

# The moral split

Alfredo M. Bonanno

It is not enough for an action simply to be considered 'right' in order for it to be carried out. Other elements, such as the underlying moral judgement, are involved, which have nothing to do with the validity of the action. This becomes obvious when you see the difficulty many comrades have in carrying out actions that in themselves are in no way exceptional.

A moral obstacle appears, leading to a real ethical 'split' with unpredictable consequences. For example, we have been pointing out the uselessness of huge peaceful demonstrations for some time now. Instead we propose mass demonstrations that are organised insurrectionally, supported by small actions against the capitalist structures that are responsible for the present situation of exploitation and genocide all over the world.

We think it could be useful to reflect for a moment on the different attitudes that exist concerning such actions, beyond any question of method or political choice

No matter how much we go into things theoretically, spooks remain inside all of us. One of these is other people's property. Others are people's lives, God, good manners, sex, tolerating other people's opinions, etc. Sticking to the subject: we are all against private property, but as soon as we reach out to attack it an alarm bell rings inside us. Centuries of moral conditioning set in motion without our realising it, with two results. On the one hand there is the thrill of the forbidden—which leads many comrades to carry out senseless little thefts that often go beyond immediate and unavoidable needs—and on the other the unease of behaving 'immorally'. Putting the 'thrill' aside, which I am not interested in and which I willingly leave to those who like to amuse themselves with such things, I want to take a look at the 'unease'.

The fact is, we have all been reduced to the animal state of the herd. The morals we share (all of us, without exception) are 'altruistic'. That is, we are respectable egalitarian and levelling. The territories of this morality have yet to be explored. How many comrades who superbly declare they have visited them would recoil at the sight of their own sister's breast? Certainly not a few.

And even when we justify our attack on private property to ourselves—and to the tribunal of history—by maintaining that it is right that the expropriators be expropriated, we are still prisoners of a kind of slavery—moral slavery to be exact. We are confirming the eternal validity of the bosses of the past, leaving the future to judge whether those into whose hands we have consigned what has been taken from us personally be considered expropriators or not.

So, from one justification to another, we end up building a church, almost without realising it. I say 'almost' because basically we are aware of it but it scares us.

To take property from others has a social significance. It constitutes rebellion and, precisely because of this, property owners must be part of the property-owning class, not simply people who possess something. We are not aesthetes of nihilist action who see no difference between taking from the former and pinching money from the beggar's plate.

The act of expropriation means something precisely in its present class context, not because of the 'incorrect' way that those we intend to expropriate have acted in the past. If that were our only point of reference then the capitalist who pays union wages and 'looks after' his workers, sells at reasonable prices, etc., would be excluded from the legitimacy of expropriation. Why should we concern ourselves with such questions?

The same thing happens when we talk about 'destructive' actions. Many comrades know no peace. Why these actions? What is gained by them? What is the point of them? They are of no benefit to us and only damage others.

For the sake of argument, by attacking a firm that supplies arms to South Africa or which finances the racist regime in Israel, one that projects nuclear power stations or makes electronic devices with which to 'improve' traditional weapons, the accent is put not so much on the latter's specific responsibility, as on the fact that they belong to the class of exploiters. Specific responsibility only concerns the strategic and political choice. The sole element for reaching the ethical decision is the class one. Realising this enables us to reach a certain clarity on the matter. The moral foundation for any action is the difference between classes, the belonging to one of the two components of society that are irreducibly opposed and whose only solution is the destruction of one or the other.

Political and strategic foundations, on the other hand, require a series of considerations that can be quite contradictory. All the objections listed above concern this latter aspect and have nothing to do with the underlying moral justification.

But, without our realising it, it is in the field of moral decision that many of us come up against obstacles. The basically peaceful (or almost peaceful) marches, no matter how demonstrative of our intentions 'against', were quite different. Even the violent clashes with the police were quite different. There was an intermediate reality between ourselves and the 'enemy', something that protected our moral alibi. We felt sure we were in the 'right' even when we adopted positions (still in the area of democratic dissent) that were not shared by the majority of the demonstrators. Even when we smashed a few windows things remained in such a way that this could be accommodated.

Things are different when we act alone or with other comrades who could never give us a psychological 'cover' such as that which we so easily get from within the 'mass'. It is now individuals who decide to attack the institution. We have no mediators. We have no alibi. We have no excuse. We either attack or retreat. We either accept the class logic of the clash as an irreducible counterposition or move backwards towards negotiation and verbal and moral deception.

If we reach out and attack property—or something else, but always in the hands of the class enemy—we must accept full responsibility for our deed, without seeking justification in the presumed collective level of the situation. We cannot put off moral judgement concerning the need to attack and strike the enemy until we have consulted those who, all together, determine the 'collective situation'. I shall explain better. I am not against the work of mass counter-information or the intermediate struggles that are also necessary in a situation of exploitation and misery. What I am against is the symbolic (exclusively symbolic) course that these struggles take. They should be aimed at obtaining results, even limited ones, but results that are immediate and tangi-

ble, always with the premise that the insurrectional method—the refusal to delegate the struggle, autonomy, permanent conflictuality and self-managed base structures—be used.

What I do not agree with is that one should stop there, or even before that point as some would have it, at the level of simple counterinformation and denunciation, moreover decided by the deadlines provided by repression.

It is possible, no, necessary, to do something else, and that something needs to be done now in the present phase of violent, accelerated restructuring. It seems to me that this can be done by a direct attack on small objectives that indicate the class enemy, objectives that are quite visible in the social territory, or if they are not, the work of counterinformation can make them so with very little effort.

I do not think any anarchist comrade can be against this practice, at least in principle. There could be (and are) those who say they are against such a practice due to the fact that they see no constructive mass perspective in the present political and social situation, and I can understand this. But these actions should not be condemned on principle. The fact is that those who take a distance from them are far fewer than those who support them but do not put them into practice. How is that? I think that this can be explained precisely by this ‘moral split’, which a going over the threshold of the ‘rights’ of others causes in comrades like myself and so many others, educated to say ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ for the slightest thing.

We often talk about liberating our instincts, and—to tell the truth without having any very clear ideas on the subject—we also talk about ‘living our lives’ (complex question that merits being gone into elsewhere). We talk of refusing the ideals transmitted from the bourgeoisie in their moment of victory, or at least the bogus way in which such ideals have been imposed upon us through current morals. Basically what we are talking about is the real satisfaction of our needs, which are not just the so-called primary ones of physical survival. Well. I believe words are not enough for such a beautiful project. When it stayed firmly within the old concept of class struggle based on the desire to ‘reappropriate’ what had unjustly been taken from us (the product of our labour), we were able to ‘talk’ (even if we didn’t get very far) of needs, equality, communism and even anarchy. Today, now that this phase of simple reappropriation has been changed by capital itself, we cannot have recourse to the same words and concepts. The time for words is slowly coming to an end. And we realise with each day that passes that we are tragically behind, closed within a ghetto arguing about things that are no longer of any real revolutionary interest, as people are rapidly moving towards other meanings and perspectives as Power slyly and effectively urges them on. The great work of freeing the new man from morals, this great weight built in the laboratories of capital and smuggled into the ranks of the exploited, has practically never begun.

# ATabula ARasa

Alfredo M. Bonanno  
The moral split

Original title: La frattura morale, "ProvocAzione" no. 12, March 1988, p.7

[tabularasa.anarhija.net](http://tabularasa.anarhija.net)