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Q1(a)

What is common sense? How are common knowledge and sociology related to each other? 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

- Define common sense as everyday, untested knowledge
- Show how sociology is related to common knowledge without being identical to it
- Contrast method, evidence and the questioning of the taken-for-granted
- Use a named theorist and one Indian illustration

Revision summary

Common sense is everyday, untested knowledge that naturalises custom and blame.

Sociology is related to it because it studies the same lifeworld of meanings.

It differs by using systematic concepts, comparison and evidence.

Durkheim on suicide and Mills's sociological imagination show private acts as public patterns.

Indian illustrations such as dowry as custom versus patriarchy and property make the contrast concrete.

The task is interrogation of common knowledge, not contempt for ordinary people.

Introduction

Common sense is the stock of everyday beliefs that people treat as obvious without asking how those beliefs were produced, or whose interest they serve. Sociology is the systematic study of social relationships, using concepts, comparison and evidence rather than proverb. Auguste Comte named the discipline as a science of society, and **Emile Durkheim** insisted that social facts must be treated as things, not as household wisdom. The two kinds of knowledge are related, but they are not the same.

Body**Common sense as unexamined knowledge**

Common knowledge is practical, local and morally loaded. It tells a person how to greet an elder, whom to marry, and why poverty is "laziness" or "fate". Alfred Schutz called this the taken-for-granted lifeworld: we act first and theorise later. Peter Berger argued that sociology begins by making that lifeworld strange. C. Wright Mills's sociological imagination asks how a private trouble is also a public issue. Common sense rarely makes that move. It naturalises caste endogamy, women's unpaid care, or the idea that a government job is the only respectable work.

How sociology is related, and how it differs

Sociology does not float above ordinary life. It starts from common knowledge, because that is where meanings live. **Max Weber**'s interpretative method takes actors' reasons seriously. What sociology adds is method. It compares cases, names structures, and allows evidence to embarrass a proverb. **Durkheim**'s study of suicide showed that a highly personal act varies with religion, family and crisis, which no folk saying about "weak character" can explain. **Karl Marx** treated "hard work brings success" as ideology when property and class set the odds. Robert Merton distinguished manifest functions that people announce from latent functions they do not see.

In India, common sense may say that dowry is custom. A sociological account follows property, hypergamy and the marriage market, as Uma Chakravarti does with Brahmanical patriarchy. Common knowledge is the raw material; sociology is its disciplined interrogation.

Flow diagram

Common sense -> Taken-for-granted lifeworld
Sociology -> Concepts comparison evidence
Common sense -> Sociology
Sociology -> Questions the obvious
Questions the obvious -> Structure and public issues

Conclusion

Common sense and sociology share the same social world, but only sociology treats that world as a problem to be explained. The examiner wants the distinction of method, not a sneer at ordinary people. Good sociology respects everyday meaning and then tests it against structure and evidence.

Facts & figures

Durkheim on social facts

Social facts are ways of acting that constrain the individual from outside. They cannot be read off common-sense motives alone.

Mills's sociological imagination

The habit of linking personal troubles to public issues and to history, which common sense typically does not do.

Dowry as illustration

Treated in common talk as custom or greed; treated in sociology as property, hypergamy and gendered kinship.