Introduction

This book follows three lines of inquiry, each equally important. First, it proposes a new theory of argument and change in world politics, focusing in particular on the role of ethical argument and normative change. Second, it intervenes in an older academic dispute, the problem of why colonialism ended.[1] Third, in the prescriptive voice of international political theory and ethics, it suggests how, building on the practices of ethical argument that are already in place, certain practices of international relations might be used to make world politics more just and peaceful.

Why focus on argument and change? International relations theorists have two generic social conditions to explain: order and change. Scholars have done well at explaining more stable aspects of world orders, such as bi-polar and multi-polar systems, but much less well at explaining, or more ambitiously, predicting significant changes in world political and economic relations. Of course accounting for stability, equilibrium, and change is no easy task and probably no single variable can do all or even most of the explanatory work. But that has not stopped international relations theorists from proposing master variable accounts of world politics – for example, stressing the drive for power or the operation of markets.

International relations theory has difficulty accounting for change in part because it has thus far not developed a clear understanding of process. The world is ordered or it changes; stasis or rupture. This view is a consequence of our meta-theoretical building blocks. International

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[1] These explanatory aims are both constitutive and causal in the sense that Alexander Wendt describes in "On Constitution and Causation in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 24 (December 1998), 101–117.

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relations theorists usually focus on the actors (or agents) of world politics and the big structures of states and alliances within an anarchic environment. Actors or agents have characteristics (rationality) and interests (power), while structures such as anarchy or hierarchy (colonialism) constrain and dispose the relations among states. There is little room for argumentation in this understanding because argument is a process. Once we begin to see world politics as constituted by agents, structures, and processes, it is possible to grasp the role of processes like argument and persuasion and to see how change may occur. I do not intend with my focus on argument to sweep all other accounts to the side or to banish complexity or contingency. Rather, I show that once we pay attention to political argument, we will see the role the making and persuasiveness of arguments plays in maintaining orders, changing relations, and overturning practices. A focus on argument may also allow us to see room for human agency within the operations of seemingly inexorable political and economic forces.

The major arguments are these. First, the usual understanding of agents and structures as constituting the major forces of world politics is incomplete without an understanding of the *processes* of world politics. Second, political argument, persuasion, and practical reason are fundamental processes within and among states. Third, beliefs and culture are respectively the content and the context of political argument; without them actors could not understand the arguments that others make, nor could actors successfully argue with others. Fourth, ethical argument analysis is a way to understand and explain normative change in world politics. Fifth, once the central importance of the processes of argument and reason in world politics is recognized, it is possible to think prescriptively about using ethical argumentative processes to re-make world politics.

I did not begin this work with a clear theory of argument and persuasion. Rather, I began by wanting to understand a puzzle: why did one of the most enduring practices of world politics come to an end so close to the peak of its practice? While some small colonial territories remain, the end of formal colonialism as a legitimate practice is perhaps the biggest change in the structure and practice of international relations in the last 500 years. Many colonies became independent in the 1960s and in 1997, with much ceremony, Great Britain returned Hong Kong to China after more than a century of colonial rule. At least in the popular imagination, the peaceful withdrawal from the island by the empire meant that the sun had finally set not only on the British empire but also

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on colonialism itself.[2] Why did old-fashioned colonialism end? Why did colonialism end when it did? Why didn't colonialism end much earlier?

Colonialism ended when it was arguably still profitable and colonizers could, if they wanted to, still enforce their will on the colonized. There was nothing inevitable about decolonization in the realm of ideas or normative beliefs. There are probably no "economic laws" that inhibit the profitability of colonialism, even in the age of industrialization and free markets, nor any reasons why militarily powerful states cannot impose themselves on weaker states should they choose to do so. The powerful could still cut off the hands or heads of those who resist imperial rule, they could still deny the weak the franchise, and tell them how they must order their political, economic, and religious affairs. Yet, as Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first independence political leader said, "Military occupation of another country against the wishes of the people of that country is internationally condemned. This means that colonialism in the traditional and political sense is now almost a thing of the past."[3]

Explaining the end of colonialism is obviously important. Particular colonial systems have risen and fallen over the past several thousand years, but there is something distinctive about the decolonization of the late twentieth century. No new colonies were formed in the last twenty-five years. And colonizers did not just stop acquiring colonies at mid century, they began to give up the colonies they already held. In the few instances during the late twentieth century when states tried to annex land, such as Indonesia's 1975 invasion of East Timor, those actions were contested not only by the subjects of colonization, but by outsiders. In one case, Iraq's attempted annexation of Kuwait in 1990, states used military force under the authority of the United Nations to remove Iraq and nullify its conquest. Colonizers, once proud, now express remorse. In 1993, the president of the United States apologized for the US annexation of the Hawaiian Islands one hundred years earlier. Colonialism made the world map look much as it does, and decolonization began at what was perhaps the peak of that ancient practice.

[2] China's occupation of Tibet is among the exceptions. While Tibet's legal status is hotly debated, the occupation denies the political self-determination and religious freedom of the people of Tibet. Several other territories, many small in terms of population, and others much larger, remain in conditions rather like that of colonies, albeit with crucial differences. See Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *The Last Colonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[3] Julius Nyerere, "Forward," in Chakravarthi Raghavan, *Recolonization: GATT, The Uraguay Round & the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1990), pp. 19–25: 19.

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Colonialism did not just fade away; it became illegitimate. Why and how did this change occur? To rephrase the question in more abstract terms, how do dominant behavioral norms change? Do normative beliefs have anything to do with those changes? If so, how?

There are competing explanations but no consensus about why colonialism is no longer legitimate. Most observers think that colonialism ended because it began to cost more than it profited the colonizers. Colonizers, being rational, thus let the practice go out of use and found less costly, more profitable, ways of getting what they wanted from former colonies. Or perhaps decolonization occurred not because any one colony was too costly to maintain, but because the imperial powers had overstretched their reach, and could no longer beat down the constant and rising resistance to empire in the periphery. Thus, the most commonly given explanations for the end of colonialism stress both the material world of extraction where conquest does or doesn't pay, and the cognitive world of rational calculators who are either wise or insensible.

I give an account of the end of colonialism that stresses factors other than profit, capabilities, and the rational calculation of costs and benefits. It is certain that those factors were important. Or rather, I should say that 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. While the colonized had always resisted colonialism, sometimes with great success, what changed in the twentieth century was the content and balance of normative beliefs and the burden of proof. Whereas colonialism had been the dominant practice, or norm, for thousands of years, supported by strong ethical arguments, colonialism was denormalized and delegitimized in the twentieth century because anti-colonial reformers made persuasive ethical arguments.

Colonialism could still be considered legitimate and acceptable if the powerful still believed in human inequality and thought it was acceptable to take and hold territory by arms and dictate the life of others with brute force. Colonialism ended, ostensibly for good, in the mid twentieth century, because most Westerners no longer think it is acceptable to control others in precisely that same way. The engine for this change was ethical argument, not force, or changing modes of production, or declining profitability. Ethical arguments, once used to support colonialism, were used to undermine and ultimately to eliminate the

practice. While it is possible to account for the practices of colonialism, the abolition of slavery, and decolonization with primarily economic or material explanations, such accounts are deficient to the extent that they fail to appreciate the process and content of argument, especially ethical arguments deployed by domestic and transnational advocates. In focusing on the content of the arguments deployed by advocates of reform, I give relatively little attention to the tactics and mobilization strategy of reformers. This is not because social movement strategy is unimportant in understanding how arguments become heard and were, or were not, persuasive. On the contrary, the politics of social movements and reform is vital. However, since the techniques of social movement mobilization are much better understood and well known than the account I give here of ethical argument, the emphasis here is less on who argues and how they organize, and more on the content and process of argument and how arguments may prompt changes in political power.[4]

The first chapter, "Argument, Belief, and Culture," lays the conceptual ground for an understanding of the process of ethical argument. It begins by developing the concept and role of argument as a practice of reason and persuasion.[5] Though argument is only one process in world politics, its role is obviously important, and strangely underemphasized and undertheorized by international relations theorists. World politics is characterized by several kinds of argument. Instrumental or practical arguments are about how to do things most effectively in the social world. Identity arguments suggest that people of a certain kind, such as "we the civilized," ought to act in a particular way. Scientific arguments use the laws of science, technology, or nature to define situations

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[4] On social movements and transnational activism see: Jeffrey W. Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation: The Impact of Protest on US Arms Control Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Whereas these scholars mention persuasion and influence at several points in their books, they are primarily concerned with demonstrating the existence and effectiveness of domestic and transnational advocacy networks. An excellent book giving more attention to persuasion is Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[5] The chapter focuses on two (ideal-type) forms of reasoning that arguments generally take: top-down (syllogism) and sideways (comparative or associative). Top-down reasoning in the case of a practical argument looks rather like a syllogism where conclusions follow logically from premises. Arguments in the form of side-ways associations, or symbolic arguments, compare cases. They use metaphor, metonym, and analogies to help others draw inferences from one situation that imply actions about other complex situations.

and show how they ought to be addressed. Ethical arguments are about what it is right to do in particular contexts.

Argumentation and persuasion depend on content or beliefs. The content of beliefs held by foreign policy decisionmakers shapes their perceptions, priorities, and preferences, especially as beliefs become institutionalized in practices – organizational routines and knowledge making processes. Yet as Dan Reiter suggests, "There is no space in realist theory to permit states to have different beliefs about how international politics work."[6] Beliefs, which address all areas of social life, are translated into political action through reason – what Aristotle called practical inference – which involves reflection and political, that is, public, argument. I describe philosophical/ontological, normative, instrumental, and identity beliefs. I also review belief system theory, and specify how the theory developed here builds on and is different from that earlier work. In addition, I discuss theories of the foundation of belief and belief change or learning.

Next, I suggest four ways that culture is relevant to an understanding of argumentative processes in world politics. First, shared cultural background allows meaningful conversations and arguments to occur. Without this background meaning, all speech, including argument, would be unintelligible. Second, culture often provides the content for specific beliefs; it is the source of philosophical, normative, identity, and instrumental beliefs. Third, culture provides the background meaning by which particular beliefs and arguments are consciously judged, and cultures contain the metaphors and historical events which actors consciously use to frame problems. That is, culture is a resource that argument makers draw upon when attempting to be persuasive. Fourth, while culture is one source of the rootedness of beliefs, it can be a source of new beliefs.

Practical, scientific, and identity arguments are ubiquitous in world politics and it might be (relatively) easy to convince you that, for example, practical arguments are at work in decisions over whether or not to intervene militarily, or that scientific arguments used within and outside epistemic communities, such as those of atmospheric scientists, can change world politics. But ethical arguments are the hard case. Do ethical arguments make a difference? Are they causal, or are they "epiphenomenal?"

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[6] Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances, and World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 5.

Chapter 2, on "Ethical Argument and Argument Analysis," gives a theoretical account of how normative beliefs and ethical arguments work in world politics. I chose to highlight the role of ethical argument because skeptics of the role of argument will probably be most skeptical about the causal significance of ethical arguments. I review several, conflicting, theories of "norms" in world politics, specify the differences between behavioral norms and normative beliefs, and show how ethical arguments may link the two. I discuss the conditions under which ethical arguments can be persuasive and describe the process of persuasive ethical argument. Specifically, ethical arguments are generally used to do one of three things: uphold existing beliefs and practices, extend normative beliefs to new areas of practice, and change dominant practices.

How can ethical arguments be used to change dominant practices? The process occurs in three phases. First, persuasive ethical arguments deconstruct: they denormalize and delegitimize dominant beliefs and practices. Second, persuasive ethical arguments offer a reconstruction, the articulation of an alternative that meets normative criteria. In this phase, alternative conceptions of possibility and interest are discussed and adopted by some actors. And, in the third phase, actors begin to change their social world. If arguments are persuasive among enough individuals and groups (and "enough" depends on the context), then the balance of capabilities between those who favor the dominant normative belief and the new normative belief will begin to change. Further, normative beliefs that change as a consequence of ethical argument may become institutionalized, altering the structures of the world and the starting point for new ethical arguments. In the first two phases, the action is primarily discursive or rhetorical; in the last phase, the action is more obvious in the political and institutional world as capabilities shift and standard practices are modified. This is a dynamic understanding of how ethical argument can be used to change dominant beliefs and practices. To see whether this understanding makes sense, I then propose a method of "informal argument analysis" by which it is possible to analyze ethical argument and the process of persuasion. Finally, some of the methodological objections to the argument analysis approach are raised and answered in the last part of chapter 2.

Chapters 3 through 7 show how ethical arguments shaped colonialism and were also used by reformers who sought to abolish slavery and to end colonialism. Chapter 3, "Colonial Arguments," outlines the content of arguments that characterized early debates on colonialism and

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describes the famous debate between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan
Ginés de Sepulveda in 1550 over the humanity of New World Indians.
Chapter 4, "Decolonizing Bodies," focuses on the movements to end
slavery and forced labor, arguing that these were crucial steps on the
path to weakening colonialism. Chapter 5, "Faces of Humanitarianism,"
describes the height of colonialism in Africa and the ways that humani-
tarian arguments were used by both colonizers and colonial reformists.
Chapter 6, "Sacred Trust," focuses on the role of the League of Nations
Mandate system in institutionalizing new normative beliefs about colo-
nial practice. Chapter 7, "Self-Determination," discusses the post-1945
period when decolonization occurred at a rapid pace and became the
international norm.[7] Chapters 5 through 7 also include more discus-
sion of colonialism and decolonization in South West Africa/Namibia
to illustrate the development of both successful and unsuccessful argu-
ments in greater detail over a 100 year period. Chapter 8, "Alternative
Explanations, Counterfactuals, and Causation," summarizes the ethi-
cal argument explanation for the end of colonialism, raises competing
economic and power political explanations for decolonization, and con-
siders counterfactual possibilities. It also concludes the discussion of
South West Africa by comparing economic and strategic factors to the
role of ethical argument.

This book could not have been written without utilizing the work of
many historians of colonialism, slavery, and decolonization. Too many
of the primary sources I consulted – especially the translations of Las
Casas' sixteenth-century arguments at Valladolid on behalf of Indians,
the anti-slavery briefs of abolitionists, and the British government's Blue
Book on German South West Africa – were vivid descriptions of what
Joseph Conrad's fictional character Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness* would
call "the horror, the horror!" Because relatively little secondary work and
analysis has been done on the Mandate system, chapter 6 builds on the
work of historians but has been supplemented by deeper investigation
into primary material, especially League of Nations documents and the
records of the Permanent Mandates Commission.

[7] The term decolonization is, of course, problematic because it implies the exit of colonizers
and the return of social, economic, and political life in colonies to a pre-conquest status.
In every instance, however, the colonized are deeply and forever changed by the colonial
experience, specifically by the introduction of wage labor, the concept of the sovereign
state, and ties to European and American economies, while pre-existing institutions and
social relations are altered or erased. In this sense no former colony has been able to fully
decolonize.

If this were a comprehensive history of the rise and fall of colonialism, I would have been compelled to use more primary sources and to discuss, in much greater depth, colonialism and decolonization in areas of the world that I hardly mention. As it is, some may think the historical analysis and case material is too long, too descriptive, too wide-ranging, and contains too many citations and events. On the contrary, this work is surely too short as history and does not even mention many events, actors, and arguments some might consider crucial. My explanation for this brevity is the simple fact that I do not intend a comprehensive account but only to persuade you of the importance of argument, especially ethical argument, in the practice and end of colonialism. My admiration for the skill of narrative historians has only grown through the process of writing this book and I have not attempted to duplicate their work. Rather, I hope to have provided a template for the analysis of argument and historical change from which other, more comprehensive, histories can be read and re-interpreted.[8]

Chapter 9, "Poiesis and Praxis: Toward Ethical World Politics," develops an approach for making the practices of world politics more ethical and legitimate. In a world of clashing cultures and conflicting beliefs about what is right, how *ought* we decide what to do about the pressing questions of world politics? Specifically, how can we decide the important ethical and policy questions of when and how to conduct humanitarian interventions? "Poiesis and Praxis" – unlike previous chapters which are historical and analytical – is forward-looking and prescriptive. Using and elaborating on the approach to argument known as "discourse ethics," it discusses the process of ethical argument by which world politics might be remade with regard to the problem of humanitarian intervention.

International politics and foreign policy decisionmaking involve deliberation and choice, though decisions are made in highly constrained choice situations. The answer to the why question – why this thing and not another – is found in the content of the arguments and the process of reason. The process and content of argument are fundamental forces in world politics – they are constitutive of the world. The beliefs that actors hold about the world and the outcome of political arguments, whether

[8] Careful readers will note that in a few cases in the book my spelling of place names and organizations change. The inconsistency is not mine, but the fact that over decades, the names themselves sometimes changed or were written differently by sources. Similarly, to avoid anachronism, I use names for groups of people, in their historical context, e.g. "Hottentot," which are now or might be considered derogatory. No offense is intended.

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they are considered persuasive, make world politics and foreign po-
licy what it is, as much or more than the distribution of power among
states. The content of world politics is found in particular beliefs, and the
process of politics is shaped by the arguments and beliefs of everyday
discourse, public political rhetoric, legislation, court proceedings, and
private memos. In turn, the process of argument and the content of
beliefs are institutionalized in practices – organizational routines and
knowledge-making processes – that are part of the cultural environ-
ments of domestic and world politics. This argument about arguments
offers an alternative theory of choice in international relations that is not
based on rational actor theory, but on the role of practical reason and
the importance of beliefs rooted in culture. The major evolutionary or
revolutionary changes of world politics are thus a consequence of rea-
soned choice – as much as change is due to accident or material forces
and structures.