

Abstract

The rise of populist parties throughout Europe is fostering the debate on normativism in science. Klaus von Beyme – one of Germany’s leading political scientists of the *Second Generation* after World War II – is an early sceptic of normative thinking in the field of political science. He campaigns for a neoinstitutionalist perspective which combines historical insights and empirical findings to describe and explain political phenomena. Not only in the times of bloc confrontation before 1990 but also in the current debate on populism, Beyme’s hesitation against normative thinking is sharply criticised as a lack of normative commitment to the fundamental values of liberal democracy. Following the concept of *Intellectual History*, this paper analyses Beyme’s scientific writings against the backdrop of biographical and historical contexts. Further, the paper shows how methodological and epistemological assumptions can shape the production of knowledge in scientific discourses.