

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q4(a)

"Non-positivist methodology is essential for understanding human behaviour." Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology as Science

Sociology as Science: Science, scientific method and critique; Major theoretical strands of research methodology; Positivism and its critique; Fact value and objectivity; Non-positivist methodologies.

Core demand of the question

- "Non-positivist methodology is essential for understanding human behaviour." Discuss
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Positivism treats behaviour as external facts and laws.

Human behaviour includes meaning, self, talk, and standpoint.

Weber, Mead, Schutz, Garfinkel, Habermas, Oakley, and Harding make non-positivist methods essential.

Counts remain useful; they are not the whole of understanding.

Essential means indispensable, not a ban on measurement.

Introduction

Positivist method, from Auguste Comte to a strict reading of Durkheim, treats behaviour as external facts and laws. Human behaviour is also meaning, motive, and moral claim. Non-positivist methodology is essential for that layer. It is not a licence to invent.

Body**What positivism can still do**

- Emile Durkheim showed that rates of suicide vary with integration and regulation. Counts are not nothing.
- Experimental and survey designs isolate variables. Robert K. Merton's middle-range hypotheses often need that discipline.

Why it is not enough for behaviour

- Max Weber defined social action by the actor's intended meaning. A rate without verstehen is a black box of behaviour.
- Alfred Schutz argued that the life-world already interprets; the sociologist is a second-order reader.
- George Herbert Mead's self is formed in significant symbols. Stimulus-response misses the conversation of the "I" and the "me".
- Harold Garfinkel showed that members accomplish order in talk. Behaviour is method, not only a thing.

- Jurgen Habermas criticised positivism for reducing knowledge to technical control.
- Ann Oakley and Sandra Harding showed that pretended neutrality can hide a standpoint and miss gendered behaviour.

What non-positivist methods add

- Interpretative interview, participant observation, and thick description recover meaning.
- Historical comparison recovers Weberian types of action and domination.
- Standpoint and reflexive notes recover whose behaviour is being coded as normal.

Discussion, not replacement

- Karl Marx is not a laboratory positivist, yet he still demanded material evidence of class. Critical method is also non-positivist in refusing surface appearances.
- Census and NFHS behaviour items still need interpretative work on what "work" or "decision" meant to the respondent.
- Essential means indispensable for understanding, not exclusive of numbers.

Flow diagram

Positivist counts -> Partial map

Non-positivist meaning -> Human behaviour

Weber Mead Schutz -> Non-positivist meaning

Partial map -> Human behaviour

Conclusion

Non-positivist methodology is essential because human behaviour is meaningful, interactional, and power-laden. Weber, Mead, Schutz, Garfinkel, Habermas, Oakley, and Harding name that object. Durkheim's evidence rule remains. Combine methods; do not reduce persons to things.

Facts & figures

Weber

Social action is behaviour oriented to others and defined by intended meaning.

Mead

The self arises in communication; behaviour is not a pre-social reflex.

Garfinkel

Ethnomethodology: members' methods produce the sense of orderly fact.

Harding

Unexamined standpoint is a scientific failure, not a guarantee of objectivity.