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Q1(b)

Distinguish between fact and value in Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Distinguish between fact and value in **Weber's** Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
- Keep the distinction within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Weber split **value-relevance** of the problem from value-discipline in proof.

The question of modern capitalism is culturally selected.

The claimed fact is **elective affinity** with inner-worldly asceticism.

Ideal types organise the comparison.

The book does not preach Calvinism as a duty.

Introduction

In The Protestant Ethic, **Max Weber** separated the values that select a historical problem from the facts he claimed to demonstrate. The book is a test case of that distinction, not a sermon for Calvinism.

Body

Value-relevance

- **Weber** cared about the uniqueness of modern rational capitalism. That interest is value-relevant: a cultural problem of his age.
- He did not pretend that the choice of question was value-free.

Facts he argued

- **Elective affinity** between inner-worldly asceticism, especially Calvinist **calling**, and a methodical spirit of accumulation.
- Correlation is historical and meaningful, not a laboratory law.
- **He used ideal types:** the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism are constructs for comparison.

Value-freedom in demonstration

- The essay does not say that capitalism is good or that Protestants should return.

- **Later chapters and his other work admit multiple causes:** law, cities, and calculable state.

The distinction inside the text

- **Fact:** a documented **elective affinity**.
- **Value:** why that affinity matters to us as moderns, which is outside the proof.

Flow diagram

Value-relevance question -> Protestant Ethic

Protestant Ethic -> Elective affinity as claimed fact

Value-freedom in proof -> Elective affinity as claimed fact

Sermon -> Not the method

Conclusion

Weber's book distinguishes **value-relevance** in choosing the riddle of capitalism from factual demonstration of an **elective affinity**. The Protestant Ethic is evidence-led interpretation, not a moral tract.

Facts & figures

Value-relevance

Values select the historical problem; they should not write the answer.

Elective affinity

Weber's term for a meaningful historical fit, not a simple cause.

Ideal type

The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism as constructed yardsticks.

Calling

Lutheran and Calvinist Beruf as a documented religious idea tied to methodical work.