

## Social Theory II

### Week 4. The Positivism Debate

1. Briefly summarize Popper's conception of the "logic of the social sciences" as presented by Frisby ("The Popper-Adorno Controversy," pp. 109-111). What do you view as the most fundamental, cogent, or interesting criticism that Adorno raises against Popper's conception of the social sciences (Frisby, pp. 111-115)? Do you see any common ground between Popper and Adorno, or are the two men so different in their assumptions about the nature of theory and its relation to the social world that no real dialogue is possible between them?
2. Summarize the various meanings of "positivism" as outlined by Keat in chapter 1 of *The Politics of Social Theory*. To what extent do these varieties of positivism tend to be associated with one another (either logically or as a matter of empirical tendency)? Which varieties or meanings of positivism (if any) do you find defensible from an epistemological standpoint and which do you find indefensible?
3. Discuss the various arguments by which critical theorists like Adorno, Habermas, and others have sought to challenge the notion of "value-freedom" in social theory and research (see Giddens, pp. 17-21 and Keat, chapter 2 for overviews). Summarize and critically evaluate Keat's defense of the notion of value-freedom against these criticisms.
4. Give three or more explicit examples that illustrate Adorno's thesis in "Sociology and Empirical Research" that the methods and results of empirical social research tend to reproduce (and possibly reinforce) dominant features of the specific societies toward which that research is directed and in which it is practiced. In each instance, assess the plausibility of the correspondence that Adorno finds between the forms and findings of empirical research and the character of the larger society. What are the implications of Adorno's observations for the role that empirical research should or might play within a critical sociology?
5. Summarize the ensemble of theoretical and methodological principles that Steinmetz includes within his concept of "methodological positivism." Briefly review the main social and historical forces that Steinmetz identifies as promoting what he describes as the plausibility and ascendance of positivism within U.S. sociology in the post-World War II era. Evaluate Burris's criticisms of the specific sub-components of Steinmetz's argument and select at least one of these on which you would be inclined to defend Steinmetz against Burris's critique and explain how or why.