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Q1(b)

What is 'value-free sociology'? Clarify

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 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

- What is 'value-free sociology'? Clarify
- Keep the clarification within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Value-free sociology is Weber's split:** values choose questions; proof stays disciplined.

It is not Comte's moral church, not Marx's fusion of theory and practice, not a view from nowhere.

Durkheim's files, Mead's interaction, and Harding's standpoint show the strain.

- **Clarify:** a rule of demonstration, not a ban on moral topics.

Introduction

Value-free sociology, in Max Weber's sense, is not a sociologist without values. It is a rule of demonstration: once the problem is chosen, the proof should not smuggle a moral verdict into the table.

Body**Weber's clarification**

- **Value-relevance** selects the question from cultural concerns. **Value-freedom** binds the demonstration to evidence and ideal-typical clarity.
- The lecture hall should not be a party pulpit. The citizen may still take a stand after the account.

What it is not

- It is not Auguste Comte's priesthood of humanity, which mixed science with a moral church.
- It is not Karl Marx's unity of theory and practice, which makes critique of class a task of knowledge.
- It is not pretended nowhere. Sandra Harding's strong objectivity names standpoint as a control.

Why the slogan is hard

- **Emile Durkheim's** "treat social facts as things" already used official morals in the files.
- George Herbert Mead and Ann Oakley show that inquiry is a social relation.
- **Robert K. Merton's ethos of organised scepticism is a cousin:** institutionalised doubt, not emptiness of values.

Flow diagram

Value-relevance -> Problem

Problem -> Evidence demonstration

Evidence demonstration -> Value-free proof

Citizen stand -> After the account

Conclusion

Value-free sociology is **Weber's** discipline of proof after a value-relevant choice of problem. Clarify it as a method rule, not as a heartless or valueless person, and not as a ban on studying injustice.

Facts & figures

Value-relevance

Weber: cultural values select what is worth knowing.

Value-freedom

Weber: demonstration must not substitute a party line for evidence.

Ideal type

A clarifying construct, not a moral ideal of how people should live.

Harding

Unnamed values are a bias; naming them can strengthen objectivity.

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