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The Justification of Secession: An Argument from G. H. Von Wright's Philosophy of Action

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I. INTRODUCTION

Secession is one of the major issues in contemporary politics. Recent and current cases illustrate this: Catalonia in Spain, Kashmir in India, Hong Kong in China, Scotland in the United Kingdoms, Kurdistan in Iraq, Abkhazia in Georgia, Ambazonia in Cameroon and Tigray in Ethiopia, etc. Ashan Butt observed three years ago that in the last seven decades, there have been about twice as many nationalist civil wars (ninety-five) as interstate wars of any kind (forty-six), leading to the conclusion that such wars, often called secession wars, are the "chief source of violence in the world today." (Butt, 2017, pp. 2-3) This does not mean that secession is always synonymous to war, as we can see for instance from the recent cases of Quebec, Catalonia or Scotland. But even when there is no war, the intensity of violence and disagreement shows that breaking up is hard. A detailed analysis of secession must be multidimensional, and it is almost certain that this cannot be done in a paper. Three major approaches have been developed: the conflict-oriented approach, the right-oriented approach and the dynamic-oriented approach. Under the first approach, "One cares about how the interplay between internal actors and external actors would affect conflict settlement" (Lu, 2018, p. 6). With the second, the main question is about the right of the group that decides to secede to do so (Busquets, 2020; Kohen, 2006). Lastly, the dynamic-

oriented approach aims at understanding the phenomenon of secession proper, through the question: why do people desire to secede? (Bartkus, 2004; Casertano, 2013) In this paper I am not concerned with the first approach. I am mainly interested with the second approach, and incidentally with the third one. More precisely, I am analyzing the question here from a logical point of view, that is from the angle of arguments for secession. In this line, secession is an interesting object of analysis for the logician since it represents an extreme case of disagreement among people, entailing a necessary "conflict of commanding wills" to use von Wright's terminology. (von Wright, 1963, p. 203) Butt defines secession as a demand by an ethno-nationalist group for either independence from, or significant regional autonomy *within*, a modern nation-state (Butt, 2017, p. 3). This definition is reductive as it does not capture recent movement many of whom are multi-ethnic. By secession, I will mean, broadly, the act of withdrawing from membership of a political union, irrespective of the *homogeneity* of the group that decides to initiate the action. My choice of using G. H. von Wright with relation to arguments for secession is motivated by the fact that his position also sheds some light on the roots of secession, which means that if his view is well articulated, it might help to understand the phenomenon of secession more generally and perhaps to see how it can be prevented. I will begin by highlighting the unresolved question of the right-oriented approach which motivates a new answer to the question. And then, I will try to construct von Wright's answer to that question. Lastly, I will show, through some concluding remarks, how von Wright's view can be used to prevent secession.

II. THE JUSTIFICATION OF SECESSION: AN UNRESOLVED QUESTION

Much of the debate about secession focuses on issues of right, both philosophical and legal. As the title of a recent book, *Morality and Legality of Secession* (Busquets, 2020) rightly summarizes the debate, secession is mostly seen under the angle of its evaluation from a moral and a legal point of view. Unfortunately, this right is never guaranteed at the national level. As Riegl and Dobos (Riegl & Dobos, 2017) have indicated, the right to secede is not recognized under context others than colonization.

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Recent secession movements are not to be classified under the colonial category as they are internal conflicts, what Philip Roeder calls national secession (Roeder, 2018).

From a moral point of view, it has been claimed that secession should be based on the principle that each people has the right to self-determination. In turn the right to self-determination is guaranteed by legal texts under international law. There is then a circular justification of the right to secede. If morality is to be guaranteed by the law, it is by no way natural, that is why it becomes an argumentative issue. The problem, however, is that in matter of arguments, international laws generally conflict with internal laws. Most often, the right to secede is not internally recognized. This is what we may call the dilemma of secession. The dilemma runs thus: arguments for or against secession seem to necessitate a choice between two norms, the norm that there should be a territorial integrity for the State to be sustained and the norm that people should freely choose and control their destiny. In other words, the territorial integrity principle can only be maintained through a certain control by the central government on the lives of the communities and the citizens, that is, with the rejection of their right to self-determination.

However, as no state will ever grant autonomy without any violence, issues of right becomes useless to understand the roots of secession. As Ahsan I. Butt (Butt, 2017) lucidly puts it, the level of violence of the central state in responding secession initiatives is proportionate to the consequences, in terms of the stability of the state, of the secession act. And this violence is often conducted with clear violations of international laws. This shows enough that the legality which is supposed to guarantee the morality of secession is flawed and makes the question of the justification of secession unresolved.

Some authors have seen it right that the problem may be resolved by simply shifting the attention from issues of justification. In a book that announces this shift (Closa Carlos et al. (Eds), 2019) from *moral* to *amoral* considerations about secession, Carlos Closa says: "We use amorality in order to escape the terrain of the justification of secession." (*Ibid.*, p. 1) It is then surprising to see the following assertion, just on the next page: "Despite the different approaches taken by the contributors, the connecting thread linking the chapters of the book lies in the critical distinction between the 'democratic theory of secession' and the 'theory of democratic secession'" (*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2). This is quite surprising because the definitions of "democratic theory of secession" and "theory of democratic secession" seem to indicate that the issue of justification has not been evacuated. Here are the definitions:

The democratic theory of secession argues the existence of a fundamental value which ultimately

justifies secessionist claims, in a sort of "teleological justification" (...) while the theory of democratic secession legitimates relying on procedures, that is the instruments used to achieve secession (*Ibid.*, p. 2. My emphasis.)

Now I wonder whether these two theories escape the original problem. I think they do not. Therefore, our authors are very prompt, after announcing that they are trying to escape the justification approach, to tackle the problem of secession from the point of view of political philosophy and from the point of view legal theory.

Let's follow them on these points

We will begin with the legal theory, just to recall a point we mentioned earlier. This is the contradiction between international law and internal law. The question here is: if there are international laws that guarantee people's right to self-determination, why does secession always go with violence?

My answer is that while the international law guarantees secession from a country formerly under the rule of a colonial power, it does not guarantee anything when it comes to secession that does not imply any foreign country. If colonies were free to break from the colonial master, it seems that communities are not allowed to break from the central government. This is the principle of the integrity of the state. Of course, we should make the difference here between natural and artificial or political freedom.

Debates on secession, at a political level, do not make clear the type of freedom they talk about. Some contract theorists think that individuals give up their natural freedom to gain an artificial freedom in the contract. However, as Rousseau pointed at the opening of his *On the Social Contract*, "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains." (Rousseau, 2003, I, 1). This shows that the artificial freedom here is not freedom at all (at least, in the mind of a contractualist like Rousseau). I suspect that political communities have later confused between this artificial slavery and natural slavery. That is why they resist whenever some members of the community want to leave.

From observation, modern political communities tend to rely on the naturalness of the State, both historically and geographically. But at the same time, they seem not to be ready to totally endorse this position since they will rely on the national constitution, which very often defends the principle of territorial integrity, to override people's right to leave. It may sound contradictory, but it is not. The artificiality of the state obtained as the result of a social contract quickly changes to become natural. One will not doubt this if he observes for instance the treatment that was given to those who threatened the sacred character of the society.

Indeed, it seems to be a common fact among contractualists to accept death penalty when the society's harmony is threatened. Consider the following examples.

Though Locke admits the right to revolution (Locke, 1980, § 224), he linked the death penalty to natural law:

In the state of nature, has a power to kill a murderer, both to deter others from doing the like injury, which no reparation can compensate, by the example of the punishment that attends it from everybody, and also to secure men from the attempts of a criminal, who having renounced reason, the common rule and measure God hath given to mankind, hath, by the unjust violence and slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared war against all mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a lion or a tyger, one of those wild savage beasts, with whom men can have no society nor security. (*Ibid.*, § 11)

As this suggests, the political society that is born of the social contract inherits this natural right of self-defense and can make use of it by eliminating a criminal for the common good.

Montesquieu, following Locke, also places capital punishment in the perspective of natural law. Attaching the principle of retaliation to the "relations of equity prior to positive law", he concludes: "They are a kind of retaliation, by which the *society* refuses security to a member who has actually or intentionally deprived another of his security. These punishments are derived from the nature of the thing, founded on reason, and drawn from the very source of good and evil." (Montesquieu, 1777, XII, 4).

Rousseau, too, does not question capital punishment. In *On the Social Contract*, he considered it to be justified by a clause implicit in the founding pact (or "treaty"), a clause which he formulated as follows:

Again, every malefactor, by attacking social rights, becomes on forfeit a rebel and a traitor to his country; by violating its laws, he ceases to be a member of it; he even makes war upon it. In such a case, the preservation of the State is inconsistent with his own, and one or the other must perish; in putting the guilty to death, we slay not so much the citizen as an enemy. (Rousseau, 2003, II, 5)

I don't know if these elements are convincing enough to justify the rejection of the right to secede, but I suspect that they have deeply contributed to the focus on the right aspects of secession analysis. However, as I said earlier, we should not much rely on law when talking about secession. Internally, the right to secede is never guaranteed, externally, secession wars hardly motivate external interventions. Roeder gives some interesting data to support our view here. Between 1945 and 2010, there has been 171 national secessions

around the world, with only 26 successful. More important, out of the 26, only 7 have motivated external intervention namely Bangladesh, Bosnia, Eritrea, Kosovo, Montenegro, South Sudan, and Timor Leste (Roeder, 2018, p. 30)

Given that the question of justification (both legal and moral) has not been given a definite answer, should we conclude that there is no convincing answer to the question? G. H. von Wright's philosophy of action seems to offer an acceptable solution to the problem. I shall now turn to examining his view.

III. VON WRIGHT ON THE RIGHT OF SECESSION

There are at least three reasons why one may be surprised to see G. H. von Wright's philosophy applied to the question of secession: 1) to my knowledge, the term "secession" does not appear in any of his writings; 2) by his insistence on the norms as being legal (the obligatory, the permitted and the forbidden), he seems to give a preference to legal normalcy, which rejects secession as we said earlier; 3) von Wright puts much emphasis on the individual action, and since a person alone cannot decide to secede, it is difficult to see how any analysis of the individual action may help to understand a collective action like secession.

However, against 1), the expression "self-determination" appears at different places in his writings (von Wright, 1998, pp. 6, 12-14, 31). Against 2), we could say that "there is a sense in which the human individual can 'break' the rule of custom and in which the course of nature cannot 'break' its (causal or statistical) laws." (von Wright, 1963, p. 8) And this should be coupled with another assertion found in the article "Laws of Nature": "Knowledge of laws of nature should not count as genuine 'knowledge of the future'" (von Wright, 1984, p. 145) which shows that even the regularities in the natural laws are not immune to future refutations; they are, von Wright would say, "open" (*Ibid.*, p. 146). Against 3), it suffices to indicate that collective actions are reducible to the action of individuals (von Wright, 1963, p. 77).

This means that though G. H. von Wright has never expressed any argument for or against secession, some points of his philosophy may be put together to analyze the issue of justification of secession.

a) *The primacy of the individual*

In *Practical Reason* (von Wright, 1983), von Wright sets himself the task of elaborating a theory of practical inference by developing the practical syllogism already put forward in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book Seven) through the concept of "deliberate choice" and by sorting out the invariants of all human action. In fact, the two projects are carried out simultaneously in the book since it is the development of the practical

syllogism that allows it to bring out the invariants of all human action.

A deliberate choice, he says, involves three elements: an end to be achieved (x), an action to perform in order to achieve that end (y), and finally the establishment of the necessity of the action to be carried out. The scheme of a practical inference is therefore as follows:

x is an end to be achieved
x cannot be achieved unless y is accomplished.
So, y must be accomplished (Ibid., p. 2)

For example:

A person wishes to make a house habitable
But the house cannot be made habitable if electricity is not installed. So, we must install electricity in the house.

There are some difficulties to be noted at this level.

- The first is that of the difference in nature between the premises and the conclusion, the premises being descriptive and the conclusion imperative. There are doubts about the validity of a first-person inference, at least as formulated above.
- Another difficulty is the determination of the unavailability of another action to be accomplished to achieve the desired end. If there is indeed more than one way to achieve this end, there can no longer be any need to perform the indicated action, but another action could just as easily be performed in order to achieve the same result.
- A third difficulty is related to the passage from the necessity of the action to its performance. Even if one derives an imperative conclusion from descriptive premises indeed, it does not follow that the action thus indicated in the conclusion will be accomplished.

Let's start with the last difficulty. This difficulty may only be for third person practical syllogisms. For the first person, it is obvious that if I identify an action as the means by which I must achieve an end that I desire to achieve, I will necessarily accomplish the action, unless I am prevented from doing so by a force above my own. Given that all action is always the action of an individual, even in the case of collective actions. It follows, then, that practical inferences are first-person inferences and their conclusions are actions. This elimination of practical inference in the third person allows von Wright to formulate, after Kant, the first principle of practical inference: *whoever wants to achieve an end must also want to use the means necessary to achieve that end (Ibid., p. 9).*

In this line, von Wright highlights a few determinants of human action and notes that the most important is the agent's aptitude to perform an act. The aptitude determines the action negatively, by placing restrictions on it (*Ibid.*, p. 48). An action may be intentional and conform to social norms, but it is only

made possible by the agent's ability to perform it. Von Wright adds to this third invariant a fourth one, the opportunity, which he presents, however, as an occasional determinant. Opportunity determines concrete action by being states already present or absent. Suppose, for example, that my intention is to open a window and that this window is already open.

The opportunity to open an already open window disappears and the action then becomes impossible.

The most important factor in determining the action is the ability or inability of the person acting to perform it (von Wright, 1998, p.3). And the modalities of capacity or incapacity are learning, difficulty, means, permission, right, aversion, opportunity, time and obstacles. I may be unable to do a thing either because I haven't learned it, because it presents an internal difficulty, because I don't have the means to do it, because I don't have permission, because I dislike it, because the opportunity to do it doesn't present itself, because I don't have the time, or because obstacles stand in my way (*Id.*). A distinction must be made between those modalities that apply to generic actions, i.e. actions that I cannot take in general because I have not learned to do them, and those that apply to individual actions because I do not have the means to take the action in question or because obstacles stand in my way. We can call the first generic modalities and the second individual or restrictive modalities. This distinction is important because it shows that one can be called upon to take an action that one can take generically, but that one cannot take individually. Also, individual modalities take precedence over generic modalities (the main one being the learning modality) because they ultimately determine the reasons why an agent has or has not acted.

b) *A Minimal Conception of Change*

Von Wright identifies three types of facts: states of affairs, processes and events (von Wright, 1963, p. 26). He excludes the last two types of facts from the logic of change because, for them to be otherwise, we would have to consider a time and space other than those in which they take place or have taken place, and that, in lending ourselves to such a game, the result will not be different in any case. But even if he rejects them, he nevertheless thinks that they can be taken as moments of a special kind of description of states of affairs. Consider a simple gesture such as opening a window. This opening can be described as a transition or process of change that took place between two business states, an initial state (or event) in which the window was closed and a final state in which the window is open. Demonstrating the interdependence between these three types of events will allow von Wright to introduce an important symbol of the logic of change, the symbol of transformation/transition or T.

The use of T is done by inserting it between two states of affairs, each representing a generic proposition, the initial and the final, and to show the passage from one state to another. Suppose for example that f means the window is closed and $\sim f$ the window is open (or not closed). We can then symbolize the opening of the window by $fT\sim f$ (the transition of the states from the closed window to the unclosed window) or the closing of the window by $\sim fTf$. Likewise, "the window has remained open" may be represented by $\sim fT\sim f$ and "the window has remained closed" by fTf . The four symbols we have just presented, $fT\sim f$, $\sim fTf$, $\sim fT\sim f$ and fTf , represent the four elementary and exhaustive transformations of the logic of change. Von Wright gives the reason for this in these terms:

On a given occasion the world either has the feature described by p or it lacks it; if it has this feature it will on the next occasion either have retained or lost it; if again it lacks this feature it will on the next occasion either have acquired it or still lack it. (*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30)

What is important to remember about the logic of change is that, by going beyond static logic, it puts forward the concept of freedom. This leads us to another central point of von Wright's philosophy, that of the Necessity of Freedom.

c) *The Necessity of Freedom*

Von Wright defends a compatibilist theory of freedom since he defends that human freedom is compatible with determinism. Here is a passage that nicely summarizes the position:

I have already argued that whereas one can be by physical obstacles prevented from doing various things – as, for example, a chained prisoner from escaping – and thus compelled to forbearance, one cannot rightly be said to be physically compelled to do anything, and therefore one cannot be physically prevented from forbearing anything either. This is a noteworthy asymmetry inherent in the concept of free action. (von Wright, 1998, p. 6)

Rosaria Egidi said that this version of compatibilism is "very special" because it is the result of a dynamic vision in which man is "an agent who is at once the subject and the object of the natural forces he controls and by which he is controlled" (Egidi, 2016, p. 124). The particularity of von Wright's compatibilism is that it claims, as Egidi has indicated, that "man without nature could not be free" (*Ibid.*, p. 125).

To understand this special version of compatibilism, it is from 1971 onwards that this question must be explored in von Wright's writing. That year was marked by the publication of *Explanation and Understanding* (von Wright, 1971), which was completed three years later by *Causality and Determinism* (von Wright, 1974). Both works aim to promote the same

thesis, according to which one cannot speak of a universal determinism on the scale of human action.

The first book is mainly a conceptual clarification whose aim is to show the difference between the natural sciences and the humanities, in order to avoid the confusion often made between explaining a phenomenon and understanding it. It is often accepted that understanding a phenomenon means being able to explain it, just as explaining a phenomenon means having understood it. For von Wright, however, these two verbs mark an epistemological difference with immense implications. The natural sciences, he says, are based on the principle of explanation, while the humanities are based on the principle of understanding. The fundamental difference that leads to this distinction is the fact that the social sciences and humanities study a being endowed with an intention, a being that carries meaning and therefore acts according to the goal it has set for itself. The teleology of human action is therefore what gives it a fundamentally different trait from other actions that one can have in the world.

One can understand von Wright's position by going back to the conceptual clarification he makes in Chapter III, which leads to the assertion that the human sciences do not provide causal explanations (von Wright, 1971, p. 153). To understand this proposition, one must distinguish between a number of concepts, causal explanation, teleological explanation, quasi-causal explanation and quasi-teleological explanation. And when defining these concepts, one must keep in mind that they are situated within the framework of von Wright's temporal logic. Causal explanations refer to the past and try to retrace the circumstances preceding the occurrence of a state of affairs and on which this occurrence could depend. There is a causal relationship between the antecedent and the following one. Teleological explanations exhibit the same connection between two states of affairs except that they refer to the future, for which an action was taken by an agent, his intention. Some causal explanations are given in the form of teleological explanations, which are then quasi-teleological explanations. Other teleological explanations, on the other hand, are formulated in the form of causal explanations, they are quasi-causal explanations. There is therefore a parity relationship between causal and quasi-teleological explanations, on the one hand, and teleological and quasi-causal explanations on the other. Von Wright explains the difference in the following terms:

A conceptual difference between causal and quasi-teleological explanations, on the one hand, and quasi-causal and teleological explanations, on the other hand, is thus that explanations of the former type depend for their validity upon the truth of nomic connections whereas explanations of the

latter type do not – at least not in their overt form (*Ibid.*, p. 85).

Although the examples taken by the author to illustrate these differences are sometimes difficult to untangle, it seems more important to understand the point here: to show that there are things that depend on us and that we cannot, by invoking the principle that we would be manipulated, remain passive and observe the course of events unless it is intentional. Once again, the author convokes the difference between the experimental sciences and the humanities to support his position. He explains that the systems that the experimental sciences study can be manipulated by an external agent. This agent has learned how to reproduce the initial states of systems under conditions where they would not otherwise have come into existence. The systems studied by social scientists cannot, as a rule, be manipulated by external agents; instead, they can be manipulated by internal agents (*Ibid.*, p. 164).

This point is important for understanding von Wright's overall project since it marks a reversal of the situation; instead of using determinism as an excuse to claim agent irresponsibility, the author uses it instead to reinforce the idea of absolute agent responsibility. The fact that the agent acts intentionally and that a teleological explanation for his action can always be provided shows that the agent's behavior can always be explained and, therefore, that he can be held accountable for it. A deterministic position, he notes, far from calling into question the idea of responsibility, is on the contrary necessary to justify it correctly (*Ibid.*, p. 166).

The conceptual arsenal used by the author to defend his thesis of the absolutely responsible agent consists in replacing the idea of cause, by the idea of condition. On the basis of this remodeling, von Wright asks himself the question whether a human agent can be the sufficient condition by which an event occurs in the world and answers in the affirmative. And he explains it more concisely by showing that anti-determinism is built by isolating a part of the world on which we act voluntarily and present as responsible for effects that without our intervention would not be present. The idea that causality is possible on the scale of a portion of the world is crucial because it allows von Wright to recognize that not all causes are attributable to man since there are many points in the universe in which man's intervention is almost absent. The idea of causality does not presuppose *a priori* the human will. This nuance allows von Wright to dismiss as a justification of determinism the non-correlation between the will of a man and the order of the world. Instead, he insists on the idea that this will can be exercised locally.

Accordingly, the world is organized into small worlds or systems in which an agent can intervene for a specific system without ever being able to act on all

these systems at once (*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82). Thus, even if we cannot act on the world as it is globally, it does not mean that we are entirely passive on the course of the world. Von Wright argues that our answer to the question of how we learn to isolate a fragment of world history into a closed system and to know the possibilities (and necessities) that govern developments within a system is as follows:

We learn this partly by repeatedly putting the system in motion through acts of producing its initial state and then watching ("passively") the successive stages of its development, and partly by comparing these successive stages with developments in systems originating from different initial states. (*Ibid.*, p. 64)

The illusion has been nourished, von Wright notes, by our tendency to think, that man in a state of pure passivity, simply by observing regular sequences, can record causal connections and causally related chains of events that, by extrapolation, penetrate the universe from an infinitely distant past to an infinitely distant future. This perspective fails to notice that causal relationships are relative to fragments of world history that have the character of what can be called closed systems (*Ibid.*, p. 82). The main idea of *Explanation and Understanding* is therefore that since we are part of a system on which we can intervene, we are ultimately responsible also if we do not act. If we stick to the author's definition of restraint, an intentional passivity (*Ibid.*, p. 90), we must then conclude that, for him, we are in any case responsible for what happens in our system, either by intervening in it or by refraining from intervening in it.

In *Causality and Determinism*, the author extends his argument by focusing this time not on the notion of causality as such, but on the link that can exist between this idea of causality and the affirmation of a universal determinism. Indeed, von Wright's aim is no longer to make a difference between causality in the experimental sciences and causality in the humanities. He now wants to devote himself exclusively to causality on the scale of nature in order to show that such causality does not in any way imply a universal determinism, particularly on the human scale. He points out that the concept of causality is intrinsically linked to the theory of human action. He also notes that this conception of causality is based on an atomic organization of the world in which independent states of affairs are linked in the logic of succession that the author calls the logics of tomorrow and yesterday. Finally, he leads a fierce struggle against determinism whose veracity, he says, must remain an open question. The argument of this second work is summarized as follows from the first pages of the first part: "*And this implies, as I shall try to show, that the idea of causal determinism, associated with this idea of causation, can*

claim validity only for limited portions of the world, and not for the world as totality." (von Wright, 1974, p. 2)

There is thus, in the background of these two works, a critique of determinism. The major idea of determinism, that there are no causal alternatives in the development of the world outside the internal necessity of the world itself, is strongly questioned by von Wright, who sees in this the idea that the world is governed by laws against which no intrusion is possible. Determinism advocates a linear view of time. But as our author notes, a difference must be made between an ontic determinism and an epistemic determinism. His argument could be schematized as follows:

*The world would be entirely determined if we knew it in its entirety and not only in certain parts.
We do not know the whole world, but only parts of it.
It follows that the world is not entirely determined.*

One could well admit an ontic determinism, following the model of a universe previously organized by a divine intelligence, which surpasses the human intelligence and finally makes that, all that men do and believe to act freely must finally be located in this project conceived before their existence. But such determinism cannot exclude human action, for men do not share with God the same form of intelligibility. On a human scale, some things are known, and others are not. An epistemic determinism implying that men necessarily know what tomorrow will look like cannot be admitted on a human scale. Now, since it is not on the divine scale, but on the human scale that action matters, it must be concluded that there is no determinism. Or, to use von Wright's schema, the fact that there is an ontic determinism does not in any way preclude an epistemic indeterminism. For our author, therefore, the defenders of the thesis of determinism on a human scale make a serious confusion between what man knows and what he does not know. The fact that man has more or less specialized knowledge on a small scale of the universe does not make him a being whose intelligibility can extend to the entire universe. It seems clear to us that it is this idea that von Wright wants to express by the formula that determinism can only be established on the scale of fragments of the world (*Ibid.*, p. 136).

He even goes so far as to suggest that epistemic determinism should rather make us optimistic, because it teaches us that there are fragments of the world that we can know and therefore act upon. That these actions are within the logic of an intelligence which is superior to our own is not something we should be concerned about. There is thus, in von Wright, the idea that epistemic determinism, considered in a fragmentary way, creates epistemic indeterminism, considered in a global way, and finally creates ontic intrusions. This is what he summarizes in the last paragraph of the book when he states that "*What action presupposes is only the epistemic certainty which, as long as it is not*

undermined, entails belief in the ontic contingency of some changes and thus takes for granted a certain margin of indeterminism in the world." (*Id.*)

How should we interpret these views, in relation to secession?

Secession is generally considered unjustified because it threatens the harmony of the collectivity by promoting locality instead of nationality.

Let's examine a) above. We have seen with von Wright's conception of practical inference that an action is ultimately individual, even when it takes place in a given community. And there are indicators that this individualization of the human action is nothing but normal as human beings act essentially at the local level. I agree that there is some kind of reductionism here. However, we can easily understand it as the goal of the action is put first in the practical inference and has greater chances to be achieved if the action is performed at a local level. With the minimal conception of change defended by von Wright, basic actions are the most important as they bring the most observable changes or consequences in the world. This is to say that, the promotion of the local in place of the national is in no way abnormal. And if this might lead to secession, then secession is normal too. Many arguments in favor of secession hold this fact that the actions at more local levels have more impact than actions at national level for actions are performed here in such a way that we can see the results and, more important, we act with close people whom we trust. As Buckley defends:

If we split apart, we'd be more likely to find ourselves living with people whom we trust and with whom we share bonds of solidarity. We'd be more prosperous, since we'd find it easier to rely on people to keep their promises, and we'd be more willing to look after each other with generous social welfare programs. (Buckley, 2020, p. 26)

As for the second point, we have seen that there are no conditions of freedom. In von Wright's view, freedom is absolute. Arguments against the justification of secession often claim that once the constitution is established, people are not free to leave. But we have seen with von Wright 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. And this aptitude, if it is not materialized at the national level, can still be perceived and implemented at the local level.

Now I agree that these arguments will hardly be new. Then, how do they help in understanding the desire to leave? The answer is that we should distinguish between social and natural normalcy.

Generally, secession is socially abnormal. This comes from the fact that the norms of a society generally put that society above the individuals. Even in the case of anonymous norms such as the customs, it is

clear for individuals that some actions are forbidden, even if they don't know how the forbearance came about. When the custom becomes a prescription, and is clearly indicated in the legal code, its normative pressure is even more important as the sanction is already existing to punish the malefactors. The necessity of sanctions here is very much in line with von Wright's view. As he recommends in *Norm and Action*,

"it is essential that the authorities should be able to back their prescriptions to the citizens with effective threats of punishment in case of disobedience. When this condition is not fulfilled the legal order collapses or dissolves, as when there is a successful revolution." (von Wright, 1963, p. 128)

Socially then, the normalcy of secession is hardly established.

But the problem with this reductive perception of normalcy is that it does not recognize what individuals are naturally able to do. Naturally, as we have indicated, the laws of the humanities are norm-like propositions, different from natural norms (*Ibid.*, pp. 8-9). Freedom as a natural determinant in von Wright's conception takes precedence over social norms. This is the shift one must understand to be able to aptly appreciate the justification of secession. The fact that individuals are free also means that they are free to leave, even with the forbearance of the norm authority since the human norm is not above the nature's norm.

To summarize the argument then, secession is justified because human beings are free and because the social norms that see secession as abnormal are subsumed to the natural norms that bring that freedom to the fore.

Now that we have shown the normalcy of secession from von Wright's philosophy of action, what do we learn from this, as far as the roots of the secession are concerned? This is the question I will answer in the concluding remarks of this paper.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF SECESSION

My concluding remarks will consist of four points:

(1) We have seen that the individual is free and responsible. This means that the paternalistic attitude should not be promoted in politics. Paternalism here refers to the tendency to think that the rulers are necessarily more informed than the governed and therefore that they know best what the population needs. Through this tendency, many political leaders tend to underestimate the people, which leads to a clear break between elites and the rest. This break is the reason why the rulers feel less and less concerned with the future of the people and are more inclined to take arbitrary laws.

- (2) As the practical inference is valid for the first person, it becomes crucial to lay emphasis on the individual's place in the society. This seems paradoxical, but the collectivity is maintained when the individuals feel valued. Besides, practical inferences show that individuals are rational as they carry calculation of the means corresponding to the ends. If this is so, then irrational norms, that is norms that are arbitrary, cannot stand for long as they are constantly challenged by rational agents to whom obedience is requested. The existence of norms and their preservation presupposes the rationality of those norms as well as that of the normative authority and agents. And this is possible only if the normative authority drops the paternalistic attitude described in (1) above.
- (3) Given that change is, first, initiated at the individual level, it gives an indication about the fact that the locality must be promoted when it comes to resource exploitation. The resources of the community must first benefit the local community.
- (4) Lastly, the existence of freedom despite the constraints gives some hope that we can do something. 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. 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.

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