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Q1(b)

Is sociology a value-free science ? Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · 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

- Is sociology a value-free science? Discuss
- Keep the discussion within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Weber**: value-relevance in questions; value-discipline in proof.

Marx, **Gouldner**, and **Harding** reject a personless science.

- **Oakley**: the interview is already a moral relation.

Census categories carry values into counts.

- **Verdict**: not value-free; yes to disciplined demonstration.

Introduction

Value-freedom would mean that the sociologist's morals do not decide the proof. **Max Weber** split value-relevance in choosing a problem from value-discipline in demonstration. Sociology can be value-disciplined. It is not a view from nowhere.

Body**The Weberian answer**

- Problems are selected because they matter to a culture. That is not a sin.
- Ideal types and evidence must not preach. The demonstration aims at adequacy of meaning and causal check.

Why a hard no

- **Karl Marx** treated knowledge as tied to class standpoint. Alvin **Gouldner** later called value-free sociology a myth of the academic marketplace.
- Sandra **Harding**'s strong objectivity asks that standpoint be named. Hidden values are bias.
- Ann Oakley showed the interview as a moral relation, not a neutral pipe.

A working discuss

- Positivist counting still encodes categories, as **Census** caste and work cells show.
- Public sociology, after Michael **Burawoy**, argues for a conversation of values with publics, not a pretence of none.

Verdict

- Not value-free as a personless machine.

- Yes to value-discipline in method.

Flow diagram

Values -> Problem choice

Problem choice -> Disciplined demonstration

Value-free myth -> Hides standpoint

Disciplined demonstration -> Sociology as science

Conclusion

Sociology is not value-free in problem choice or in the researcher's location. It can still bind claims to evidence in **Weber's** sense. **Harding** and **Gouldner** are right against the myth. The honest science names values and then tests.

Facts & figures

Weber

Value-relevance versus value-freedom in the demonstration of claims.

Gouldner

Criticised value-free sociology as an ideology of the profession.

Harding

Strong objectivity: making standpoint explicit can improve, not ruin, science.

Burawoy

Public sociology: a dialogue of values with extra-academic publics.

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