ('are the peasants a revolutionary class?'), while anarchism has largely been an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice ('is it okay to break a window, or, if this were 1890, to assassinate the head of the Secret Police?'). I also observed that seeing a political movement largely as enacting theory, and therefore, almost inevitably it seems, being founded on the intellectual charisma of some purported Great Thinkers, has had almost uniformly pernicious political effects. Most of what I at least see as the really vital strains of Marxism, nowadays, have abandoned it (viz., Autonomism or Council Communism…). This does not, as I emphasized above, in any way mean denying the importance of theory. It means engaging in theoretical reflection on the role of theory itself. In that book, I proposed a distinction between high theory and what I proposed to call 'low theory', a way of bringing the fruits of centuries

thinking of someone *other* than yourself once in a while?') It's quite possible that, as a result, I've over-compensated: I try to avoid jumping on a soapbox and trying to prove in my public persona just how much more I care about structural forms of oppression than other activists, but instead, try to let them inform every aspect of my actual practice itself. But then there's the danger that people who just read the book will be encouraged to treat these issues as unimportant!

They're not. Nothing could be more important.

In the case of OWS, there's yet another dilemma. It was part of the explicit strategy of the government agencies and right-wing propaganda engines that coordinated the suppression of OWS to prove that if one creates spaces of freedom outside authority, it will always and necessarily lead to a Hobbesian scenario of chaos, violence, and filth. This is one reason why the NYPD, for instance, started busing released criminals directly to Zuccotti Park and encouraging them to stay for the free food and shelter. It's hard not to remember arch-rightwing propagandist Andrew Breitbart's last drunken outburst, when he saw a group of occupiers outside some right-wing convention and started repeatedly screaming 'Stop Raping People! Stop Raping People!' and to be aware these accusations were widely reported around America and taken as received wisdom, and as a way of validating the systematic police assaults (including, I might note, the systematic use of sexual assault by police) and not wish to point out that, actually, while the US has the highest rates of sexual assault in the world, *outside* the camps, it's not clear there's a single example of long-term occupier raping anyone. On the other hand, it's fair to ask: what kind of standard is this? 'Not nearly as bad as the worst in the world' isn't really much of a recommendation.

We live in a rape culture. American society teaches its young men in a thousand subtle and not-so-subtle ways that sexual assault is a legitimate expression of masculinity, just as it teaches its young women that the constant threat of sexual

violence is just a part of life they have to learn to accept. There is absolutely no possibility of creating a politics of human liberation unless every aspect of this culture is rooted out, because it's precisely this underlying violence, and threat of violence, on which all other forms of social inequality are ultimately built. How, then? I think at this point we at least know the wrong way. The ongoing collapse of the Socialist Workers' Party in the UK, after their refusal to take seriously an accusation of sexual assault by one of their high-ranking members, amidst insistence that it was crucial to preserve the revolutionary organization so that gender issues could, eventually, be addressed, is a case in point. Any organization that takes such a position deserves to dissolve into ignominy. When I quoted Rebecca Solnit, who emphasized the hypocrisy of the US media talking about sexual assault as an endemic problem in OWS camps when they ignored its much greater prevalence in every other aspect of US life, I certainly did not mean to make a similar move! So let me clarify: OWS, for all the fact that its principles and decision-making process derived from feminism at least as much as from anarchism, often didn't have a lot to be proud of in that regard. Still, if I didn't feel creating the kind of liberated spaces we were trying to create provided the best opportunity to battle the whole physical, psychological, and moral structure of that rape culture, and all the other forms of violence that are ultimately constructed on top of it – right now, and not in some abstract revolutionary future – I don't think there would have been much point in creating them in the first place.

Lasse Thomassen

The next review raises some questions of theory and practice. The main criticism is that I place such an emphasis on activist practice that I ignore the degree to which any practice is already informed by theoretical assumptions. No doubt there is some truth here. I probably did put the weight unduly on

and I would be the first to admit that this needs to be developed. But I see a bit of a tension here between the argument that one must not essentialize about what humans are basically about, and that one must not develop an essentially negative view of freedom. Since, after all, positive conceptions of freedom generally do turn on the assumption that there is an essential self, a nature, or some core which needs to be developed. One might argue that they need not necessarily do so. One can see them as developing something already immanent in the nature of social relations (or even, and I think this is more accurate, that since the self is just the sum of its relations, the distinction is meaningless). But of course, that is precisely what I am arguing – or thought I was!

Still, it does not pay to be glib. Here we enter difficult territory. Here let me turn to the final review.

Gemma Bone

Gemma Bone's review takes on more of the substance of the historical argument, and I'm very grateful for that. She also summarizes the essential logic of my position – and by extension, that of the majority of my fellow occupiers, who had come to basically the same conclusion – quite admirably. I think she also puts her finger on the most problematic area when she asks what sort of tacit definition of freedom all of this implies. I must be honest and say that this question does remain undertheorized in much of my work, and for that matter in a lot of anarchist writing generally. This might seem odd, since anarchism is, after all, the political philosophy that attaches more value to freedom than any other. I suppose I could say that this is a common phenomenon. Economists, for instance, have yet to come to any kind of consensus about what money is. But I can see why that might not seem too reassuring. After all, in economists, this is an obvious intellectual failing.

However, there is also an obvious difference between economists and anarchists. Economists claim to be practicing

peace, but that hatred, betrayal, lies, exploitation, and violence are not essential in the same way, it would be possible to bring humans into being without them. Ironically, this is precisely why it's often argued these latter *are* somehow rooted in 'human nature' – because they certainly seem unnecessary and counterproductive, yet always they seem to crop up, at least to some degree, anywhere.

Obviously, I'm not making that sort of argument either. I have little interest in arguments about hard-wired impulses of one sort or another. (No doubt we have them, but I think all evidence suggests we have innumerable contradictory ones pulling us in every possible direction in any instance, and therefore, the overall effect is not that different from what it would be if we had none.) As an anthropologist, I'm more keenly aware than anyone that most common generalizations about human society tend to be false, an idealized projection of certain aspects of the self-understanding of recent dominant North Atlantic societies onto to the rest of humanity. Yet as an anthropologist I can also observe that there are *some* aspects of human social life, *some* principles, which really do recur everywhere. Some of these have egalitarian implications. Others don't. It seems to me any project of social transformation, if it is to have any chance of success, can't operate according to some fantasy of wiping the slate clean and creating entirely new sorts of humans being, but has to build on what's already there, expanding on certain existing habits and sensibilities, trying to contain and marginalize others. To proceed otherwise would be disastrous. The habit of immediately condemning any generalization about human social life as an inadmissible appeal to 'human nature' has historically been associated with exactly this kind of politics of absolute rupture that, when applied in revolutionary contexts, has never led to anything but disastrous results.

Perhaps I have gone on too long about a relatively minor point. The question about freedom is the really important one,

one side. I suspect here I am in part reacting to what I feel is a certain arrogance that people trained as radical theorists – such as myself – so often feel when they first try their hand at radical action of some kind, and simply assume they know what needs to be done, and how to go about it, better than the activists who have been doing this sort of thing for years. It's often a humbling experience. It certainly was for me.

The reviewer fixes on a line from an effusive line from the acknowledgments: to 'everyone in the movement, who taught me everything I know'. Admittedly, on a literal level, this is pretty obviously untrue. But it's so obviously untrue I assumed the reader would understand it was not meant to be interpreted literally! Such statements always contain unspoken qualifications, bracketed qualifiers if one likes – in this case, the real meaning was something more like 'to everyone in the [*ongoing*] movement [*over the last 13 years since I first became involved*], who taught me everything [*that really matters that*] I know [*about the actual practice of direct action and direct democracy*]'.

Now, admittedly, that's a lot of implicit text. But as the reviewer notes, it was an acknowledgment! You're supposed to be effusive.

There's a lot of things one could say about the relation of theory and practice more generally, and some I will be turning to in the next section, but here let me confine myself to the specific point. The odd thing is, when it comes to social movements, I really didn't show up with a lot of theoretical baggage. I had read virtually nothing of social movement literature when I got involved in the Direct Action Network in 2000, and to be honest, I still haven't read much. So it's simply not true that I had already formed my core opinions about direct action and the like before I started doing it; rather, any ideas I did have on the topic I quickly realized were based on fundamental conceptions, were useless and were wrong-headed, and part of the whole apparatus of intellectual common sense

I came to realize had to be completely rethought. For instance, I had actually encountered plenty of examples of consensus decision-making process in my own ethnographic fieldwork in Madagascar. But I had never written much about it, despite its obvious political significance, because nothing in my theoretical or ethnographic training had taught me to attach any particular importance to decision-making processes or given me the intellectual tools with which to say anything interesting about it. It was only when I got involved in DAN a decade later, and became part of a political group that was self-consciously trying to operate according to such principles – and where participants, therefore, spent a great deal of time and energy thinking about consensus process, its advantages, and difficulties – that I was able to reflect back on many things I'd witnessed in Madagascar, and understand what was actually going on. This was because in Madagascar, what we called 'consensus process' was simply common sense, it was the way everyone had been going about making collective decisions for their entire lives, and assumed everyone always had; whereas we were trying to create a new democratic culture from scratch and had to consciously reflect on every aspect.

The second question raised by the reviewer concerns 'the issue of human essence, or human nature', and asks whether I am basing my arguments about (for instance) 'baseline communism', or everyday anarchism, on such assumptions, and whether it is wise to do so. This is, obviously, a legitimate concern. Though I must say I've always found strange tensions in the way such matters tend to be discussed. To use the phrase 'human nature' in a political context, or to suggest someone is making assumptions about human nature, is almost to accuse them of doing something bad, naïve, even reactionary by definition. But, obviously if we can talk about 'humans' as a category, we are assuming that all beings that fall into that category do have common qualities of some kind, that is, something which a critic could then describe as an 'essence' (and 'essence' just

means 'that which makes something what it is'), or 'nature'. Similarly, you cannot oppose racism, sexism, or other forms of inequality, and instead call for equal justice and dignity for all human beings, if 'human' is an empty category. (I know this will rankle some anti-species-ists (sp?) but it's true: no one is really arguing we should treat, say, a fish *exactly* the same as a human being, and it would be impossible to do so without radically reducing our standards for how we treat people.)

The reason the specific word 'nature' raises hackles is not because anyone really believes humanity to be such an empty category, but rather, because historically, the term has so often invoked to tell a certain kind of just-so story. Once upon a time, the story goes, we all lived in a natural state of peace, equality, and cooperation. But then somehow a serpent entered the garden and ruined it. The serpent takes various forms, but the implication is that liberation just means a rediscovery of our true selves, buried somewhere below. Obviously, this is a fairy tale. For one thing, it's logically incoherent. Both cooperation and competition, egoism and altruism, and the rest, only exist in relation to each other.

I have always made it clear that such arguments are naïve and dangerous. (In fact, I am engaged in a research project right now that argues, among other things, that while hunter/ gatherers are often quite hierarchical, early cities were often quite egalitarian.) Still, what one *can* say is that some of these principles are inherent to the very process of the mutual creation and sustenance of human beings that we have come to call 'society', a process that has to take place in order for humans to exist at all, and others are not. No one can deny that our existence is made possible by endless acts of cooperation. This is not true in some places and not others. It's true everywhere, and we have every reason to believe it necessarily always must be true of human beings. It is not at all clear that anyone owes their existence to competition. In the same way, our lives are made possible by endless acts of love, trust, honesty, nurturance, or