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Q4(a)

Examine Max Weber's method of maintaining objectivity in social research.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · 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

- Examine **Max Weber's** method of maintaining objectivity in social research
- Keep the examination within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Weber:** values select problems; proof stays value-disciplined.

Ideal types make comparison public and one-sided on purpose.

Verstehen reconstructs meaning and must meet causal checks.

Marx, Mead, Oakley, and Harding name remaining standpoint problems.

Objectivity is a method of accountability, not a view from nowhere.

Introduction

Max Weber's method of objectivity is a craft, not a claim that the sociologist is a machine. He split the choice of problems from the rules of proof, and he built tools-ideal types, **verstehen**, and value-discipline-to keep the account of action checkable.

Body**Value-relevance and value-freedom**

- Cultural values select what is worth knowing. That is inevitable in historical sciences.
- Once the question is set, the demonstration must not insert a party sermon. This is **value-freedom** as method.
- Objectivity is adequacy to the object and to logical standards, not emptiness of the person.

Ideal type

- An **ideal type** is a one-sided accentuation of traits for comparison, such as bureaucracy or the spirit of capitalism.
- It is not an average, not a moral ideal, and not a hypothesis by itself.
- **Objectivity here is clarity:** others can see what was accentuated and dispute the fit of a case.

Verstehen as controlled understanding

- Social action is defined by intended meaning. Observation without interpretation misses the object.

- **Verstehen** is not empathy as proof. Motives are reconstructed and then checked against documents, sequences, and comparison.
- Causal adequacy and adequacy at the level of meaning must go together.

Comparison and historical method

- Objectivity grows from contrasting cases, as in the studies of religion and domination, not from a single nation's proverb.
- Probability, not law in **Durkheim**'s strongest sense, is the usual form of claim.

Examination of limits

- **Karl Marx** argued that a class location organises vision; **Weber** underplayed ideology as systematically distorted knowledge.
- George Herbert Mead and later interactionists show the researcher inside the same symbol world.
- **Ann Oakley and Sandra Harding**: the interview and standpoint are not washed out by an **ideal type**.
- **Emile Durkheim** feared prenotions; **Weber** kept meaning in, which is a different objectivity, not a lesser one.
- Robert K. Merton's organised scepticism is an institutional support **Weber** assumed in the scholarly community.

What to keep

- Name the values that chose the problem.
- State the type.
- Show the evidence for meaning and for cause.
- Allow revision.

Flow diagram

Value-relevance -> Question
Question -> Ideal type
Question -> Checked verstehen
Ideal type -> Objectivity as clarity
Checked verstehen -> Objectivity as clarity
Value-freedom in proof -> Objectivity as clarity

Conclusion

Weber maintains objectivity by value-relevant questions, value-disciplined proof, ideal types, and checked **verstehen**. The method is stronger than pretended neutrality and weaker if class, gender, and interaction are ignored. Use his craft; do not treat it as a finished shield.

Facts & figures

Value-freedom

Weber's rule that demonstration should not substitute evaluation for evidence.

Ideal type

A constructed accentuation used to measure historical cases.

Verstehen

Interpretative understanding of intended meaning in social action.

Adequacy of meaning

Weber: an explanation must make sense at the level of motive as well as of sequence.

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