A Three-Dimensional Framework for Analysing Normative Power

The study at hand draws on earlier work on normative power to propose three dimensions along which the normative power of an international actor can be analysed. After a short review of already existing and relatively recent analytical formulations, these three different dimensions (norms and identity, means and paradoxes) will be expanded upon. The goal is to arrive at a useful analytical framework that can be utilised in examining the extent to which actors’ (in this case EU and US) foreign policy conduct approximates that of a normative power within a given context (here the January 25th Revolution and its aftermath). The apparatus will, therefore, ultimately allow for the translation of theoretical insights into a useful device for analysis. In the process, the exposition on the dimensions will also shed more light on the relationship between normative power and the fundamental institution of international law – the most stable collection of norms for the international body politique, but also, as will become clear, a litmus test of sorts for an ideal-typical normative power.

4.1 An Analytical Framework for Normative Power

Recently, there have been four notable contributions in the variegated literature on normative power that conceptualise categories for assessing norm promoting actors in the international realm. In this context, a tripartite-framework proposed by Ian Manners (2008), the normative power ideal-type conceptualisation by Tuomas Forsberg (2011), Nathalie Tocci’s (2008b) endeavour to profile a normative foreign policy actor and Elizabeth De Zutter’s (2010) proposal to free normative power theorising of its ethical dimension warrant extended discussion. Following the considerable intellectual labours of other contributors to the normative power debate, the study at hand puts forth a humble addition to this proliferating line of normative power theorising.

The first two of the abovementioned formulations are quite similar and their focus is predominantly on the EU. Manners’s (2008, 47, 55–59) conceptualisation builds upon his previous work on normative power and draws on “the three major approaches to procedural normative ethics: virtue ethics, deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics” (emphasis added), to structure
a framework according to which the EU’s normative power and normativity – ‘EU normative ethics’ – can be analysed with reference to three different categories: principles, actions and impact. In terms of principles and virtue ethics, Manners (ibid., 55–56) suggests that the Union needs to “live by virtuous example”. This means that the EU should aspire for ‘coherence’ by promoting principles understood to be universal within the UN system (instead of parochial particularistic norms), thus espousing a “holistic strategy for world peace”. Relatedly, the Union should also act with ‘consistency’ by refraining from promotion of norms that it does not itself abide by. (Ibid.) Through introducing deontological ethics into the equation, Manners (ibid., 57–58) draws attention to how the EU, as a normative power, should ‘be reasonable’ in its approach to the international arena and pursue a dialogical approach through ‘rationalisation’, ‘reasoning’ and ‘persuasion’. Finally, the foray into consequentialist ethics underlines the ‘impacts’ and ‘implications’ of the Union’s conduct (ibid., 58). This leads Manners (ibid., 59) to suggest that the EU should ‘do least harm’ in international politics by acting reflexively and fostering the virtues of ‘local ownership’ and ‘positive conditionality’.

Forsberg (2011, 1190), in his contribution, asserts that the normative power literature has traditionally been plagued by terminological inconsistency and thus envisages normative power as a Weberian ideal-type, a perfectly benign actor towards which real-life actors can only aspire – i.e. an actor can only be a normative power to a certain extent. His normative power ideal-type consists of five parts. Firstly, a normative power has a ‘normative identity’ that comes about through its normative constitution (Forsberg 2011, 1191–1192; cf. Manners 2002, 240–242). Secondly, it pursues normative as opposed to, for instance, economic interests. Thirdly, it “behaves according to norms”, especially the norms enshrined in international law, and fosters the tenets of multilateralism in the process. Fourthly, a normative power “uses normative [read soft] means of power”, predominantly persuasion and the evocation of previously made (legal) commitments. Finally, the normative power ideal-type also “achieves

---

1 See Manners’ (2002, 242–244; 2006a, 70–73; 2008, 48–55) list of norms, already discussed at length in Section 3.1.

2 Forsberg (2011, 1199) does a good job of capturing the essence of Max Weber’s concept: “Ideal-types are thus idealized (but not necessarily normatively idealized) descriptions of the concrete features of things that help to compare otherwise fuzzy phenomena with each other. Ideal-types are mental constructs, and in individual cases the features of the ideal-type can be ‘more or less present’. Ideal-types are therefore not true or false: they can only be described as being either helpful or unhelpful as heuristic aids for studying concrete phenomena.” (Ibid.)