

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q1(b)

What is the relationship (similarities and differences) between sociology and history in terms of their area of study and methodology? Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- State similarities of sociology and history in subject matter
- **Contrast area of study:** unique events versus recurrent patterns
- **Contrast methodology:** archive and narrative versus comparison, survey and theory
- Name **Weber**, **Marx** or a historical sociologist

Revision summary

Sociology and history both study power, class, belief and the state in time.

Marx and **Weber** already worked historically inside social theory.

History typically takes unique events and archival narrative.

Sociology typically takes recurrent relations and comparative or survey methods.

Windelband's idiographic-nomothetic contrast still organises the syllabus point.

Historical sociology shows the overlap without erasing the division of labour.

Introduction

Sociology and history both study human beings in society, and both refuse to treat the present as a natural fact. **Karl Marx** made history the method of social theory when he tracked modes of production. **Max Weber** wrote historical sociology of religion, bureaucracy and the city. The resemblance is real. The difference lies in what each discipline treats as its typical object and in the methods it trusts.

Body**Similarities of area**

Both ask how power, belief, class and the state have been made. A caste census, a famine, or the making of a middle class is at once a historical episode and a sociological structure. Marc Bloch's history of feudal society and **Weber's** The Protestant Ethic sit on the same shelf. C. Wright Mills said that sociology without history is empty, and history without sociology is blind. The Annales school and later historical sociologists such as Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol used archives to explain revolutions and agrarian class.

Differences of area and method

- **History classically takes the unique event:** a reign, a war, a statute, a particular famine year. Wilhelm Windelband called this the idiographic interest. Sociology classically seeks types and regularities: bureaucracy, anomie, patriarchy, the informal sector. That is the nomothetic interest. The historian's area is often a time and a place with proper names. The sociologist's area is a set of relations that may recur in other times and places.

Method follows that split, though practice overlaps. History leans on archives, chronicles and source criticism, then narrates sequence. Sociology uses comparison, survey, ethnography and explicit theory. **Durkheim** wanted social facts measured like things. **Weber** combined both: historical cases become ideal types, neither a full chronicle nor a law of physics. In India, the same peasant movement can be a narrative of 1857 or a type of agrarian mobilisation, as A. R. Desai and later subaltern historians differently did. Historical sociology blurs the line; the examination distinction still holds: situated sequence versus structured comparison.

Flow diagram

Society in time -> History
Society in time -> Sociology
History -> Unique event archive narrative
Sociology -> Types comparison theory
Weber historical sociology -> History
Weber historical sociology -> Sociology

Conclusion

The two disciplines meet in the study of social life over time. They part in typical object and typical method: the unique, sourced event versus the comparable pattern. **Weber's** historical sociology is the best reminder that the border is a division of labour, not a wall.

Facts & figures

Idiographic versus nomothetic

Windelband's labels: history as the unique case, sociology as the search for types and regularities.

Weber's historical sociology

Ideal types built from historical cases of religion, domination and rationalisation, not from laboratory laws.

Mills on history and biography

Sociology needs history; history needs a sense of social structure, or each remains incomplete.