CHAPTER 3

Reinterpreting Normative Power

This chapter first outlines the original normative power conceptualisation by Ian Manners, and then moves on to describe how the debate on normative power has been framed vis-à-vis two other conceptualisations of the European Union in the world: civilian power and (aspiring) military power. Then, a short exposition of the relationship between normative power and the fundamental institution of international law will be undertaken. The section will survey how international law figures within the debate and how the normative power discourse fits with conceptualisations of the EU as an actor in the international legal sphere. Following this, the construction of the EU’s normative power in academic discourse as an antithesis to the United States will be explored – an inescapable undertaking given the comparative research setting applied in the present context. This will be followed by a short exposition on America’s at times tenuous relationship with international law. Finally, the ideas of soft power and normative power as hegemony will be explored to contextualise the normative power debate into broader disciplinary conceptualisations that, albeit different, bear striking resemblance to the normative power concept and therefore function as potential avenues for further clarifying the concept's semantic field. Lastly, establishing the 'hegemony connection' will also allow for a short consideration of how powerful actors relate to the fundamental institution of international law.

3.1 Normative Power Europe: The Groundwork

Before proceeding, however, it is instructive to make a short detour to contextualise the meaning of the normative power concept utilised within the auspices of this study, for the notion has acquired different discipline-specific meanings in disparate contexts. Alongside the debate on normative power Europe (NPE), which will function as the core repository of theoretical insights on the concept in the forthcoming chapters, two other strands are worthy of note, as they illuminate two discreet dimensions of the notion of normative power. The first of these can be attributed to the work of Amitai Etzioni (1975, 6) in the context of organisations and compliance theory. He used the term normative power to refer to the “allocation and manipulation of symbolic rewards”, and contrasted it with two other forms of power: remunerative and
coercive. In the legal sciences, on the other hand, the term is used more generally to refer to the power of norms *per se*, the power to set and/or interpret norms or to have authority over someone (see Weiler 2004, 548; Raz 2009, 7, 16–17). All of these meanings of normative power are, in fact, embedded in the normative power concept coined by Ian Manners (2002) and developed further in the auspices of the ensuing debate and the study at hand. The actual contours of this embeddedness will become clear to the reader as the discussion proceeds.

The normative power Europe concept, the wellspring for the discussion that follows, was originally coined by Ian Manners (2002; see also 2006b, 168) to fill a void in normative theorising on the European Union. The mantle of normative power was bestowed upon the EU, because the Union supposedly aspired to change conceptions of normal in the international arena (Manners 2002, 252; Forsberg 2011, 1185). The normative power conceptualisation also drew on the notions of ‘ideological power’ and ‘power over opinion’, attributed to E.H. Carr and Johan Galtung, respectively, and its key mechanisms were theorised to be ideas, opinions and conscience instead of coercion (Manners 2002, 239; Diez and Manners 2007, 175). Moreover, and this was probably the most important insight in Manners’s (2002, 252) original formulation, the EU’s power in world politics was premised not on what the Union does, but on *what it is*. Hence, normative power actually underlines three different aspects: *normativity in the sense of inviting value judgements on what is desirable, a form of power that works through immaterial channels, and a type of actor with a particular normative identity* (Manners 2011a, 228–233; Diez and Pace 2011, 213).

The key proposal behind normative power was to reframe the discussion on the Union’s ‘actorness’ in the wider international system – to move away from the focus on the EU’s capabilities inherent in the old juxtaposition between *civilian* and *military power* – towards analysing the ‘ideational impact’ of the Union’s identity in the world. Thus, by virtue of its *sui generis* nature, the Union was claimed to possess a *normative difference* in relation to other actors. Accordingly, this difference based on the EU’s *historical context, hybrid polity*

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1 In his original article Manners (2002, 238) uses both terms ‘role’ and ‘identity’.

2 According to Francois Duchêne (1973, 19–20) the European Community (EC) was the first example of a collection of states that had been able to domesticate relations between its own members. By virtue of being “long on economic power and relatively short on armed force” the EC was acting as a ‘civilian power’, furthering such domestication beyond its own borders (ibid.). In his response to Duchêne, Hedley Bull (1982, 151) rebutted that the EC was not an actor in international affairs and was unlikely to ever become one, which, in turn, meant that the civilian power conceptualisation was an attempt to cover up the Community’s inherent lack of military prowess.