

JCMS 20th Anniversary Symposium on the Arrival of Normative Power in Planetary Politics

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For the past two decades, the ‘Normative Power Approach’ (NPA) has affected both academic and policymaking debates on the European Union (EU) in global politics. Since its publication in the *Journal of Common Market Studies* in 2002, [the Normative Power article](#) has remained one of the highest cited and most influential articles in the study of European integration. Importantly, the NPA is one of the very few approaches in EU studies applied outside of the field to China, India, Russia, Japan, USA, Turkey, ASEAN, and other polities.

The NPA helped open up the study of the EU in global politics to normative theory, specifically the use of Critical Social Theory. The approach also helped advance more constitutive understandings of the EU in global politics, specifically through the idea of sharing relations and theory of contested global-local politics. Finally, the approach helps drive a practical theory of EU external actions, specifically normative power as empowering actions in concert that reshape conceptions of normal for the planetary good.

Our [twentieth anniversary symposium](#) develops the ideas of the original article by introducing the arrival of normative power in planetary politics. ‘Planetary politics’ are characterised by truly planetary relations of causality that can only be understood and addressed holistically. In the context of climate emergency, Coronavirus, Russian invasion of Ukraine, and their socio-economic and political consequences, a planetary political approach to understanding the EU is essential.

Nobody can be unaware that, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres put it in November 2022, ‘we are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator’. In June 2023 the EU’s Copernicus Programme reported that the global-mean temperature threshold of 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels was breached for the first time. With projections for global-mean temperature rises in the range 3–5°C by 2100, all policymakers, scholars, and activists must focus on the planetary politics of climate hell.

The intervention article takes this deadly future seriously by arriving at a different way of thinking about planetary politics using the normative power approach. The focus of this approach is on realising planetary symbiosis of ecological homeostasis (stability) and human equality in order to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all. The main problem we all face is not that facts about climate science and consequences of global inequality are unknown, but that the wider understanding of how to address them is shaped by the vice-like grip of ideological common sense. This common sense includes the anthropocentric assumption that the planet is for human consumption, the Eurocentric assumption of the superiority of Western civilisation, and the neoliberal assumption that free market economics and free trade are beneficial for all. To break this grip and imagine otherwise I take the language of *Arrival*, the 2016 speculative fiction film based on Ted Chiang’s 1998 short ‘Story of Your Life’ and use it to think about the normative power approach to planetary politics.

The article uses a critical social theory of agonistic cosmopolitics (i.e. contested global-local politics), rather than antagonistic theories of international relations (i.e. adversarial relations between states) which must decentre both anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism. The EU must understand that it sits in a colonial past and can only have a planetary future – its actions and policies must take account of these simultaneous realities. In policy terms, the ‘European Green Deal’ illustrates the risks of not demonstrating an awareness of the environmental and climate crisis in the context of historical imperialism and industrialism. Without starting from historical and future awareness, European societies will not return to sustainability this century.

Second, the article de-silences both non-human perspectives and non-western voices that are crucial for trying to work around the impasse of contemporary international relations. This means that the way in which the EU, its member states and its transnational actors interact on planet Earth must move towards sharing, non-adversarial, but necessarily agonistic relationships and away from selfish, adversarial and unnecessarily antagonistic international relations. In policy terms, the EU’s implementation of the SDGs illustrates the

risks of top-down external actions rather than more inclusive outside-in/bottom-up approaches that capture wider, non-western, marginalised, and more pluralistic interpretations of normative power and planetary politics.

Third, the article advocates the practical use of normative power as empowering actions in concert that reshape conceptions of normal for the planetary good. This means that the EU, its member states and its transnational actors must rethink for whom are their policies for – for Europeans? For humanity? Or for the planet as a whole? In policy terms, for example, the article highlights that the need to consider the symbiosis of EU external actions to address economic inequality, social injustice, ecological unsustainability, conflict insecurity and political (ir)resilience illustrates the risks of geopolitical antagonistic international relations at the risks of planetary politics.

Finally, the article concludes that for this to be the beginning of the story of the rest of our lives, we need to take seriously the planetary symbiosis of ecological homeostasis and human equality. The arrival of normative power in planetary politics is just the beginning of that story. In policy terms, as simultaneous warnings ‘climate hell’ and ‘extreme inequality’ demonstrate, the EU, its member states and its transnational actors can begin to listen to the sounds and voices of our rapidly heating and iniquitous planet or continue to the end of our story.

Following this ‘arrival’ intervention, three sets of contributors respond from their own normative, theoretical, and empirical perspectives. The first response is from Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2023) on ‘The Third Democratic Transformation: From European to Planetary Politics’ who argues that the advent of planetary politics changes the conditions of possibility for the kind of democratic practices that can best deliver on our planetary-human eco-system found in transformation through the normative power approach. This is followed by Michelle Pace’s (2023) study of the ‘The Construction of EU Normative Power and the Middle East ‘Conflict’ ... 16 Years on’, arguing that Israel and Palestine are ‘co-dependent’ representing a microcosmic image of planetary politics as the space we need to think differently. Finally, Maxine David, Roberta Guerrina, and Katharine Wright (2023) envision ‘Nakedly Normative: A Feminist (Re-)Imagination of Planetary Politics’ using a critical feminist lens to argue that the potential of a normative power approach can only be fulfilled if political and societal actors embrace four ‘Es’: ethic of care, empathy, emancipation and equity.

The contributors bring a diversity of theoretical perspectives but share a commitment to critical social theories that recognise difference, post-/de-colonial theory, and feminist theory in a spirit of pluralism that is essential for the sustaining and enriching of the story of our lives. In educational terms, this means changing the way we teach the EU as if it was distinct from broader historical and planetary politics. In terms of the practice of politics, this demands a holistic, contextual and inclusive understanding of connections between policy-specific parts and the political-ideological whole.

This blog is the introduction to a series that explores the potential of a normative power approach to planetary politics. Authors have applied the approach to varied disciplines and substantive topics. Blogs from this series will be linked here as they are released:

- [Michelle Pace’s blog](#) explores the constructed nature of the EU’s power in the Middle East ‘conflict’ and the way that climate mitigation amplifies social and political fragility in the region.
- [Maxine David, Roberta Guerrina, and Katherine A.M. Wright’s blog](#) challenges the linearity of thinking inherent to ideas of progressive politics and proposes a more emancipatory and pluralist approach to research.



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