

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Social Change in Modern Society

Paper 1 · Unit 10

The four families of change theory with their thinkers straight, the modernisation versus dependency fight in full, and education and technology read as sites of reproduction rather than progress.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

(a) Sociological theories of social change. (b) Development and dependency. (c) Agents of social change. (d) Education and social change. (e) Science, technology and social change.

Social Change — the Concept and the Splits That Matter

Social change is alteration in the structure and functioning of social relationships over time. The word is a container, and the first job in any answer is to say which distinctions you are working with, because the theories that follow disagree about direction, cause, pace and scale rather than about the definition.

- Wilbert Moore's working definition is the usable one: significant alteration of social structure, including the consequences and manifestations embodied in norms, values and cultural products. The operative word is significant, which excludes routine variation.
- Change is not progress. Progress is a value judgment about direction; change is a neutral description. Nineteenth-century sociology fused them, which is precisely why its evolutionary theories collapsed.
- Change is not development. Development is directed, planned change towards a specified goal, so it carries an agent and an intention that social change need not have. The examiner rewards this distinction because sub-unit (b) depends on it.
- Change is not evolution. Evolution names change of a particular kind, cumulative differentiation towards greater complexity, which is a hypothesis about direction, not the fact of change itself.
- The four axes to sort any theory on: direction (linear, cyclical, or none), cause (material, ideational, demographic, technological, conflictual), pace (gradual or revolutionary), and level (societal, institutional, group).
- Morris Ginsberg's list of factors driving change remains a workable frame for the intro of an answer: conscious individual decisions, individual acts influenced by changing conditions, structural strain, external influences, outstanding individuals, confluence of independent causes, and chance or novel events.
- MacIver and Page's distinction: social change (in relationships) is not the same as cultural change (in the technology, values and artefacts), and the two do not move together, which is the observation Ogburn built a whole theory on.
- Two ideas that recur across all the families and are worth planting early: change is normal, and the interesting question is not why societies change but why they persist; and every theory of change is a theory of order turned inside out, which is why functionalism struggles here and conflict theory thrives.

KEY TERMS

Social change — Significant alteration in social structure and the relationships, norms and values it carries (Moore).

Development — Directed, purposive change towards a defined goal, distinguished from change by the presence of an agent and an intention.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Illustrate the conflicts and tensions experienced by societies undergoing social change. [2013]

Evolutionary Theories

The founding family, and the one every subsequent theory is a reaction against. All of them assume change is directional, cumulative and towards greater complexity. Their fatal flaw is not that they were wrong about complexity but that they smuggled European superiority in as the endpoint.

- Auguste Comte's law of three stages: human thought and therefore society pass from the theological (explanation by gods), through the metaphysical (explanation by abstractions), to the positive (explanation by observed law). Intellectual change is the driver, and each stage has its corresponding social organisation.
- Herbert Spencer applied organic analogy and evolution: societies move from simple to compound, doubly and trebly compound, through structural differentiation and functional specialisation, and from militant (compulsory cooperation, coordinated for war) to industrial (voluntary cooperation, coordinated by contract). His survival of the fittest, applied to societies and classes, is Social Darwinism, and it licensed laissez-faire and colonial hierarchy.
- Lewis Henry Morgan (Ancient Society, 1877) staged history as savagery, barbarism, civilisation, keyed to technology, and directly supplied Engels the raw material for The Origin of the Family. E.B. Tylor did the parallel job for religion and culture.
- Durkheim's version is the most defensible: societies move from mechanical solidarity (likeness, collective conscience, repressive law, segmental structure) to organic solidarity (interdependence through the division of labour, restitutive law), driven by increasing material and moral density, that is, more people in closer interaction competing for the same niche.
- Ferdinand Tonnies gives the parallel with the opposite valuation: Gemeinschaft (community, natural will, ties of kin and place) yields to Gesellschaft (association, rational will, contract, calculation). Where Durkheim saw a new solidarity, Tonnies saw a loss.
- The standard criticisms: unilinear, so every society must climb one ladder; teleological, since the endpoint is assumed; Eurocentric, since the endpoint is Europe; and empirically wrong, since societies borrow, regress, stagnate and skip stages.
- Neo-evolutionism revived the family after 1950 by dropping unilinearity. Leslie White made energy captured per capita per year the measure of cultural advance. Julian Steward's multilinear evolution studies parallel lines of development in similar ecological settings. Sahlins and Service separate general evolution (overall advance of complexity) from specific evolution (adaptation to a particular environment), which lets both be true at once.
- Talcott Parsons (Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, 1966) restated evolution as an increase in adaptive capacity through four processes: differentiation, adaptive upgrading, inclusion, and value generalisation. He identified evolutionary universals, such as stratification, bureaucracy, money and markets, and generalised legal order, which any society must acquire to advance. Gerhard Lenski's ecological-evolutionary theory keys the whole sequence to technology, from hunting and gathering to horticultural, agrarian and industrial.

KEY TERMS

Unilinear evolution — The assumption that all societies traverse the same fixed sequence of stages in the same order.

Multilinear evolution — Steward's revision: parallel but distinct developmental lines shaped by different ecological conditions.

Evolutionary universal — Parsons's term for a structural innovation, such as bureaucracy or money, that so raises adaptive capacity that it is likely to be independently invented.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Examine any two theories of social change in detail. [2017]

Cyclical Theories

The answer to evolutionism's optimism. Change is real but it goes nowhere in particular: societies and civilisations rise, mature, decay and are replaced, and modernity has no special claim to be the destination. These theories are usually asked as part of a compare-and-contrast, so learn each one's unit of analysis and its engine.

- Oswald Spengler (*The Decline of the West*, 1918-22) treats each culture as an organism with a life-span of roughly a thousand years, passing through spring, summer, autumn and winter. When a living culture hardens into a technical, urban, imperial civilisation, it is already dying. His claim that the West had entered its winter is what made the book famous and what makes it unfalsifiable. Method: morphological analogy, not evidence.
- Arnold Toynbee (*A Study of History*) replaces the organism with a mechanism: challenge and response. A civilisation grows when a creative minority devises successful responses to environmental or human challenges and the majority follows by mimesis. It breaks down when the creative minority becomes a dominant minority that rules by force rather than attraction, and an internal proletariat secedes. Challenges must be of the right severity: too little and nothing happens, too much and the society is crushed.
- Pitirim Sorokin (*Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 1937-41) is the most systematic. Cultures oscillate between two supersystems defined by their conception of reality: ideational (reality is spiritual, needs are spiritual, truth is faith) and sensate (reality is what the senses report, needs are material, truth is empirical), with a rare and creative synthesis, the idealistic, in between.
- Sorokin's engine is the principle of immanent change: a system changes because of what it is, carrying the seeds of its own transformation inside it, not because of external shocks. His principle of limits adds that each supersystem exhausts its own possibilities and must give way. His verdict on the modern West is that sensate culture is in crisis and overripe.
- Vilfredo Pareto (*The Mind and Society*) gives the political cycle: the circulation of elites. History is a graveyard of aristocracies. Elites govern by two psychological residues, and the types alternate. Lions rule by force, conviction and group loyalty; foxes rule by cunning, manipulation, combination and negotiation. Each type lacks the other's virtue, so each decays and is displaced by the other, in an endless rotation. Revolution is not the abolition of elites, only the replacement of one by another.
- Ibn Khaldun (*Muqaddimah*, 1377) is the precursor worth naming for depth: *asabiyyah*, or group solidarity, is strongest among austere desert tribes, carries them to conquest, and is dissolved by the luxury of the settled cities they capture, whereupon a new solidary group arrives. Roughly four generations per cycle.

- What cyclical theories get right: they refuse the assumption of progress, they take decline seriously, and they explain why complex societies collapse, which evolutionary theory cannot. Pareto's elites and Ibn Khaldun's solidarity remain analytically live.
- What they get wrong: Spengler and Toynbee treat civilisations as bounded organisms with life-spans, which is metaphor doing the work of evidence; the periods are fitted after the fact; the theories are unfalsifiable, since any outcome can be read as a phase; and Sorokin's categories are too capacious to be tested. Because they operate at civilisational scale, they cannot explain any particular change.

The cyclical theorists compared

Thinker	Unit of analysis	Engine of the cycle	Phases or types
Spengler	Culture as organism	Organic life-span, roughly 1000 years	Spring, summer, autumn, winter (culture hardens into civilisation)
Toynbee	Civilisation	Challenge and response; failure of the creative minority	Genesis, growth, breakdown, disintegration
Sorokin	Cultural supersystem	Immanent change and the principle of limits	Ideational, idealistic, sensate
Pareto	Governing elite	Alternation of residues; elites decay	Lions (force) and foxes (cunning) in rotation
Ibn Khaldun	Dynasty and tribe	Rise and dissolution of asabiyyah through luxury	Roughly four generations per dynastic cycle

KEY TERMS

Immanent change — Sorokin's principle that a system changes by virtue of its own internal properties, not by external impact.

Circulation of elites — Pareto's cycle in which lions and foxes alternately govern and decay, so elites are replaced but never abolished.

Asabiyyah — Ibn Khaldun's group solidarity, the resource that carries a group to power and is dissolved by the comfort power brings.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically examine the cultural theories of social change with suitable examples. [2013]

Functionalist Theories, and the Cultural Lag Account

Functionalism was built to explain order and had to be retrofitted to explain change. The result is a theory in which change is gradual, adaptive, endogenous and self-correcting, which is exactly the set of assumptions the 2018 question was inviting you to attack.

- Parsons's answer is moving equilibrium. The system tends towards equilibrium, so change is disturbance followed by re-equilibration at a new level. Change is therefore adaptive, incremental and system-maintaining rather than transformative.
- The mechanism is structural differentiation: a single institution performing many functions splits into specialised institutions performing one each. The family loses production, education, welfare and religion to the factory, the school, the state and the church, and retains socialisation and personality stabilisation.

Adaptive upgrading, inclusion of previously excluded groups, and value generalisation to accommodate the new diversity complete the sequence.

- Neil Smelser (Social Change in the Industrial Revolution, 1959) supplies the empirical demonstration, tracing the Lancashire cotton industry and the Lancashire family through exactly this differentiation, and adding that differentiation generates disturbance before integration catches up.
- Parsons's own account of the ultimate source is Weberian: change is initiated by strain, and cultural and religious innovation supplies the new values. He gives ideas, not the economy, the initiating role.
- Merton's contribution is the crack in the door. Dysfunction is real, not every element is functional for every group, and the accumulation of dysfunctions generates pressure for change. His concepts of manifest and latent function, functional alternatives, and anomic strain give functionalism the vocabulary of tension it otherwise lacks.
- William F. Ogburn (Social Change, 1922) supplies the technological-cultural account. Material culture, meaning technology and artefacts, changes faster than non-material or adaptive culture, meaning law, custom, values and belief. The interval of maladjustment between them is cultural lag.
- Ogburn's mechanisms of cultural growth are invention, accumulation, diffusion and adjustment, and he treated change as fundamentally exponential because inventions combine.
- Cultural lag examples with contemporary bite: reproductive technology outrunning family law; data collection outrunning privacy regulation; artificial intelligence outrunning liability doctrine and labour law; gig platforms outrunning employment classification; social media outrunning the norms of speech and evidence. The concept is alive precisely because the lag has lengthened.
- Criticisms of cultural lag: it is technologically determinist, since it assumes material culture is the independent variable; the direction can reverse, as when law or ideology outruns technology, or when values change first and pull technology after them; the term maladjustment presupposes an ideal fit; and lag is easy to name after the fact and impossible to measure before it.
- Criticisms of functionalism on change generally, and this is the 2018 question in a paragraph: it treats change as adaptation, so it cannot theorise rupture, revolution or collapse; it locates the source inside the system, so it under-weights war, conquest, colonialism and world-market position; it assumes the system tends to integrate, so it has no account of persistent, structured conflict; and its notion of equilibrium is a postulate, not a finding.

KEY TERMS

Cultural lag — Ogburn's interval of maladjustment during which non-material culture has not yet adapted to a change in material culture.

Structural differentiation — The functionalist mechanism by which multi-purpose institutions split into specialised ones as society grows more complex.

Moving equilibrium — Parsons's model of change as disturbance followed by re-equilibration at a new level of adaptive capacity.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Explain the relevance of the idea of 'cultural lag' in understanding social change. [2015]
- Is the theory of cultural lag valid in present times? Discuss. [2018]
- Does collapse of functionalism and bankruptcy of Marxism coincide with the rupture of modernity? Discuss. [2018]

Conflict Theories

For conflict theorists, change is not a disturbance to be absorbed, it is what the system is made of.

Contradiction is built in, and the question is when it becomes visible and who acts on it. This is the family with the strongest account of rupture and the weakest predictive record.

- Marx's mechanism is precise and should be reproduced exactly. Every mode of production consists of forces of production (technology, labour, raw materials) and relations of production (property relations). The forces develop; the relations become a fetter on them; the contradiction is expressed as class struggle; and at a certain stage the relations are burst asunder, which is revolution. The economic base changes and the superstructure is transformed with it.
- Hence the opening of the Communist Manifesto: the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Note that Marx also made the bourgeoisie a revolutionary force, praising its dissolution of feudal ties, which is why reading him as merely anti-capitalist misses the argument.
- The subjective condition matters as much as the objective one. A class in itself, defined by its position, becomes a class for itself only when it acquires consciousness, organisation and a sense of opposed interest. Where consciousness fails, false consciousness holds, which is why the prediction of proletarian revolution in advanced capitalism has not been vindicated.
- Why it did not happen, in the terms of later Marxists: Gramsci's hegemony, where the ruling class rules by consent manufactured in civil society, not only by force; Lenin's labour aristocracy; the welfare state, universal suffrage and trade union incorporation; and the diffusion of ownership and expansion of the middle strata.
- Ralf Dahrendorf (Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, 1959) rebuilt conflict theory on authority rather than property. Society is a plurality of imperatively coordinated associations, and in each of them some command and some obey. Conflict is therefore ineradicable and general, not a peculiarity of capitalism, since abolishing private property leaves the command relation intact, as the Soviet case demonstrated.
- Dahrendorf's decomposition of capital (ownership separated from control) and decomposition of labour (skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled with divergent interests) plus institutionalised conflict regulation (collective bargaining, courts, arbitration) yield post-capitalist society, where conflict continues but is channelled rather than revolutionary. Change is therefore continuous and incremental, not catastrophic.
- Lewis Coser (The Functions of Social Conflict, 1956), reworking Simmel, argues conflict is often functional. It clarifies boundaries, strengthens internal cohesion, creates alliances, and serves as a safety valve that releases hostility without destroying the relation. Crucially, conflict inside a flexible structure produces adaptive change, while a rigid structure that suppresses conflict accumulates it and eventually shatters.
- This gives you the answer to the perennial question of whether conflict causes or results from change. It does both, and the loop is the point: change disturbs existing distributions, disturbance produces conflict, conflict redistributes, and redistribution is further change. Coser's rigidity thesis explains why some societies absorb the loop and others break.
- Criticisms: Marx's economic determinism, even softened by relative autonomy, under-weights ideas, ethnicity, gender and nation as bases of conflict and change; the revolutionary prediction failed in exactly the places the theory predicted it first; Dahrendorf's authority relations are so general that they explain conflict everywhere and change nowhere in particular; and Coser's functional conflict is functionalism with the vocabulary of struggle borrowed.

KEY TERMS

Fetter on the forces of production — Marx's condition for revolutionary change: relations of production that once enabled the forces now obstruct their development.

Imperatively coordinated association — Dahrendorf's unit of analysis, any organisation in which authority is distributed unequally and therefore conflict is structurally given.

Safety valve — Coser's term for an institution that channels hostility away from its original object, preserving the relationship at the cost of the tension.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- 'Social conflict is both a cause and a consequence of social change.' Explain. [2016]

Development and Dependency

The most reliably examined section of this unit, and the one where the fight is cleanest: modernisation theory says poor countries are poor because of what they are internally, dependency theory says they are poor because of what has been done to them externally. Get both accounts and their critics right and this section carries whole questions.

- Modernisation theory's premise: development is a transition from traditional to modern, the West made it first, and the obstacles are internal, meaning traditional values, kinship obligation, fatalism, low savings, and the wrong personality type. The remedy is diffusion of Western capital, technology, institutions and attitudes. Note the Cold War context, which is not incidental.
- W.W. Rostow (The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto, 1960) is the canonical statement. Five stages: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption. Take-off requires investment rising above about ten per cent of national income, a leading sector, and a political and institutional framework that can exploit the momentum. The subtitle tells you the purpose.
- The sociological versions: Bert Hoselitz applied Parsons's pattern variables, so traditional societies are ascriptive, particularistic and diffuse and modern ones achievement-oriented, universalistic and specific. David McClelland (The Achieving Society) made the need for achievement, instilled in childhood, the psychological engine. Daniel Lerner (The Passing of Traditional Society) made empathy, the capacity to imagine oneself in another's position, the mobile personality's key trait, spread by mass media. Inkeles and Smith (Becoming Modern) sought to measure the modern individual across six countries.
- Criticisms of modernisation theory: it is ahistorical, since it ignores colonialism, which is what actually produced the gap; it is ethnocentric, since modern simply means Western; the tradition-modernity binary is false, because Japan and East Asia modernised on traditional foundations and tradition is frequently the instrument of modernisation, as Rudolph and Rudolph argued for India; it blames the victim; and it assumes the ladder is climbable when the first climbers pulled it up.
- Dependency theory's premise inverts all of it. Underdevelopment is not a starting condition, it is a produced outcome. The rich world and the poor world are two sides of one historical process, not two positions on one ladder.
- The origin is the Prebisch-Singer thesis from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America: the terms of trade for primary commodity exporters decline secularly against manufactured imports, so trade transfers value from periphery to centre even without coercion. Paul Baran added that the surplus generated in the periphery is extracted or squandered rather than invested.

- Andre Gunder Frank (*Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, 1967) supplies the phrase and the model: the development of underdevelopment. Underdevelopment was actively created. A chain of metropolis-satellite relations runs from the world metropolis down through national capitals to the remotest village, and at every link the surplus is expropriated upwards. His famous corollary is that satellites develop most when their links to the metropolis are weakest, which he supported with Latin American industrial growth during the Depression and the two world wars.
- Theotonio Dos Santos defined dependence formally as a conditioning situation in which the economies of one group are conditioned by the development and expansion of another. Samir Amin (*Accumulation on a World Scale*) added unequal exchange and the distinction between autocentric and extraverted accumulation.
- The internal critique that matters most: Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (*Dependency and Development in Latin America*) rejected Frank's flat pessimism and proposed associated dependent development. Development and dependency can coexist, since foreign capital can industrialise a periphery while keeping it structurally subordinate. The outcome depends on internal class alliances and the state, so dependency is a situation to be analysed historically, not a law.
- Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis (*The Modern World-System*, 1974) reframes the unit of analysis. The proper object is not the nation-state but the single capitalist world-economy that has existed since the long sixteenth century, an economy with no single political roof. It has a core (high-wage, high-skill, capital-intensive, strong states), a periphery (low-wage, raw materials, weak states), and a semi-periphery.
- The semi-periphery is Wallerstein's real innovation, and the point examiners look for. It is exploited by the core and exploits the periphery, which makes it politically stabilising, because it prevents a polarised confrontation between the two extremes and gives the middle a stake in the system. Mobility between zones is possible for individual states, which answers the East Asian objection, but the structure of zones is permanent. Hegemony (Dutch, then British, then American) is cyclical.
- Criticisms of dependency and world-systems: Ernesto Laclau's is the sharpest, that Frank defines capitalism by exchange and market linkage rather than by the relations of production, which makes sixteenth-century Latin American plantation slavery capitalist and empties the concept. Bill Warren (*Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*) argued imperialism spread capitalism and thereby developed the colonies. The East Asian NICs, South Korea and Taiwan, developed while deeply linked to the core, which contradicts Frank's weak-link thesis directly. And the theory is better at explaining why development fails than at prescribing what to do, since delinking has a poor record.
- The contemporary relevance, which is what recent questions ask for: global value chains where the periphery supplies labour and the core captures the margin; commodity dependence and price shocks; debt and the conditionality attached to it; brain drain; digital dependency, where data is extracted and platforms, cloud infrastructure and models are owned in the core; vaccine and technology access asymmetries; and the reproduction of extraction in the critical-minerals economy of the energy transition. The mechanism has moved from colony to contract, which is Cardoso's point rather than Frank's.
- The alternatives to both camps, worth a closing paragraph: Amartya Sen's capability approach and development as freedom, which redefines the goal rather than the mechanism; the post-development critique (Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva), which argues development is a discourse that constructed two-thirds of the world as underdeveloped in 1949 and should be abandoned rather than fixed; and Alain Touraine and Manuel Castells on informational development.

Question	Modernisation (Rostow, Hoselitz, McClelland)	Dependency (Frank, Amin, Wallerstein)
Unit of analysis	The nation-state, taken in isolation	The world system or the metropolis-satellite chain
Cause of poverty	Internal: traditional values, low savings, wrong institutions	External: historical extraction of surplus by the core
What underdevelopment is	An original condition, a starting point	A produced outcome, actively created
Prescription	More contact: aid, foreign investment, technology, Western values	Less contact: delinking, autonomy, socialist transition
View of colonialism	Largely absent from the model	The constitutive event
Fatal objection	Ahistorical and ethnocentric; ignores the ladder being pulled up	East Asian NICs developed while fully linked; Laclau on the definition of capitalism

KEY TERMS

Development of underdevelopment — Frank's thesis that underdevelopment is not an original state but the actively produced result of surplus extraction by the metropolis.

Semi-periphery — Wallerstein's intermediate zone, exploited by the core and exploiting the periphery, whose function is to prevent polarised confrontation.

Associated dependent development — Cardoso and Faletto's finding that industrial development can occur within dependency, its shape decided by internal class alliances and the state.

Terms of trade decline — The Prebisch-Singer thesis that primary commodity prices fall secularly against manufactures, transferring value to the core through ordinary trade.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Write a short essay on the Latin American perspective on 'dependency'. [2014]
- 'Social change can be brought about through development.' Illustrate from the contemporary situation of India. [2016]
- Criticize A.G. Frank's 'development of underdevelopment'. [2019]
- Technology has accelerated the process of development and dependency. Discuss. [2020]
- Critically examine the contribution of dependency theories in understanding the present global scenario. [2021]
- Trace the trajectory of development perspectives on social change. [2022]

Agents of Social Change

A listing question that rewards structure. Sort the agents into deliberate and undeliberate, name a theorist for each, and give one line on the mechanism. The examiner is checking whether you can distinguish an agent from a cause.

- Technology: the most visible agent and the one most often overstated. Ogburn's cultural lag and White's energy thesis are the classic accounts. Note the standing objection, that technology is itself socially produced, so treating it as an independent agent begs the question.

- Economy and market: Marx's forces of production; Polanyi's great transformation, in which the disembedding of the market from society is itself the change and provokes a protective counter-movement; Weber's rationalisation of enterprise.
- The state and law: the most deliberate agent. Law changes behaviour before it changes belief, which is exactly Ogburn's lag running the other way, and the Indian record on untouchability, dowry, sati, child marriage, land reform and reservations is the standard illustration. William Graham Sumner's stateways cannot change folkways is the counter-position and is now generally regarded as too strong, since compliance eventually reshapes attitude.
- Social movements: the collective, deliberate agent. Touraine makes movements the very site where a society acts on itself; Castells reads new movements as identity projects; Melucci points at their cultural rather than instrumental targets. Movements matter here as the mechanism by which structural strain becomes directed change.
- Education: treated separately below, since the syllabus gives it its own sub-item.
- Ideology and religion: Weber's switchmen, the Protestant ethic as the model case, and the counter-case of religion legitimating stasis through theodicy.
- Demography: the demographic transition itself changes everything downstream, from the age structure and dependency ratio to women's labour force participation and household size. Migration redistributes people, remittances and ideas; Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa's second demographic transition ties falling fertility to individualisation.
- Urbanisation: Wirth's urbanism as a way of life (size, density, heterogeneity producing anonymity, secondary contacts and tolerance), Simmel's blasé attitude, and Durkheim's dynamic density as the mechanism linking city growth to the division of labour.
- Mass media, which UPSC has asked directly, deserves the fullest treatment. The optimistic tradition: Lerner's empathy-spreading media, the diffusion of innovations (Everett Rogers), Habermas's public sphere as the space where private people reason publicly, and Castells's mass self-communication and networked social movements, where the tools of broadcast pass to the individual.
- The critical tradition on media: Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry, which manufactures standardised pseudo-individuality and produces conformity; Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, with its five filters of ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and ideology; McLuhan's the medium is the message, meaning the form of the technology changes perception regardless of the content carried; Habermas's own thesis of the refeudalisation of the public sphere by commercial media.
- Media in the present: filter bubbles and algorithmic curation, misinformation that travels faster than correction, platform ownership concentrated in a handful of firms, and the digital divide that decides who is an agent and who is an audience. Feminist media scholarship (Judy Wajcman, Cynthia Cockburn) argues new media reproduces existing hierarchies rather than dissolving them, since design, ownership, capital and the coding workforce remain male-dominated, and online harassment is a mechanism for policing women's presence. Media is therefore an agent of change and an instrument of reproduction at once, and which one depends on who owns it.
- The distinction to state early and use throughout: an agent is a vehicle through which change is transmitted, a cause is what generates it. Media, education and law are agents that can carry change in any direction, which is precisely why they are contested.

KEY TERMS

Public sphere — Habermas's arena in which private persons reason together about public matters; he argues commercial media has refeudalised it into spectacle.

Culture industry — Adorno and Horkheimer's term for the standardised mass production of culture that produces conformity while advertising individuality.

Mass self-communication — Castells's term for individually generated, potentially mass-reaching digital communication that bypasses broadcast gatekeepers.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Assess the role of mass media as an agent of social change. [2017]
- Feminist scholars argue that 'New media' is masculine and hence reinforces structural hierarchies rather than reconfiguring them. Comment. [2019]

Education and Social Change

The syllabus item looks benign and the debate is not. Functionalists treat education as the great equaliser and the engine of mobility; conflict theorists show it is the most sophisticated machinery for reproducing inequality ever built, precisely because it launders privilege as merit. Bourdieu is the name that must appear.

- Durkheim (Moral Education; Education and Sociology) gives the founding functionalist account. Education transmits the collective conscience, attaches the child to society, and produces the secular morality an organic society needs. School is society in miniature, the first place the child obeys an impersonal rule rather than a person. It also supplies the specialised skills the division of labour requires.
- Parsons makes the school the focal socialising agency and the bridge between the family and society. In the family the child is judged by particularistic, ascriptive standards; in school, for the first time, by universalistic, achievement standards applied to all. This is how the child is fitted for a society that will judge him the same way.
- Davis and Moore add role allocation: education sifts, sorts and grades, matching talent to functionally important positions and legitimating the unequal rewards attached to them. Human capital theory (Schultz, Becker) restates it economically: education is investment, returns accrue to the individual and to growth.
- The functionalist claim in one sentence, so you can attack it precisely: education is a meritocratic mechanism that allocates positions by ability and effort, and therefore promotes mobility and equality of opportunity.
- Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (Schooling in Capitalist America, 1976) supply the correspondence principle. The social relations of school mirror the social relations of work: hierarchy of authority, fragmentation of tasks, extrinsic rewards (grades for wages), alienation from the product of one's work, and competition. School does not teach obedience as a subject; it produces it as a structure. The hidden curriculum, not the syllabus, does the work.
- Their sharper claim is that the myth of meritocracy is the real function. If failure is attributed to the individual's own measured lack of ability, inequality is legitimated and the loser blames himself. They argued that measured IQ explains far less of the variance in earnings than class origin does, which is what makes the myth a myth.
- Pierre Bourdieu (with Jean-Claude Passeron, Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture; The Inheritors) is the deepest account and the one that most repays precision. Cultural capital is the dispositions,

language, taste, confidence and familiarity with legitimate culture transmitted by the family. The school does not teach it; it presupposes it, and then rewards it as though it were talent.

- The mechanism is habitus, the durable set of dispositions laid down by class upbringing, which makes the middle-class child fluent in the school's own idiom and the working-class child a foreigner in it. Bourdieu calls the imposition of the dominant culture as the legitimate culture symbolic violence, and the school's authority to do so pedagogic authority.
- The result is that the school converts inherited cultural capital into certified educational capital, and educational capital into occupational position, so class is laundered into merit. The examination is the laundering machine. Working-class children then eliminate themselves, which Bourdieu calls self-elimination, and this consent is what makes the system durable.
- Basil Bernstein's language codes are the mechanism at the level of speech: the restricted code is context-bound, particularistic and assumes shared understanding; the elaborated code is context-independent, universalistic and explicit. The school works entirely in the elaborated code, which middle-class children arrive already speaking. Bernstein insisted, against his misreaders, that the restricted code is not deficient, only differently valued.
- Paul Willis (*Learning to Labour*, 1977) complicates the reproduction story from the other side, and quoting him prevents your answer sounding deterministic. His lads see through the meritocracy myth and reject the school's promise, which is a genuine penetration of their real conditions. But the counter-school culture they build, valuing manual work, masculinity and having a laff, delivers them to the factory floor. They are not duped and they reproduce their own subordination anyway. Willis calls it partial penetration.
- The radical wing: Ivan Illich (*Deschooling Society*, 1971) argues schooling teaches passive consumption and confuses process with substance, so the institution itself must go. Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970) attacks the banking model, in which the teacher deposits knowledge into a passive student, and proposes problem-posing dialogic education leading to conscientization, critical awareness of one's own conditions, which makes education the instrument of liberation rather than reproduction.
- Randall Collins (*The Credential Society*, 1979) adds credentialism: as certificates proliferate, they function as currency for status groups rather than as measures of skill, so the requirement inflates without the job changing. This explains why more education can coexist with no more mobility, which is the fact the 2022 question was built on.
- The synthesis for an answer: education is not simply reproductive or transformative, it is the arena in which the two fight. Mass literacy and schooling have historically enabled real mobility, women's entry into public life, and the destruction of ascriptive monopolies on knowledge. At the same time, differentiated quality (elite private, mass public), the hidden curriculum, credential inflation and the conversion of cultural capital ensure that the hierarchy survives the expansion. Expansion changes who is inside the system without changing the system's sorting function, which is why more education, unaccompanied by redistribution, widens the gap it promised to close.

Functionalist and conflict readings of education

Question	Functionalist (Durkheim, Parsons, Davis and Moore)	Conflict (Bowles and Gintis, Bourdieu, Willis)
What does school do?	Socialises, transmits skills, allocates roles by merit	Reproduces class, legitimates inequality, certifies inherited advantage
What is the hidden curriculum?	Not theorised; the syllabus is the content	The real content: obedience, hierarchy, extrinsic reward (correspondence)
Who succeeds and why?	The able and the hardworking	Those arriving with cultural capital and the elaborated code
What is the examination?	A neutral instrument of selection	The machine that converts class into merit (symbolic violence)
Is expansion the remedy?	Yes: more access means more mobility	No: credential inflation and differentiated quality preserve the hierarchy

KEY TERMS

Cultural capital — Bourdieu's term for the dispositions, language, taste and cultural familiarity inherited from the family, which schools presuppose and reward as ability.

Correspondence principle — Bowles and Gintis's claim that the social relations of schooling mirror those of the workplace, producing the compliant worker.

Hidden curriculum — The values, habits and hierarchies transmitted by the organisation of schooling rather than by its stated content.

Symbolic violence — Bourdieu's imposition of the dominant culture as the legitimate culture, accepted as natural by those it disadvantages.

Credentialism — Collins's inflation of certificate requirements as status competition, without a corresponding change in the skill the job needs.

Conscientization — Freire's development of critical consciousness of one's own social conditions through dialogic education.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- 'Instead of promoting equality in society, the present system of education itself has contributed to increased socio economic disparities.' Comment. [2022]

Science, Technology and Social Change

The sub-item that dates fastest and therefore rewards theory over examples. The organising question is whether technology drives society or society shapes technology, and the defensible answer refuses both extremes while showing you know why each is tempting.

- Technological determinism is the position that technology develops autonomously and society adapts. Its classical statements are Ogburn's cultural lag, Marx's line that the hand-mill gives you the feudal lord and the steam-mill the industrial capitalist (though Marx's larger argument is not determinist), and McLuhan's the medium is the message.
- The social shaping of technology is the counter-position. Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman argue technology is itself a social product, carrying the interests, assumptions and hierarchies of its makers in its design. Pinch and Bijker's social construction of technology adds interpretive flexibility: relevant social

groups contest what an artefact is for, and closure is a social settlement, not a technical inevitability. The bicycle, redesigned repeatedly according to whose riding counted, is the standard case.

- Robert Merton, in the sociology of science proper, gives the normative structure of science, CUDOS: communism (common ownership of findings), universalism (claims judged by impersonal criteria, not by who made them), disinterestedness, and organised scepticism. His broader Merton thesis (Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England, 1938) argues Puritan values legitimated experimental science, so religion helped produce it.
- Thomas Kuhn (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962) supplies the change model for science itself. Normal science works inside a paradigm, solving puzzles it defines; anomalies accumulate; crisis follows; a revolution installs a new paradigm; and because paradigms are incommensurable, the shift is a conversion, not a proof. Science therefore changes the way societies do, by rupture and by generational replacement, which demolishes the picture of smooth cumulative progress.
- On work and technology, the two positions to name are Braverman and Blauner. Harry Braverman (Labor and Monopoly Capital, 1974) argues technology under capitalism is designed to deskill: Taylorist separation of conception from execution transfers the worker's knowledge to management, so the effect is control, not efficiency. Robert Blauner (Alienation and Freedom, 1964) offers the inverted U-curve, in which alienation rises from craft to machine-tending to assembly line and then falls with continuous-process automation. The contemporary test case is algorithmic management in gig work, which reads far more like Braverman than like Blauner.
- Ulrich Beck (Risk Society, 1986) is the essential contemporary theorist here. Industrial society distributed goods, risk society distributes bads. Its risks are manufactured, that is, produced by our own technological decisions rather than by nature; they are unbounded by class, nation or generation, so smog is democratic; they are invisible and known only through the science that also produced them, which makes expertise both indispensable and distrusted; and they are uninsurable. Hence reflexive modernisation, in which modernity's central problem becomes modernity itself.
- Giddens's companion image is the juggernaut of modernity, a machine of great power that we collectively steer and that can run out of control, plus manufactured uncertainty and the disembedding of social relations from local context by expert systems.
- Castells (The Rise of the Network Society) argues the informational mode of development reorganises everything around networks: the space of flows displaces the space of places, timeless time displaces clock time, work becomes networked and individualised, and those without a valued contribution are not exploited but excluded, which he calls the fourth world. Harvey's time-space compression is the parallel account from political economy.
- The feminist critique is required, not optional, given how UPSC has asked it. Judy Wajcman (Feminism Confronts Technology; TechnoFeminism) argues technology is neither neutral nor inherently masculine, but is socially shaped in male-dominated design, ownership and engineering contexts, and therefore encodes existing hierarchies. Reproductive and domestic technology is her best evidence: labour-saving appliances did not reduce housework hours, because standards of cleanliness rose to absorb the saving, so the technology reproduced the housewife rather than freeing her. Cockburn adds that technical competence is itself a construction of masculinity. Applied to new media: the platforms are owned, designed and coded overwhelmingly by men, harassment polices women's presence, algorithms trained on existing data reproduce existing bias, and the participatory promise is therefore structurally undercut.
- The Indian and developmental angle, used carefully: the green revolution raised output and widened regional and class disparity because it required irrigation and capital; the digital divide decides who benefits

from a technology of inclusion; leapfrogging is real, since mobile telephony bypassed a landline stage that never arrived; and technology transfer without ownership of the underlying capability is dependency in a new costume, which is the point the 2020 question was making.

- The verdict to write: technology is not a cause standing outside society, and society is not free to shape it at will. Technology is socially produced and, once installed at scale, becomes an obdurate structure that constrains what can be done next. Its distributive effect is therefore decided by who owns it, not by what it can do.

KEY TERMS

Manufactured risk — Beck's category of hazards produced by human technological decisions rather than by nature, and therefore uninsurable and unbounded.

Reflexive modernisation — Beck's stage in which modernity's principal problem becomes the unintended consequences of modernity itself.

Paradigm — Kuhn's shared framework of assumptions, methods and exemplars within which normal science proceeds; replaced by revolution, not by accumulation.

Deskilling — Braverman's thesis that technology under capitalism separates conception from execution, transferring workers' knowledge to management as control.

Space of flows — Castells's term for the network-organised spatial logic of the informational society, displacing the space of places.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Technology has accelerated the process of development and dependency. Discuss. [2020]
- Feminist scholars argue that 'New media' is masculine and hence reinforces structural hierarchies rather than reconfiguring them. Comment. [2019]

Last-mile revision

- Change is not progress, not development, not evolution. Sort every theory on direction, cause, pace and level.
- Evolutionary: Comte's three stages, Spencer's simple to compound and militant to industrial, Morgan's three stages, Durkheim's mechanical to organic, Tonnies's *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. All unilinear and Eurocentric; neo-evolutionism (White's energy, Steward's multilinear, Parsons's evolutionary universals) drops the ladder.
- Cyclical: Spengler (organism, 1000 years), Toynbee (challenge and response, creative minority), Sorokin (ideational to sensate, immanent change and limits), Pareto (lions and foxes, circulation of elites), Ibn Khaldun (asabiyyah).
- Functionalist: Parsons's moving equilibrium and structural differentiation, Smelser's Lancashire, Merton's dysfunction, Ogburn's cultural lag. Cannot theorise rupture, which is the 2018 question.
- Conflict: Marx's forces fettered by relations, class in itself to class for itself; Dahrendorf's authority and imperatively coordinated associations, post-capitalist decomposition; Coser's safety valve and the rigidity thesis.
- Modernisation: Rostow's five stages and the ten per cent take-off, Hoselitz's pattern variables, McClelland's need for achievement, Lerner's empathy. Ahistorical, ethnocentric, ignores colonialism.
- Dependency: Prebisch-Singer terms of trade, Baran's surplus, Frank's development of underdevelopment and metropolis-satellite chain, Amin's unequal exchange. Frank's weak-link thesis fails on the East Asian NICs; Laclau attacks his definition of capitalism.
- Cardoso and Faletto: associated dependent development, so dependency is a situation to analyse, not a law. Wallerstein: one world-economy since the long sixteenth century, and the semi-periphery is what stabilises it politically.
- Agents: distinguish agent from cause. Media is both, and which one depends on ownership. Habermas's public sphere against Adorno's culture industry and Herman and Chomsky's five filters.
- Education, functionalist: Durkheim (moral education), Parsons (bridge, universalistic standards), Davis and Moore (role allocation). Conflict: Bowles and Gintis (correspondence, myth of meritocracy), Bourdieu (cultural capital, habitus, symbolic violence, self-elimination), Bernstein (codes), Willis (partial penetration), Collins (credentialism), Freire (banking model, conscientization).
- Science and technology: technological determinism against social shaping (MacKenzie and Wajcman, SCOT). Kuhn's paradigms make science itself change by rupture. Beck's manufactured risk and reflexive modernisation is the essential modern reference.
- Wajcman's decisive example: labour-saving appliances did not cut housework hours because standards of cleanliness rose to absorb the saving. Technology reproduced the role it promised to abolish.

Common errors to avoid

- Listing theories without a comparison. UPSC almost never asks for one theory in isolation; the marks are in the disagreement, so name who is arguing with whom and about what.
- Attributing 'challenge and response' to Spengler, 'ideational and sensate' to Toynbee, or 'circulation of elites' to Sorokin. These four cyclical thinkers are the most commonly mixed up names in the whole paper.
- Calling Marx a technological determinist on the strength of the hand-mill line. His argument is about the contradiction between forces and relations, and the relations are social, not technical.
- Stating Rostow's take-off without the investment threshold, the leading sector, and the subtitle. A Non-Communist Manifesto is not decoration; it is the theory's political address, and naming it shows you read the argument rather than the summary.
- Presenting dependency theory as one position. Frank, Amin, Cardoso and Wallerstein disagree substantially, and Cardoso's associated dependent development is a rebuttal of Frank from inside the school.
- Forgetting the semi-periphery when writing on Wallerstein. It is his distinctive contribution, and its function is political stabilisation, not an intermediate income band.
- Answering a dependency question with colonial history and no mechanism. The mechanism is surplus extraction through terms of trade, ownership, debt, and value-chain position, and it must be named for the present, not only for 1947.
- Treating education questions as policy questions. The examiner wants Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, Bernstein and Willis, not a summary of a government scheme. Schemes are illustration; theory is the answer.
- Confusing cultural capital with money or with education itself. It is inherited disposition, taste and linguistic fluency, and its whole power lies in the school treating it as ability rather than as inheritance.
- Writing Willis as though the lads were tricked. His point is that they see through the meritocracy myth accurately and reproduce their own subordination anyway, which is why the concept is partial penetration.
- Using Ogburn's cultural lag as an all-purpose explanation. It is technologically determinist, the direction reverses (law and values can outrun technology), and maladjustment presupposes an ideal fit that has to be argued for.
- Answering the science and technology sub-item with a list of current technologies. Name Kuhn, Merton, Beck, Braverman, Wajcman and the determinism versus social shaping axis, then illustrate.