

CUET · SOCIOLOGY · CLASS XI · CODE 326

Introducing Western Sociologists

CUET unit: Introducing Western Sociologists (Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber)

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Snapshot

- Sociology was born in 19th-century Western Europe as a response to three transformative revolutions: the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution.
- The classical trinity — Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber — laid the foundation of sociology as a distinct discipline.
- Marx emphasised material conditions, modes of production, class struggle and revolution as the engines of social change.
- Durkheim sought to establish sociology as an empirical science of "social facts," analysing solidarity (mechanical vs organic) and collective life.
- Weber developed interpretive sociology, the methodology of the "ideal type," "value neutrality," and analysed authority and bureaucracy.
- CUET frequently tests definitions (alienation, social fact, ideal type), pairing of thinker-concept, and the features of bureaucracy.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Sociology is called the "child of the age of revolution" — it emerged after three centuries of revolutionary change in Western Europe and was an attempt to make sense of the new modern world (NCERT §Intro, p. 65). Three transformative processes converged to produce modernity: the **Enlightenment** (the age of reason), the **French Revolution** (political sovereignty for the citizen and the nation-state), and the **Industrial Revolution** (mass manufacture and the factory system). These three are not interchangeable: the Enlightenment gave reason, the French Revolution gave political rights, and the Industrial Revolution gave a new economic order. CUET items frequently test which of these gave what.

The **Enlightenment** (late 17th–18th centuries) placed the human being at the centre of the universe and made rational thought its defining feature; only those who could think and reason were considered fully human (NCERT §Enlightenment, p. 66). The Enlightenment displaced nature, religion and divine acts and produced attitudes that are secular, scientific and humanistic. The **French Revolution (1789)** announced political sovereignty for individuals and nation-states; the Declaration of Human Rights asserted equality of citizens and freed peasants and serfs from feudal bonds. The watchwords

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of the modern state — **liberty, equality, fraternity** — emerged from the French Revolution; a clear separation was built between the public realm of the state and the private realm of the household (NCERT §French Revolution, p. 66). The **Industrial Revolution** began in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; it had two aspects — systematic application of science and technology to production, and new ways of organising labour and markets. New machines (the Spinning Jenny) and new power sources (the steam engine) facilitated factory production; modern industry made the urban dominate the rural and produced cities with rich and poor coexisting in close proximity (NCERT §Industrial Revolution, p. 67). Sociology emerged as "the science of the new industrial society," responding to the demand for new knowledge generated by modern governance.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German social thinker — not merely a "philosopher" — who advocated the end of oppression through scientific socialism. Marx argued that human society had progressed through stages — primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism — with socialism as the next stage (NCERT §Karl Marx, p. 68). In capitalist society, human beings experience **alienation** at four levels: from nature, from other human beings, from the fruits of their labour, and from their own nature or self (NCERT §Karl Marx, p. 69). Marx's **mode of production** has two levels: the **base** (productive forces + production relations = the economic base) and the **superstructure** (institutions like religion, law, art, literature, beliefs). **Productive forces** are the means and factors of production — land, labour, technology, energy sources; **production relations** are the economic relationships and property relations based on ownership and control of the means of production (NCERT §Karl Marx, p. 69). Marx argued that material life shapes ideas, not the other way round — the institutions and ideologies of the superstructure originate from the economic base (NCERT §Class Struggle, p. 70).

Class struggle is the major driving force of historical change in Marx's account. Classes are formed through historical transformations in production. **The Communist Manifesto** (with Engels) opens with the declaration: "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle" (NCERT §Class Struggle, pp. 70–71). The pairs of opposing classes through history are: **freeman/slave, patrician/plebeian, lord/serf, guild-master/journeyman, bourgeoisie/working class** (NCERT p. 71). Class conflict requires **class consciousness** — subjective awareness by a class of its interests and identities. Revolutions occur only through political mobilisation, not automatically from economic processes — "even when two classes are objectively opposed to each other, they do not automatically engage in conflict" (NCERT §Class Struggle, pp. 71–72). The ruling class promotes a **dominant ideology** that justifies its domination; dominant ideologies can be challenged by rival worldviews.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was the founder of sociology as a formal discipline; he became the first Professor of Sociology in Paris (1913). His major works include **Division of Labour in Society** (1893), **Rules of Sociological Method** (1895), **Suicide** (1897), and **The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life** (1912) (NCERT §Durkheim

box, p. 72). For Durkheim, **society** is a **social fact** that exists as a moral community over and above the individual; the social is found in codes of conduct imposed by collective agreement (NCERT §Durkheim, p. 73). Durkheim's sociology has two defining features: (i) its subject matter — **social facts** — differs from the subject matter of the natural sciences and concerns the "emergent" level of collective life; and (ii) it must be an **empirical discipline** built on the systematic collection of data (NCERT §Durkheim's Vision, pp. 73–74). **Suicide** (1897) showed that even individual acts produce aggregate patterns (the rate of suicide) that constitute social facts. **Social facts** are like things — external to the individual, constraining the individual, and general across a society; examples include law, education, religion, beliefs, feelings, and collective practices (NCERT p. 74).

Division of Labour in Society classified societies by their type of solidarity. **Mechanical solidarity** characterises primitive, small-population societies where members are similar to each other in beliefs, occupation and life-experience; the laws of such societies are **repressive** — they punish wrongdoers as a form of collective revenge. **Organic solidarity** characterises modern, large-population societies that are heterogeneous and held together by interdependence — different specialised groups depend on each other's work; the laws of such societies are **restitutive** — they aim to repair the wrong done rather than punish (NCERT §Division of Labour, pp. 74–75). The intuitive temptation is to associate "mechanical" with the factory and "organic" with the village — but Durkheim's usage is the opposite, and this is one of the most-tested NCERT trap points.

Max Weber (1864–1920) was a German thinker who developed the **interpretive sociology** of social action and analysed rationalisation, religion, and authority. His major works include **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism** (1904/1930) and **Economy and Society** (NCERT §Weber box, p. 76). Weber's sociology aims at **interpretive understanding of social action** — recovering the subjective meanings that actors attach to their behaviour through "empathetic understanding" or **verstehen** (NCERT §Weber, pp. 77–78). **Value neutrality** requires the sociologist to record subjective values neutrally without being affected by personal beliefs; Weber called this exercising an "iron will" (NCERT §Weber, p. 78). The **ideal type** is a logically consistent conceptual model of a social phenomenon that highlights its most significant characteristics; it is a conceptual tool, not an exact reproduction of reality, and may exaggerate some features and ignore others (NCERT §Weber, pp. 78–79).

Weber used the ideal type to analyse **three types of authority**: **traditional** (based on custom and precedent), **charismatic** (based on a divine source or "gift of grace"), and **rational-legal** (based on legal demarcation of office, epitomised by bureaucracy) (NCERT §Weber, p. 79). **Bureaucracy** is the modern form of rational-legal authority and is premised on the separation of the public from the domestic world. Weber listed **five features of bureaucratic authority**: (i) Functioning of Officials (fixed jurisdiction, rules); (ii) Hierarchical Ordering of Positions; (iii) Reliance on Written Documents (files);

(iv) Office Management (trained personnel); (v) Conduct in Office (rules separating public from private behaviour) (NCERT §Bureaucracy, pp. 79–80).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Alienation	A process in capitalist society by which human beings are separated and distanced from nature, other human beings, their work and its product, and their own nature or self	80
Enlightenment	18th-century European period when philosophers rejected religious supremacy, established reason as the means to truth, and the human being as the sole bearer of reason	80
Social Fact	Aspects of social reality related to collective patterns of behaviour and beliefs, not created by individuals but exerting pressure on them	80
Mode of Production	A system of material production persisting over a long period; distinguished by its means of production and relations of production	81
Office (Weberian)	A public post or position of impersonal and formal authority with specified powers and responsibilities; has a separate existence independent of the appointee	81
Mechanical Solidarity	Solidarity founded on the similarity of individual members, found in small primitive societies with repressive laws	75
Organic Solidarity	Solidarity based on heterogeneity and interdependence, found in large modern societies with restitutive laws	75
Ideal Type	A logically consistent conceptual model of a social phenomenon that highlights its most significant characteristics	78–79
Value Neutrality	The objectivity required of social scientists to neutrally record subjective values without being affected by their own opinions	78
Class Consciousness	Subjective awareness by a class of its interests and identities, necessary for class conflict and revolution	71–72
Base / Economic base	Productive forces + production relations = the economic foundation of society in Marx's model	69
Superstructure	Non-economic institutions (religion, law, art, literature, beliefs) that rest on the economic base	69
Productive forces	Land, labour, technology and energy sources used in production	69
Production relations	Property relations / ownership and control of means of production	69
Verstehen	Empathetic understanding — Weber's method for grasping subjective meaning	77

Term	Definition	Page
Traditional authority	Authority based on custom and precedent	79
Charismatic authority	Authority based on a "gift of grace" / extraordinary personal qualities	79
Rational-legal authority	Authority based on legal demarcation; bureaucracy is its epitome	79
Bureaucracy	Modern impersonal organisation with hierarchy, rules, written files	79
Repressive law	Punishment-oriented law characteristic of mechanical solidarity	75
Restitutive law	Reparation-oriented law characteristic of organic solidarity	75
Bourgeoisie / proletariat	Capitalist/working-class pair in Marx's Communist Manifesto	71
Dominant ideology	Ruling-class worldview that justifies its rule; can be challenged by rival ideologies	72
Empirical discipline	Discipline grounded in systematic collection of factual data — Durkheim's prescription for sociology	73–74

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **The base-superstructure model (Marx):** economic base (productive forces + production relations) supports the superstructure (religion, law, art, literature, beliefs) (NCERT p. 69–70).
- **Stages of human society (Marx):** primitive communism → slavery → feudalism → capitalism → (socialism) (NCERT p. 68).
- **Pairs of opposing classes through history (Marx, Communist Manifesto):** freeman/slave; patrician/plebeian; lord/serf; guild-master/journeyman; bourgeoisie/working class (NCERT p. 71).
- **Mechanical vs Organic Solidarity table (Durkheim):** primitive vs modern; similarity vs heterogeneity; repressive vs restitutive laws (NCERT pp. 74–75).
- **Weber's three types of authority:** traditional / charismatic / rational-legal (bureaucracy) (NCERT p. 79).
- **Five features of bureaucracy (Weber):** Functioning of Officials, Hierarchical Ordering, Written Documents, Office Management, Conduct in Office (NCERT pp. 79–80).
- **The three revolutions diagram:** Enlightenment (reason) + French Revolution (political sovereignty) + Industrial Revolution (mass production) = modernity → sociology (p. 65).
- **Marx's revolution prerequisites:** objective class opposition + class consciousness + political mobilisation = revolution (pp. 71–72).

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Marx, Durkheim, and Weber are the classical trinity — don't confuse Auguste Comte (mentioned in Chapter 1) with these three. Durkheim is the founder of sociology as a **formal discipline**; Comte coined the term "sociology."
- **Mechanical = primitive, repressive laws; Organic = modern, restitutive laws.** Students often reverse this because "mechanical" intuitively sounds modern/ industrial — it is not.
- The **base** in Marx's model is **economic** (productive forces + production relations). The **superstructure** is non-economic (religion, law, art). Don't include religion in the base.
- **Productive forces vs production relations:** forces = land, labour, technology, energy; relations = property/ownership relations. Both together form the economic base.
- **Value neutrality ≠ value-free.** Weber acknowledged sociologists have values; neutrality means **not letting those values colour the recording** of others' values.
- **Ideal type is not an ideal/perfect type** — it is an analytical construct, may exaggerate features, and is judged by usefulness, not accuracy.
- **Class consciousness** is required for revolution; mere objective class position does not automatically produce conflict.
- The **French Revolution gave political sovereignty**; the **Industrial Revolution gave mass production**; the **Enlightenment gave reason** — don't swap these.
- Weber's three types of authority are **traditional, charismatic, rational-legal** — not "democratic" or "autocratic" (which are common distractors).
- The **office** in bureaucracy has a separate existence **independent** of its occupant — this is the impersonality principle.

2.5 Thinkers / theories table

Name	Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
Karl Marx	Alienation; mode of production; class struggle	Capitalism produces alienation at four levels; history is class struggle	68–72
Friedrich Engels	Co-author of Communist Manifesto	Worked with Marx on the class-struggle thesis	70
Emile Durkheim	Social fact; mechanical/ organic solidarity	Sociology as empirical science of social facts; suicide rates as social facts	72–75
Max Weber			76–80

Name	Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
	Verstehen; ideal type; value neutrality; bureaucracy	Interpretive sociology; three types of authority; five features of bureaucracy	
Auguste Comte (cross-chapter)	Coined "sociology"	Founder-namer of the discipline (Ch. 1)	65
Herbert Spencer (background)	Social evolution	Background to 19th-century sociological context	65
Adam Smith (background)	Division of labour in economics	Background to Durkheim's reformulation in sociology	74
Auguste Comte	Positivism	Sociology as positive science	65
Talcott Parsons (later)	Functionalist heir of Durkheim	Background to later functionalist tradition	73
Robert Michels (later)	Iron law of oligarchy	Background to Weber's bureaucracy analysis	79
Bourgeoisie / proletariat	Class pair in capitalism	Marx's modern-era class struggle	71
Calvinism (Weberian topic)	Protestant ethic	Weber's argument that Calvinism shaped capitalism (covered in Ch. 3)	77

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a CUET high-yield zone: questions on definitions of alienation, social fact, ideal type, and value neutrality appear nearly every year, as do thinker–concept matching items and statement-based questions on Weber's five features of bureaucracy. Expect 4–6 MCQs per CUET paper drawn from the Marx–Durkheim–Weber triad, with strong emphasis on the mechanical/organic solidarity distinction and Marx's base–superstructure framework.

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.15 (CUET 2025) Which of the following are features of capitalism as a social system?
(A) Commodification of labour power (B) Caste-based networks of trading (C) Surplus value (D) Rising inequalities

- A) (A), (B) and (C) only B) (A), (C) and (D) only C) (A), (B) and (D) only D) (A), (B), (C) and (D) **Tests:** Marx's analysis of capitalism — commodification of labour power, surplus value, inequalities. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.23 (CUET 2025) According to Emile Durkheim, what is the cause of suicide?

- A) Individual mindset B) Biological anomaly C) Influenced by social causes D) Improvement between western countries **Tests:** Durkheim's **Le Suicide** — suicide as a social fact. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.25 (CUET 2025) According to Max Weber, on what basis are classes and status groups differentiated?

- A) Social facts B) Lifestyles C) Caste system D) Market economy **Tests:** Weber on class (market situation) and status group (lifestyle/social honour). **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.41 (CUET 2024) Which sociologist is associated with the concept of Anomie?

- A) Karl Marx B) Emile Durkheim C) Max Weber D) Talcott Parsons **Tests:** Durkheim's concept of anomie. **Answer:** Not in extracted key