
1. This book examines the role of ethical argument in decolonization. Neta Crawford recognizes the importance of other factors, such as economic interest, in this process. However, her main argument is that ethical arguments, especially regarding human equality and the rule of law (133), have played the most important role in the longue durée of decolonization, by gradually undermining the legitimacy of existing colonial practices. Even figures who did not oppose colonialism or unfree labor in all its forms can be seen to have advanced this process, as their contributions framed subsequent debates and thereby narrowed options for how — and ultimately whether — formal colonial rule could be advocated and justified. Crawford is, in a sense, supplying the historical counterpart of today's international human rights regime, which functions through obtaining public, written commitments from states, thereby narrowing those states' options for public positions on human rights issues and gradually weaving a web of accountability.

2. It is refreshing that Crawford's book focuses on the empirical content of specific cases, rather than the theory of social movements or the philosophical and legal foundations of human rights, which have received more attention in the scholarly literature. Along the way, Crawford offers an impressive and judicious synthesis of the best recent and classic work in colonial studies. A newcomer to colonial history could do worse than to read her middle chapters as an introduction to the entire topic of colonialism. There, Crawford lays out the main issues of colonial policy, criticism, and reform since the 1400s and in various parts of the world (mostly the Americas and Africa). She reminds the reader of the absolutely fundamental importance of slavery and other forms of unfree labor to the colonial enterprise, and that allows her to link antislavery thought to the broader stream of ideas that "denormalized and delegitimated" (160) colonialism. She pays special attention to German Southwest Africa/Namibia, the Belgian Congo, the Philippines under U.S. rule, Pan-Africanism, and the end of Portuguese colonial empire.

3. The book opens with two chapters that lay the groundwork for how arguments can be understood to bring about political change. Chapter one provides a typology of arguments (instrumental, identity, scientific, and ethical), and situates them in relation to "belief" and "culture." Chapter two focuses on ethical argument and how it effects change by denormalizing and delegitimizing existing beliefs and practices; offering alternatives that fit better with existing ethical norms; and finally institutionalizing change, if the "balance of capabilities" (7) has indeed shifted toward those who are demanding change. Two concluding chapters, Chapters eight and nine, return to a similar level of abstraction, to consider how to weigh the importance of various factors in bringing about change, and how to put Crawford's theory of ethical argument into political practice via Habermasian discourse ethics and, in practical terms, a proposed convention on humanitarian intervention.

4. It is the middle chapters, Chapters three, four, five, six, and seven, that contain the historical material in support of Crawford's thesis about the centrality of ethical argument. These middle chapters treat, in turn, the Iberian and other European debates of the 1500s about the humanity of Amerindians and the permissibility of forcing Christianity and labor on them; the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about plantation slavery and the slave trade in Africa and the Americas; the turn toward humanitarianism as a justification for colonialism, specifically African partition, in the nineteenth century; the interwar League of Nations mandate system; and increasing prominence in the twentieth century of the principle of self-determination, both before and after the rapid series of decolonizations in the 1950s and 1960s.

5. Chapter six, on the mandate system, is the best of the historical chapters. Because of the paucity of scholarly literature on the mandate system, Crawford used primary sources, and the result is a better melding of her thesis and evidence than in the other middle chapters. The vast chronological and
geographical span of her project means that she depends mostly on secondary literature in the other chapters. If that literature did not highlight rhetorical continuity or change, then it is difficult for her to demonstrate it, no matter how plausible her thesis is or how extensive her references. In Chapter 3, for example, she makes use of historian William Sherman's arguments about why brutality against Amerindians in New Spain seems to have lessened in the sixteenth century. What Crawford needs to advance her own argument is some connection between Las Casas's influence and that reduction in violence, but Sherman's own explanation centers on the generational difference between the earliest conquistadors and Creoles who socialized with Indians since childhood. Nevertheless, Crawford concludes the discussion by stating that Las Casas was "able to change the identity beliefs of the conquistadors and their emotional relationship to the Indians" (157). Her point could be proven, but probably only by carrying out her own examination of texts from that time, not Sherman's work. This sort of loose connection is atypical for Crawford, however. She tends instead toward careful, precise writing that if anything leads her to understate her case. In the middle chapters her main thesis about ethical arguments' primary role in change often appears in a more limited but very well-supported form: that participants in colonial debates felt obliged to make ethical arguments.

6. Political scientists, as she notes, may find the book too laden with irreducible historical detail; historians, including this reviewer, may come away wanting more, especially evidence from primary sources. Both will be impressed by Crawford's skill at analyzing the big questions of colonialism, its end, and humanitarian intervention. Her book is an excellent example of a historicized account of human rights innovation, and an ambitious and admirable fusion of international relations, history, and the theory of human rights.

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