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Q5(a)

In what way is the scope of sociology unique? Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- **State what "scope" means:** the distinctive object of sociology
- Show uniqueness versus psychology, economics, history and common sense
- Name Comte, **Durkheim**, Simmel or Giddens on the social as such
- Avoid listing chapter headings of a textbook

Revision summary

Scope means the distinctive object and questions of a discipline.

Sociology's object is social relationships, institutions and emergent **social facts**.

Durkheim's sui generis **social facts** and Simmel's **forms of interaction** name that uniqueness.

Contrast with psychology, economics, history and common sense clarifies the vantage.

Topics such as family or class are shared; the relational cut is not.

Indian events can be shared objects; sociology asks how groups and institutions make them.

Introduction

The scope of a discipline is the set of questions it can legitimately ask and the kind of object it treats as real. Sociology's uniqueness is not that it alone studies human beings. Psychology, economics, political science and history do that too. Sociology is unique in taking **social relationships, institutions and emergent social facts** as its centre, rather than the isolated mind, the market choice, the office of the state, or the unique event.

Body**The social as a distinctive object**

- **Auguste Comte claimed a new science of society. Emile Durkheim made the claim precise:** **social facts** are external, constraining and general, and they are not reducible to individual psychology. Suicide rates, a currency, a language, or a caste rule exist as a reality sui generis. Georg Simmel located the unique scope in the **forms of interaction**-conflict, exchange, sociability-that can be compared across contents. Anthony Giddens later said that sociology studies the constitution of society: how structure is produced in action and how action is made possible by structure.

This scope includes family, class, religion, law, education, work, gender and social change, but the uniqueness is the relational question: how are these patterned, reproduced and transformed together? C. Wright Mills's **sociological imagination** is a method of using that scope, linking biography to history.

Uniqueness by contrast

Psychology asks about cognition and personality; sociology asks how those are socially distributed and labelled. Economics often models a rational chooser; economic sociology, after Weber and later Granovetter, puts choice back into networks and meanings. History narrates unique sequences; sociology compares types, though historical sociology shares the archive. Common sense naturalises the same world that sociology treats as constructed. The unique scope is therefore a vantage, not a fence around a few topics. In India, a riot, a marriage or a factory strike can be studied by many disciplines; sociology's cut is group relations, institutions and the production of order and conflict.

Flow diagram

Human life -> Psychology mind
Human life -> Economics choice
Human life -> History unique event
Human life -> Sociology relations institutions
Sociology relations institutions -> Social facts forms

Conclusion

Sociology is unique because it studies society as a level of reality made of relations and institutions, not because it owns a list of chapters. Durkheim's social facts and Simmel's forms still name that scope. Other sciences overlap the terrain; they do not replace the relational question.

Facts & figures

Social facts

Durkheim: ways of acting that are external and constraining, to be explained by other social facts.

Forms of interaction

Simmel's claim that sociology studies recurring forms such as conflict and exchange across different contents.

Sociological imagination

Mills: the quality of mind that links personal biography to public social structure.