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Section—I

20 Marks Questions - 500-600 words Each

Q. - Critically discuss Auguste Comte's ideas on the nature of Sociology.

ANS.- Auguste Comte (1798–1857), often regarded as the "Father of Sociology," was the first thinker to systematically conceptualize Sociology as a scientific discipline. His ideas laid the foundation for modern sociological thought and influenced the development of positivism as a philosophical approach. Comte believed that Sociology should be the science of society, governed by scientific laws similar to those in natural sciences. Although his contributions are groundbreaking, they have also been subject to critical evaluation.

Sociology as a Positive Science

Comte argued that Sociology should follow the methods of natural sciences and rely only on empirical observation, classification, and scientific reasoning. He maintained that society operates according to universal laws that can be studied objectively. This scientific orientation formed the basis of his doctrine of **positivism**, which rejected metaphysical explanations.

According to Comte, the "positive stage" of knowledge emphasizes observation, comparison, and experimentation. He believed that Sociology, by adopting this approach, could produce reliable knowledge about social phenomena, enabling prediction and social progress. This idea was significant in giving Sociology a scientific identity distinct from philosophy, religion, and speculative thought.

However, critics point out that human societies are dynamic and subjective, unlike the largely predictable phenomena of natural sciences. Human emotions, values, meanings, and cultural variations cannot always be measured through purely scientific methods. Hence, Comte's insistence on a strict positivist methodology is often considered reductionist and overly rigid.

Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences

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Comte proposed a hierarchy of sciences, beginning with Mathematics, followed by Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and culminating in Sociology. He argued that Sociology was the "Queen of the Sciences" because it dealt with the most complex phenomenon—human society.

He believed that Sociology depends on the knowledge generated by earlier sciences, making it the final and most advanced discipline. This hierarchical view contributed to establishing Sociology as a legitimate academic field.

However, critics argue that the hierarchy is simplistic and ignores the interrelationships between different branches of knowledge. Modern scientific developments show that disciplines such as Psychology, Economics, and Anthropology cannot simply be placed on a linear scale. Knowledge today is interdisciplinary, not hierarchical as Comte assumed.

Social Statics and Social Dynamics

Comte divided Sociology into two branches:

- **Social Statics**, which studies the forces that maintain social order and stability.
- **Social Dynamics**, which examines social change, evolution, and progress.

This distinction is one of Comte's important contributions as it provided a structural framework for studying both continuity and transformation in society. Many later sociologists, including Spencer, Durkheim, and Parsons, adopted similar frameworks.

However, critics argue that Comte had a narrow and linear view of progress, assuming society always evolves in one direction—from simple to advanced. Modern sociologists recognize that social change is multi-directional, cyclical, and influenced by power, resistance, and conflict—factors underemphasized by Comte.

A Secular Religion of Humanity

Comte believed that Sociology should not only explain society but also guide moral progress. He proposed a "Religion of Humanity," with Sociologists acting as moral leaders. While his intentions were to replace theological authority with rational ethics, critics view this idea as quasi-religious and authoritarian. The concept contradicts his own positivist principle of separating facts from value judgments.

Conclusion

Comte's ideas played a crucial role in establishing Sociology as a distinct scientific discipline. His adherence to positivism, emphasis on empirical study, and concepts of social statics and dynamics created a foundational framework for later thinkers. However, his rigid scientific approach, linear view of progress, and quasi-religious vision have been widely criticized. Despite limitations, Comte remains a central figure whose ideas continue to influence sociological inquiry and debate.

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Q. - How do you distinguish between commonsense knowledge and sociological data ? Discuss.

ANS.- In everyday life, human beings interpret society through intuitions, direct experience, cultural learning, and personal beliefs. This creates what is termed **commonsense knowledge**, which helps individuals make sense of routine interactions. However, sociology moves beyond personal impressions and seeks a systematic, objective, and evidence-based understanding of social behavior and institutions. The difference between commonsense and sociological data is therefore central to the scientific nature of sociology as a discipline.

1. Meaning of Commonsense Knowledge

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Commonsense knowledge refers to the ideas, assumptions, beliefs, and opinions that individuals accumulate through daily life experience. This knowledge emerges from conversations, observation, tradition, upbringing, or the general wisdom of society. It is often passed from one generation to another and reflects cultural understanding.
Common examples include ideas such as:

- "Parents always know what is best for children."
- "Women are more emotional than men."
- "Poor people are poor because they do not work hard."

Such statements may appear true to many people, but they rely heavily on subjective interpretation rather than factual verification. Commonsense knowledge is practical, quick to use, and often accurate for everyday purposes, but it is not reliable enough for academic or scientific inquiry.

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2. Limitations of Commonsense Knowledge

Despite being useful in daily life, commonsense has several limitations:

- It is **unexamined** and rarely challenged.
- It is based on **limited personal experience** rather than large-scale evidence.
- It may reflect **biases, stereotypes, and prejudices** rooted in society.
- It differs across cultures, regions, and historical periods, making it inconsistent.

For example, older generations may view working women as neglecting family, while newer generations celebrate their independence. Thus, commonsense changes with context and cannot provide universal understanding.

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3. Meaning of Sociological Data

Sociological data refers to information collected using scientific research methods to understand social reality. These methods may include:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Participant observation
- Field studies
- Statistical analysis
- Content analysis
- Historical research

Sociological data is therefore **systematic, verifiable, and objective**. It does not rely on personal belief but on careful observation, measurement, and interpretation.
For instance, instead of assuming why students quit school, sociologists may conduct surveys across regions, interview students, analyze household income, and compare school infrastructure to produce reliable conclusions.

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4. Characteristics of Sociological Data

Sociological data is distinct from commonsense because it is:

- **Empirical:** based on evidence rather than belief.
- **Systematic:** collected through planned research steps.
- **Objective:** independent of personal opinion or prejudice.
- **Verifiable:** findings can be tested or reproduced by other researchers.
- **Generalizable:** applicable beyond the immediate group or individual.

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5. Example of Contrast

A commonsense idea might state: "Divorce rates are rising because people no longer value marriage." Sociology, however, would examine multiple possible factors such as educational levels, changing gender roles, urbanization, laws favoring easier divorce, economic independence of women, and shifting personal values. Data collection and analysis would support or reject these assumptions.

Conclusion

In summary, commonsense knowledge relies heavily on personal experience, cultural norms, and intuition. While useful for everyday living, it is subjective and prone to bias. Sociological data, on the other hand, relies on disciplined research methods, critical evaluation, and factual evidence. Sociology challenges commonly held beliefs and seeks deeper understanding of human behavior and society. The distinction ensures sociology remains a scientific and credible discipline capable of uncovering patterns and explanations that commonsense alone cannot provide.

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Q. - What is idealism ? Discuss George Berkeley's views on idealist philosophy.

ANS.- Introduction

Idealism is one of the major schools of philosophical thought that emphasizes the primacy of the mind, consciousness, or ideas over physical matter. In simple terms, idealism asserts that reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual in nature. Instead of seeing the world as composed of material objects that exist independently, idealism argues that the existence of anything depends on perception or thought. This school of thought stands in contrast to materialism, which believes that matter is the foundation of reality. Among the idealists, George Berkeley (1685–1753) is one of the most well-known philosophers who presented a unique and radical form of idealism that came to be known as subjective idealism.

Understanding Idealism

Idealism as a philosophical position proposes that:

- Reality is rooted in ideas rather than material objects.
- The external world does not exist independently of the mind.
- Knowledge is possible only through the mental processes and perceptions.

Various thinkers—such as Plato, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel—developed distinct versions of idealism throughout history. However, Berkeley is particularly important for completely denying the existence of matter and asserting that only minds and ideas exist.

George Berkeley's Idealist Philosophy

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