

Comments on Djia's Minimal-Freedom Argument for the Right of Secession

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Description

In March 2021, my article entitled "The Justification of Secession: An Argument from G. H. Von Wright's Philosophy of Action" was published in the Global Journal of Research in Engineering [1]. I wrote the article in the context of secession wars going on the world, including in my country, Cameroon. Though the article is a continuation of my studies in G. H. von Wright's philosophy of action, there is a clear break with my previous more theoretical article that appeared in Filosofiska Notiser in 2020, "Von Wright and Wittgenstein on Ethics and Logic: Deontic Logic Against Ethical Mysticism" [2].

Globally, my article in the Global Journals is in line with my continuous efforts in connecting philosophers to current issues. In 2018, I collaborated in an article on multiculturalism, in 2020, on another one on environmental crisis and in 2021 I wrote this paper on secession which appeared shortly before my contribution on COVID-19 [3-5]. It is clear, as I suggest through these many topics, that the philosopher cannot avoid talking about public affairs.

The observation that the philosopher must fully be involved in public affairs may seem trivial but in reality it is not. When I was offered the opportunity to write a comment on my own paper, I found it biased to do a self-evaluation. I then decided to ask one of my colleagues to write his comments about the article. But from one colleague to another, the answer was almost the same: "The hierarchy will not be happy with me talking about secession when a secession war is going on in our country." This is sad because intellectuals should in the first place be concerned, as I said earlier, with the public affairs going on in their country and around the world.

My intention in the paper was to shift from the legal or moral aspects of the justification of secession to a justification derived solely from philosophy of action. I said, and I still believe it is the case, that this shift is necessary if one is to avoid the "secession dilemma". I did not give any formal setting of the dilemma in the paper but I think it can be formulated as follows:

If the State grants the right to secede, then it fails as a State in maintaining its territorial integrity and if a group decides to secede, then its action cannot be legal (given that territorial integrity is a central mission to any State).

But either the State grants the right to secede or a group decides to secede.

Therefore, either the State fails in maintaining its territorial integrity or secession is illegal.

As one can notice, the conclusion of the dilemma gives rise to what I called in the paper the logical problem of conflicting wills. On one side, the will of the governants is to maintain the state's territorial integrity and for this, they cannot grant the right to secession. On the other side, the will of the group that decides to secede is to have their autonomy though they know it is "illegal", an illegality which they do not admit.

The legal approach to the secession problem does not solve the dilemma because it must first acknowledge the illegality of secession. The moral approach seems not to be better because secession is always characterized by much moral polarization without any shared evaluative ground. My paper sought to propose a third option.

I tried to demonstrate, in line with G. H. von Wright's philosophy of action, that given that human beings are free, they are also free to leave a political association such as the State. The main challenge in that argument was to prove that human beings are free. According to Von Wright, freedom should be understood as the capacity to bring some change in the world. And this change should be understood as simply being able to move from one state of affairs to another, like say opening a window which is closed [1].

This minimal conception of freedom is very compatible with determinism no matter the form it takes. Indeed determinism might be important at a macrolevel of the society or the world, but never at the microlevel of the individual. This amounts to saying that "determinants of action which include the permission and the right to perform a certain act are axiologically less important than the agent's aptitude to act" [1]. Freedom is so necessary that people are ready to die for it. This is why I ended my paper with the remark that:

Secession indicates that people have lost hope in the future, that they think it is their duty to find a better place where they will bring that hope back. This is the sign that secession is painful for those who want to secede [6]. They are ready to take the risks of losing so many lives without any guarantee of success only because the despair is already greater than the benefits of staying together [1].

Conclusion

Nevertheless, there is a regret which I would like to share with the reader. When writing the article in 2020, I did not come across a wonderful book by Anna Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford University Press, 2019). I was informed of its publication only after reading an interview with her by Sergi Morales-Gálvez in Las Torres de Lucca. Her basic assumption is that self-determination is a cornerstone of any claim to sovereignty by the state. As she puts it, to have a right to rule a population and its territory, a state must represent its subjects' shared political will, that is a widely held intention to associate politically and to support common political institutions. I find this view very close to mine because it does not take the legal nor the moral approaches that so often misrepresent the secession problem and also because it brings back secession to its primitive element: the territory.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of Interest

None

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