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Q3(c)

How had Enlightenment contributed to the emergence of sociology?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- How had Enlightenment contributed to the emergence of sociology?
- Keep the answer within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

Enlightenment made institutions worldly, comparable, and criticisable.

Montesquieu, Condorcet, **Rousseau**, and the philosophes prepared comparison, progress, and critique.

Comte turned the programme into a named science.

Revolution and industry supplied the crisis.

Marx, **Durkheim**, and **Weber** are heirs who also criticised Enlightenment optimism.

Introduction

Sociology emerged when industrial and political upheaval made society a problem. The Enlightenment contributed the intellectual permission: reason, comparison, progress, and a worldly account of institutions. It did not, by itself, write the discipline.

Body

What Enlightenment supplied

- Institutions were treated as human products, open to criticism, not as eternal mystery.
- **Montesquieu** compared laws and manners. Condorcet pictured progress through knowledge. Auguste **Comte** later turned that faith into a hierarchy of sciences with sociology at the peak.
- **John Locke** and later utilitarians centred the rights-bearing individual, which made social order a puzzle.
- Jean-Jacques **Rousseau** politicised inequality. **Karl Marx** would invert contract into class, but the question was already public.
- Voltaire and Diderot attacked sacred monopoly, opening secular explanation of crime, worship, and government.

What else was required

- The **French Revolution** showed that order can collapse. The Industrial Revolution showed new classes and cities.

- **Conservative reaction, which Robert Nisbet stressed, also fed sociology:** community, authority, and the sacred as problems.
- **Emile Durkheim** rebuilt moral solidarity. **Max Weber** read Enlightenment rationality as disenchantment and iron cage.

Contribution, stated tightly

- Naturalistic explanation, comparison, progress as a research programme, and the legitimacy of criticising custom.
- Sociology is heir and critic, not a hymn to the eighteenth century.

Flow diagram

Enlightenment -> Reason comparison progress

Enlightenment -> Critique of dogma

Industry revolution -> Sociology

Reason comparison progress -> Sociology

Critique of dogma -> Sociology

Conclusion

Enlightenment reason, comparison, and critique made a science of society thinkable. Industry and revolution made it necessary. **Comte** named the science; **Marx**, **Durkheim**, and **Weber** rebuilt it around capitalism, solidarity, and rationalisation.

Facts & figures

Montesquieu

Compared legal and social types in *The Spirit of the Laws*.

Comte

Named sociology as the last positive science of order and progress.

French Revolution

Showed political order as historical and fragile, a founding shock for social theory.

Nisbet

Argued that community, authority, and the sacred also founded the sociological tradition.