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FEATURED BOOK REVIEWS

The Five Hundred Years' Argument

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Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention. By Neta C. Crawford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 466 pp., $85.00 cloth (ISBN 0-521-80244-X), $30.00 paper (ISBN 0-521-00279-6).

The end of the Cold War witnessed an impressive growth in the study of the impact of norms on international and domestic politics. The subject matter of the new work typically involved issues that had previously been the provenance of normative philosophers and international lawyers. Issues connected to just war theory and international humanitarian law, such as inhumane weapons and military intervention, received considerable attention (Price 1997; Tannenwald 1999). The broad category of human rights (women's suffrage, antislavery movements, torture, democratization) also figured prominently (Nadelmann 1990; Ron 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Kaufmann and Pape 1999; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). The focus on such issues in the new scholarship often seemed driven by ethical concerns, but the methods for studying them were fairly conventional and empirical rather than normative. The main innovations came in the theoretical realm, as students of normative change found traditional realist and institutionalist approaches (usually linked under the rubric "rationalist" or "materialist") lacking in explanatory power. Thus, much of the new work on norms developed constructivist theoretical frameworks and pitted them against rationalist accounts, sometimes finding that a combination of approaches worked best (Katzenstein 1996; Checkel 1997; Thomas 2001).

In parallel with the mainly North American constructivist study of norms, a group of German scholars was drawing upon the work of political theorist Jürgen Habermas to produce valuable insights into the effect of "communicative action" on international politics. A number of intrepid bridge-builders have sought to integrate the Habermasian work on argument and persuasion with mainstream constructivist and rationalist approaches, often with promising results (Risse 2000; Checkel 2001; Schimmelfennig 2001). Now, with the publication of Neta Crawford's *Argument and Change in World Politics*, we have a work that makes a major theoretical advance in our understanding of the role of argument in political change and, moreover, combines it with fascinating, detailed, and original empirical cases spanning five centuries. Finally, in an unusual move for an empirical study of foreign policy, Crawford adopts a prescriptive tone, advocating an international politics based on "discourse ethics," and thereby tying the positive study of argument back into its normative origins in the work of Habermas.

Crawford's theoretical discussion of the role of argument could have been a small but important book in itself. Her analysis represents a careful reading and synthesis of a large and wide-ranging body of literature—from political theory, psychology, and anthropology, as well as international relations. It is essentially taxonomic, comprising the kind of effort that Giovanni Sartori (1970) advocated as a necessary

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precondition for carrying out research. Crawford concludes her survey with a how-to of argument analysis and offers criteria by which her contribution should be judged: "The theory of political argument will be interesting and worthwhile if it can tell us something about the source of foreign-policy goals, illuminate the processes that decisionmakers engage in to make their decisions, and help us see better than before the content of world political action" (p. 129). She is sensitive to alternative explanations, particularly ones that rely on nonnormative, material factors. Yet, like most of the current generation of constructivists, she finds the normative-material divide somewhat artificial. Successful ethical arguments that contribute to policy change undoubtedly draw upon shared perceptions of material constraints and opportunities, but that hardly lessens the impact of the process of argument itself or its moral foundations. After all, material factors do not translate directly into outcomes. Ethical argument is the means by which actors articulate their interpretation of the material world and its implications for policy. Much of Crawford's book consists of the history of changing attitudes toward colonialism—from the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century to South Africa's attempt to maintain military control over Namibia (former South-West Africa) in the twentieth. Why Spain's colonial predations were widely accepted as normal in the "civilized" world whereas South Africa was universally condemned for its behavior is one of the underlying puzzles that drives Crawford's inquiry. She considers and rejects the economistic argument that colonialism lasted only until its costs outweighed its benefits: "Colonialism ended when it was arguably still profitable and colonizers could, if they wanted to, still enforce their will on the colonized" (p. 3). Formulated in general terms, her question is: "Why did one of the most enduring practices of world politics come to an end so close to the peak of its practice?" (p. 2). Her answer does not reject material factors, but it puts them in the context of prevailing beliefs and morality: "The beliefs actors held about profit, military and economic capabilities, and the costs and benefits of colonies mattered causally in terms of motivating colonialism and decolonization. But what mattered more in the long run was the making of persuasive ethical arguments containing normative beliefs about what was good and right to do to others" (p. 4).

Crawford's focus on the "long run" is perhaps the most compelling feature of her study. It reflects her general position that positive change in the realm of human rights occurs gradually over centuries. Change begins with challenges to a widely accepted practice, such as slavery. The arguments underlying these challenges initially seem quite marginal, but over time they become the common wisdom. Thus, in a fascinating account of arguments about the Spanish conquest of the New World, Crawford uncovers written critiques of enslavement and the brutal treatment of native populations by such religious figures as Bartolomé de Las Casas. These critiques sought to challenge the assumptions underpinning the prevailing policies—such as the basic inferiority and inhumanity of the Indians vis-à-vis the Europeans. In chapters recounting the end of the slave trade and forced labor in the colonies, Crawford depicts the gradual encroachment of these new arguments and how they came to change the overall understanding of the moral issues at stake. In an important insight, she points out that reformers with fairly modest critiques of existing practices and institutions often provided the groundwork for more substantial and unintended change at a later date.

Crawford is particularly good at recreating the moral worldviews of the participants in these historical debates. Her method of "informal argument analysis" reveals the conditions under which certain views prevail over others, or fail to do so. Her technique borrows explicitly and with good effect from Michael Walzer's (1977) insights about the role of identifying hypocrisy in arguments as a way of effecting moral change. Crawford shows, for example, that colonizers' arguments about controlling new territories in order to convert the natives to Christianity came under challenge when critics pointed out that the natives were

being murdered or enslaved instead. In later chapters on the emergence of the norm of self-determination, she recounts the arguments that native leaders in South-West Africa made to try to prevent the brutal destruction of their people by German colonizers in the late nineteenth century. Such arguments, although unsuccessful at the time, demonstrated the underlying hypocrisy of the German position. In a discussion representative of her methodological self-consciousness and sophistication, Crawford describes why the native arguments failed to persuade the German colonizers at the time, whereas similar arguments paved the way for widespread decolonization later.

Arguments about self-determination and the relative degree of readiness for self-government played a major role in the so-called Mandate System of the League of Nations and its successor institutions under the United Nations. The chapters on these subjects are among the most rewarding in Crawford's book. She returns to the case of South-West Africa as a kind of leitmotif here and in a chapter devoted to alternative explanations for decolonization. Her use of the case brings welcome specificity to the general claims of the first part of the book and demonstrates an impressive level of expertise.

In her final chapter, Crawford makes the case that contemporary arguments about the merits of humanitarian intervention—"the threat or use of military force to protect or promote human rights" (p. 399)—reflect the legacy of colonialism and decolonization as well as the nature of past arguments about those practices. She provides a thoughtful overview of current debates, a valid critique of dominant theories of international relations as incapable of contributing much insight, and a proposal for an international convention on humanitarian intervention as a practical way of bringing discourse ethics to bear on a major world problem.

Argument and Change in World Politics, impressive as it is, nevertheless merits a few critical observations. In her empirical chapters, Crawford's treatment of materialist and power-based explanations for moral norms is nuanced and fair. In her theoretical chapters, however, her identification of E. H. Carr as representative of the simplistic view that international morality is merely the product of power seems misplaced. In fact, Carr's classic *Twenty Years' Crisis* (in the chapters least often assigned in our courses, unfortunately) revealed a more sophisticated understanding: "The fact that national propaganda everywhere so eagerly cloaks itself in ideologies of a professedly international character proves the existence of an international stock of common ideas, however limited and however weakly held, to which appeal can be made, and of a belief that these common ideas stand somehow in the scale of values above national interests. This stock of common ideas is what we mean by international morality" (Carr 1964:145). Here Carr hints at some of the very arguments Crawford herself makes when she suggests, for example, that "those who do not adhere to the [international] standards of normative belief attempt to justify their (non-normal) behavior on ethical or practical grounds" (p. 123). Although often considered the founder of modern political realism, Carr clearly recognized its limitations, especially when questions about the impact of morality arise: "The necessity, recognized by all politicians, both in domestic and international affairs, for cloaking interests in a guise of moral principles is in itself a symptom of the inadequacy of realism" in explaining international politics (Carr 1964:92). Realism, according to Carr, failed to account for the importance of ethical justifications for Realpolitik-inspired behavior, justifications that could in turn be subjected to criticism by those who would point out their underlying hypocrisy—a process much like the one Crawford describes. Carr's position is probably not so far from Walzer's (1977) argument, which Crawford quotes approvingly: "Whether or not people speak in good faith, they cannot say just anything they please. Moral talk is coercive; one thing leads to another" (p. 249). For Crawford, the moral arguments decision makers use to justify their actions are the vulnerable point at which critics of existing practices focus their attention to effect change.

Crawford's success at getting into the mindsets of policymakers of centuries past in order to understand how their critics used their moral frameworks against them is one of the great strengths of her work. Yet, focusing on the moral justifications—bringing religion to heathens, providing good government to those incapable of doing it themselves, in short, the "civilizing mission"—risks understating the baser motives of greed and lust for power and their manifestations in mass persecution, torture, and genocide. Crawford is not unaware of these practices, and, in recounting the German subjugation of South-West Africa in particular, she explicitly describes them. But in other cases, the moral discourse of the time masks important facets of colonization. Consider the question that pitted Las Casas against Sepúlveda in 1550: "Is it lawful for the King of Spain to wage war on the Indians, before preaching a faith to them, in order to subject them to his rule, so that afterward they may be more easily instructed in the faith?" (p. 152). The realm of acceptable discourse within which it was possible to criticize existing policy implied that killing and enslaving Indians was all about the spread of Christianity and nothing else.

Clearly it was not Crawford's intention to downplay the human costs of colonialism or its ulterior motives. In some cases—such as the US counter-insurgency war in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century—she contrasts the rhetoric of "aggressive humanitarianism" with the reality of hundreds of thousands killed for the crime of wanting to run their own affairs under neither Spanish nor US domination. Yet the moral weapon that she highlights—identifying hypocrisy—was wielded more effectively by such contemporary anti-imperialists as Mark Twain than by some of the figures she quotes. In 1901, for example, Twain (1996) suggested that "extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet." Speaking for that Philippine Person Sitting in Darkness, Twain imagined him thinking that "there must be two Americas: one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on; then kills him to get his land … It is yet another Civilized Power, with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot-basket and its butcher-knife in the other. Is there no salvation for us but to adopt Civilization and lift ourselves down to its level?" (Twain 1996, emphasis in the original).

Argument and Change in World Politics is an impressive work of scholarship along many dimensions: theoretically, empirically, and in its implications for real-world politics. Ironically, however, the great strength of Crawford's contribution—her ability to work within the arguments that represent the hegemonic discourse of the time—also implies a certain weakness. Consider, for example, that much of the discourse on contemporary US foreign policy, as framed by the Bush Administration, works within the Manichean idiom of good versus evil. It has presented the war in Afghanistan as a humanitarian intervention to restore women's rights and advocated war against Iraq without mentioning the word oil. Conducting a "discourse ethical dialogue" in these terms, as part of a convention on humanitarian intervention, would be a daunting prospect. It would require, as Crawford suggests, "questioning cherished assumptions, changing comfortable ways of being in the world, and making real changes in relations of power" (p. 435). Fortunately, *Argument and Change in World Politics* makes a major contribution to that long-term effort.

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