UNIT: 6 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Social Contract theory of Society

3.3.1 Criticism of the Social Contact theory

6.4 Organic theory of Society

3.4.1 Criticism of the organic theory

6.5 Theory of Group of Mind

6.6 Modern Debate on Individual and Society

6.7 Let us sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to check your progress

6.10 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the relation of the individual and Society
- explain the social contract theory
- describe the organic theory of society
- elaborate on the theory of Group of mind
- evaluate the modern debate on individual and Society

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Different thinkers have put forward their opinion on the relation between individual and society. Although we find different views on the relation between the society and the individual living in it, yet the common viewpoint is that the relation between the two is inescapable. The interesting point that arises here is about how society originated and which comes first–society or the individual. This issue has become an interesting point of discussion not only among the social philosophers but also among the sociologists.

Therefore, we get different theories regarding the relation of the two. In this unit we will discuss the different theories adding different philosophers' viewpoints regarding the relation between the individual and the society. The three important theories in this regard are as follows:

- The social contract theory: According to this theory, society is an artificial structure to meet up peoples demand. The supporters of this theory are Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke. This theory is also known as structuralism in modern sense.
- The organic theory: According to this theory, society is an organism. Just as an organism is an organic unity of interdependent organs, so also society is an organism of interdependent individuals. Both cannot exist apart from each other.
- The group mind theory: According to this theory, man is a social being. The social self or ideal self can be realized through society. So, man is inconceivable apart from society. Idealist philosophers advocate this theory.

Besides elaborating on these three theories we will discuss contemporary debate on the contentious issue of the relationship between the society and the individual and their relative importance.

6.3 SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

One of the most important theories of the relation between individual and society is the social contract theory. This theory holds that the society is an artificial phenomenon. People lived independently of one another without any reciprocal relation. At that time they thought that they are self sufficient to run their life. But in course of time they come into contract with one another to form a society for their personal advantage. So, the emergence of society is a mechanical process of individuals coming together. The advocates of the social contract theory are: Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau and John Locke. We will now discuss the respective viewpoints one by one.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) : Hobbes in his book *Leviathan* writes that man is selfish, quarrelsome, and aggressive. He is egoistic in nature. As a

result, he thinks to be perfect in whatever he does. So, his selfish nature is the root cause of the conflict among men. Hobbes writes that- the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. It indicates that nature is a state of war. Because people want to run their life independently without coming into contract with other fellows. That is why, in order to safeguard their life, they come into a contract with one another. As a result the concept of society comes into light.

John Locke (1632-1704) : John Locke holds that the state of nature is against the state of war which is upheld by Hobbes. Rather, it is a state of peace and good will. It is not held that man is independent of nature. The state of nature is governed by the law of nature, which is not challenged by man. So, people are subordinate to the law of nature. That is why, it is not the like Hobbes' view of contract. Like Locke, Hobhouse (1588-1679) also states that everyone is free and born equal in society. So, people came into contract to form a society which removes the crude state of nature, and formed a civil society. After the formation of the civil society people entered into another contract and formed a government to make and enforce laws for the welfare of all.

J.J. ROUSSEAU (1712-1778) : Rousseau holds that the state of nature was based on mutual good-will and happiness. But in due course the growth of population and the desire to acquire property on the part of the people became the principal cause of conflict and collision among people. Therefore, in order to free themselves from such conflict and collision people came into contract to defend their property and security. The contract was made not just to protect property and security only. The contract was also formed for co-operation, co-ordination and mutual harmony among the people so that people could come into contract easily. So, the main purpose of the contract was to generate a general will so that mutual harmony or social unity would emerge. In this way the concept of society came into existence.

Adam Smith, a famous economist, holds the view that people came into contract in order to regulate the mutual economy. So, in his view society is an artificial procedure made by man.

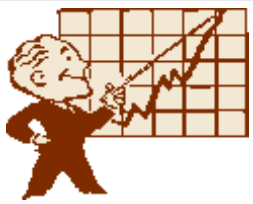
3.3.1 Criticism of the Social Contract theory

Although the advocates of the theory give different views to explain the origin of society, still it can be asserted that this theory is not satisfactory. This theory is based neither on historical fact nor on logical truth. The view that man can live apart from society (man precedes society) cannot be accepted, because man is a social being. Again the thought of the state of nature prior to the socialization process in the context of society cannot be easily accepted. We cannot by evidence show that society came into existence in order to protect property and to defend their security.

Secondly, the presupposition that the state of nature was selfish and brutal before the contract came into existence cannot be accepted without reservation. Because man is neither absolutely selfish nor absolutely unselfish. We cannot ignore the fact that man has both egoistic and altruistic nature.

Thirdly, this theory is not based on logical truth. Because the social contract presupposes the political consciousness. But we cannot imagine the political consciousness in the state of nature. Therefore, the concept of contract cannot be presupposed before society came into existence. That is why the social contract theory is not satisfactory.

Lastly, the social contract theory is nothing but an attempt of the thinkers to justify the relation between individual and society. Although the reasons of contract presupposed by this theory cannot be accepted, yet the supposition of contract for the emergence of society provides clues to the social thinkers to critically discuss this theory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Fill in the blanks:

A. ..... holds that society is an artificial phenomenon.

B. John Locke is an advocate of.....

C. According to Hobbes, man is ..... by nature.

D. Rousseau holds that the state of nature was ..... and.....

Q2: State whether the following statements are true or False.

A. Rousseau /Locke/ Hobbes wrote the book Leviathan

B. The life of man is solitary poor, nasty, brutish and short- said by Locke/ Rousseau/Hobbes



ACTIVITY: 6.1

- Do you think that the social contract theory is not a satisfactory reply to the relation of individual and society? Discuss.

Ans: .....

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6.4 ORGANIC THEORY OF SOCIETY

This theory compares society to an living organism. Just as a human body cannot exist apart from its parts or organs, so also the society cannot exist apart from the individuals. Again just as a society cannot exist without individuals, so also individuals cannot be complete without a society. Individuals are part and parcel of society. Just as we cannot think of a human being without bodily parts so also the concept of society without individuals will be meaningless. Individuals cannot be independent of society. **Herbert Spencer**, one of the advocates of this theory says: "Social structure can be compared to an animal body whose system of nutrition has its counter parts in society, in the industrial and agricultural systems, the circulatory system with the heart, arteries and veins, corresponds to the communication and transport systems of a nation, the nervous system to the government, and so on."



Herbert Spencer: (1820-1903) A British sociologist.

The organic theory indicates the social nature of man. Man is a social animal. So, a man wants to be in company with others. The sharing nature of man overcomes the presupposition of the brutish or selfish nature of

man which is thought to be the reason behind the contract. Therefore, the social contract theory alone cannot give us a proper reply to the question of the relation between the individual and the society.

The organic theory, therefore, is a developed form of the theories about the relation between individual and society, because this theory holds that individuals are interdependent on one other. As a result, people want to live in mutual contract and intercourse with one another. So, apart from society, men are mere abstractions. Thinking, feeling and willing, which are the essential conditions of a man, are activated only in a society. Therefore, a question naturally comes to our mind as to if we can think of a man without a society? The organic theory answers that question by holding that the focus of a man is reflected in society. We cannot think of a society without individuals. So, an individual cannot exist without a society, both are interdependent. Society consists of individuals. And Individuals are essential parts of society. According to this theory, both are inseparable from one another. That is why, this theory does not recommend the mechanical view of society. Rather it advocates a natural view of society through organic relation.



LET US KNOW

Functionalism is the oldest and most dominant theoretical perspective in sociology. This perspective lays emphasis on two aspects: i) Application of the scientific method to an objective study of the social world. ii) Use of an analogy between the individual organism and society. Emile Durkheim and recent Talcott Persons(1902-1979, Americian sociologist) are the two advocates of functionalism. They hold that the social world is objectively real. Functionalists compare society to a living organism. They hold that the different parts of society e.g. the family, education, religion, law and media etc. contribute to the smooth functioning of society.

3.4.1 Criticism of the organic theory

Although this theory is a developed form of the mechanical view of society, still this theory is not free from criticism.

Firstly, this theory tries to explain the relationship of individual and society through organic relation. The problem is that we can metaphorically explain the relationship in terms of the organic form, but in reality the picture is different. Because society and individual cannot be like a structured human body. Although mechanically it is possible for us to explain the different functions of a human body, but we cannot explain the relationship of individual and society like an organism.

Secondly, the organic theory is not satisfactory. Organs of a human body cease to exist when a man dies. But the society does not cease to exist. It continues its functions. Therefore, on this ground critics are not ready to accept the organic theory of society.

However the significance of this theory is that it removes the primitive concept of individual and society. This theory shows us the inseparable relation of individual and society. Over and above, it emphatically asserts that individual cannot live without society, and society also cannot exist without individual. So, both are inseparable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3: What is organic theory?

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Q 4: Can we think of society without individual?

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Q 5: Who are the advocates of the organic theory?

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Q6: State whether the following statements are true or False.

A. The organic theory holds that individual and society are interdependent. (True/false)

B. The organic theory is satisfactory. (True/False)

C. The social contract theory advocates the mechanical view of society. (True/False).



ACTIVITY: 6.2

- Why is the relation of individual and society not mechanical according to the organic theory? Discuss.

Ans: .....

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- Do you think that the organic theory is a satisfactory account of relation between individual and society?

Ans: .....

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6.5 THEORY OF GROUP OF MIND

According to this theory, man is a social being. His rational self or ideal self is nothing but the social self which can be realized in society. Every individual human being who has a rational self belongs to society. So, they are members of society. Morality and spirituality are also realized in society. So, according to this theory, the realization of social self is the main goal, of an individual which is realized only in society. Therefore, the society is the medium of realizing the highest nature of self, which is indeed the social self. It is hidden in the nature of self. But every individual can realize unseen self in society. It also can be said that the potential self can be actualized in society. Therefore, every individual has an aim to realize the higher self. But this realization is fulfilled only when the individual self tries to achieve it in society or in the social universe. That is why, eminent social thinker Durkheim rightly pointed out that "Social mind is an existence distinct (not apart) from the mind of the individuals, and is superior to them. This mind or collective consciousness is the higher form of psychic life. It

tends to absorb the individual mind from which it differs not only in the richness of content but also in kind."

This saying of Durkheim beautifully points out that ever individual self is different from the higher social self. So, the commonality or the objectivity of self is realized only through the social self. It is considered as the essence of every ideal self or individual self.

Individuals are interdependent members of society. He cannot realize the universal, moral and spiritual self apart from other individual selves or fellow men. The social self is the higher self, and individual self tries to actualize the common nature of self in society. Therefore, it can be said that society is the unity of the individual self. And every individual self leans towards the same goal i.e., common good. It is also regarded as the ideal of every individual self.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7: What is the main goal of the theory of Group of Mind?

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Q8: According to the Group of Mind theory, what is 'social self'?

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Q9: State whether the following statements are True or False:

a) According to the 'theory of Group of Mind', Man is a social being. (True/false)

b) Durkheim asserts the individual self is different from the higher social self. (True/ false).

c) The Group of Mind theory holds that the higher self can be realized without society. (True/ False)



ACTIVITY: 6.3

- Is the Group of Mind theory satisfactory? Give reasons.

Ans: .....

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- Do you find any difference between individual self and social self? Discuss.

Ans: .....

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6.6 MODERN DEBATE ON INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

The relationship between individual and society can be classified under four categories in contemporary sociological theory. They are respectively:

- Nominalism
- Interactionism
- Neo-nominalism
- Realism

Nominalism: According to this theory, individual is the only reality. The general concepts such as society, group, culture and values are not regarded as useful in order to study human behaviour. The only thing which can be explained and which is very much useful is the behaviour of individual. This is also so called individual psychology. It helps to predict others' human behaviour, knowing one's behaviour from different angles. That is why, the group context is not a real entity. It is nothing but an assaemblage of different individuals.

This concept has a resemblance to the social contract theory. This theory also holds that society is an artificial phenomenon. Society is not a natural phenomenon, because people felt a necessity of coming into contract in order to get rid of fear from natural calamities like earthquakes, flood, different diseases etc. So, this theory gives us the hint that individual has a dominant role in the social contract theory. Apart from individuals, society has no existence independently. Like the concept of nominalism, the social

contract theory holds that the individual precedes the society.

Interactionism: This concept holds that neither society nor individual can be discussed independently. Individual and society both interact with each other, and only then a meaningfull relationship between individual and society develops. Just as society is incomplete without individual, so is individual without society. Hence both are inseparable. Interactionism is concerned with the socio-psychological frame of reference which ignores what is common to all men as well as what is unique to particular individuals. Rather, it deals with what is common to classes of individuals in a particular culture or a particular social context.



J.H.Turner (1974-) Americian Sociologist

This concept has a similarity to the organic theory of society. The organic theory also indicates the important relationship of individual and society. This theory holds that individual and society are interconnected; one cannot be discussed without the other. This theory compares the society to an organic human body. Just as an organic body is interconnected to other parts of a body, so also individual and society are indispensably related.



Thomas: (1863-1947) Americian Sociologist **Leslie white** (1900-1975), an Americian sociologist,

Neo-nominalism: This concept accepts the existence of group as an objective reality as well as the idea that individual is the fundamental unit. This concept indicates that society is made up of persons and of processes which have their locus and immediate origin in the person. Social phenomena can be explained in terms of individual phenomenon. This concept amends the other concept that society is an artificial emergence of individual. Rather, it goes ahead and views that society is made up of persons, who cannot be an artificial appearance. Allport and Homans are the two advocates of neo-nominalism. The neo-nominalists, reductionists or advocates of psychological sociology view social structure as 'a kind of convenient fiction or a shorthand designation for summarizing individual behaviour in aggregative terms.'

This concept has a similarity to the Group mind theory, criticizing individual centric posture over social structure. This concept gives us the hint that social self is also equally important like the individual self. Social self can give us the important point that social self is an aggregate of individual self. That is why this concept puts importance on social behaviour

in order to describe the relationship between individual and society.

Realism: This doctrine holds that both group and individual are real. They are not concrete, but are abstract entities. It also holds that group is understandable and explicable in terms of social processes and factors, but not explicable or understandable by reference to individual behaviour.

Durkheim holds that social processes are independent of human will. That is why, social phenomena cannot be reduced to individual phenomena. A whole is not identical with the parts. So, society is not a mere sum of individuals. It is said that the first origins of social phenomena are psychological because the only elements which make up society are individuals. Individuals represent a specific characteristic, because nothing collective can be produced if individual consciousness is not taken into account. But individual consciousness itself cannot be a characteristic. When individual consciousnesses are combined in a certain way then social life emerges.

The tendency to explain the social life through psychological factors is not a correct explanation. Although it is thought that certain qualities like religious sentiments, parental love, sexual jealousy are innate in man, still these qualities are the results of collective socialization process. Therefore, collective life is not derived from individual life.

The latter, i.e., the individual cannot explain the former i.e., the collective but it can atleast help an explanation. A sociologist explains the social facts. But, later he can take benefit from his psychological lesson, yet he must concentrate on the realm of social facts. This was Davidson's view.

In sharp contrast to Durkheim's view, George Homans, an advocate of neo-nominalism in contemporary sociology holds that sociology can be derived from psychology. According to him, social processes can be reduced to the laws of behavioural psychology.

These sociologists lay emphasis exclusively on psychological and socio-psychological phenomena. It undoubtedly leads to one sided research in sociology. Turner says that Homans reduces sociological questions into psychological questions. But, according to William Issac



George Homans: (1910-1989) Americian founder of behavioural sociology & exchange theory.



F.H. Allport: (1890-1978) American Psychologist, Father of experimental social psychology.



Emile Durkheim: (1858-1917) The First French academic sociologist, who is widely known as a 'founding father' of modern sociology.



Znaniecki: (1882-1958) Florian Witold, born in Russian Empire. Philosopher & Sociologist

individual behaviour and social institutions are to be explained in terms of culture. Everything that people think, feel and do is culturally determined.

There is still another group of thinkers such as Charles Horton Cooley, Znaniecki, who hold individual and society are two aspects of the same reality. According to Thomas and Znaniecki, the individual is neither the product of his milieu, nor does he produce his milieu, rather we can say both. Another scholar, White has claimed that culture, not the individual, is the only genuine reality.

The question-whether sociological phenomena can and must be reduced to psychological phenomena, has been a critical issue in contemporary sociology. In this respect reductionism can never give us an adequate answer regarding the relationship between individual and society. Rather, it deviates its track from the original issue of the relationship between individual and society. Man is more than a psycholological animal because he is also the product of culture. However, society is not mere collection of individuals. Rather, it is an entity involving a qualitative jump from individual to society. That is why, it is not a satisfactory strategy to reduce the social phenomena to psychological phenomena or to reduce psychological phenomena to social phenomena in the context of individual and society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q10: What is nominalism?

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Q11: What is interactionism?

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Q12: Who are the advocates of neo-nominalism?

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Q13: What is realism?

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Q14: Fill in the blanks:

a) ..... individual is the only reality.

b) ..... holds that both group and individual are real.

c) Reductionism leads to ..... research in sociology.



ACTIVITY: 6.4

- Can we think of the traditional type of society through the sociological concept of nominalism? What do you think?

Ans: .....

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- Is the concept of realism a satisfactory answer to individual and society?

Ans: .....

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Anthony Giddens view on structuralism:

In the above discussion we have seen that in the context of the individual and the society both individual consciousness (Psychology) and social phenomena (Facts) are mutually complimentary. But what role does the social structure play in determining the activities of the individual? In this context we can mention Anthony Giddens, well known British sociologist who refers to the classical theorists holding the view that social structure decides the action of the individual. We can call it dualism. Let us see how Peter J. Kivisto, an American sociologist defines structuration: "The theory of structuration is an attempt to overcome the dualism that he sees as plaguing other theories –a dualism that gives priority either to actors or to social structures……..structures are created by humans, but they in turn constrain and enable human action." You may wonder what this dualism

means. According to this definition the dualism lies in the relation between the individual (actors) and the social structures. Just as the structures are created by human beings, they are also controlled by social structure.

Giddens asks the question: Is society made up of the sum of individual's actions? Or, is society more than the sum of these actions and is there a social structure that is independent of each individual's actions? Giddens points out some salient features of structure. They are:

- Structures exist only in human memory
- Structures exist only in practice. They are produced by agents, i.e., actors(individuals).
- Structures enable us to do actions. They also exercise control on the actor.
- Structures consist of rules and resources which agents or actors draw upon in the production and reproduction of social life.

He views that the relationship between social structure and individual or actor or agent is never taken as dualism. Nether the agent can be explained in terms of social structure nor the social structure can be explained in terms of the agent. He holds the view that structure inherently involves structuration. The actor always does some activity and doing some activities he actually does structuration. Structuration implies reproducing structure. So, reproduction of structure is structuration.



6.7 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit we come across different theories regarding the relation between individual and society from the traditional to modern. In the tradional stage we have found the theories like **the social contract theory**, **organic theory** and **theory of group of mind**. These theories undoubtedly attempt to explain the relationship between individual and society, but their viewpoint in case of discussing the relationship between the two can be pinpointed as follows.

- The social contract theory holds that society is not a natural phenomenon. People felt a necessity of coming into contract to get rid of troubles.
- The organic theory holds that individual and society are interdependent like bodily parts of a human body. Just as in a human body, bodily parts are interconnected to each other, so also the relationship of individual and society are inter-related.
- The group of mind theory holds that individuals are members of society. Apart from society men are mere abstractions. This theory also points out a goal of human life, i.e., to realize the social self in society. So, this theory also indicates that individual and society are related.
- All these theories attempt to discuss the relationship of individual and society, but none can claim to be satisfactory in this context. It is undoubtedly true that these theories start an important discussion to provide us many important clues in case of the origin of society.
- In sociology too, we come across different theories regarding the relation of individual and society. Nominalism holds that individual is the only reality. There are not any general concepts like society, culture, value etc. According to this concept, knowing one's behaviour we can predict others behaviours also. This concept undoubtedly has a similar viewpoint to the social contract theory for the presupposition of independent reality of individual.
- **Interactionism** like the organic theory discusses the interrelation of individual and society.
- **Neo-nominalism** is a developed form of nominalism, which holds the view that both individual and group mind are fundamental units. This theory points out the social behaviour of man, which is very much important in order to explain the inter-relationships of individual and society.
- **Realism** holds that social life is not explicable in terms of individual behaviour, although individual behaviour or consciousness can take a role.



6.8 FURTHER READING

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6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) The social contract theory b) Social contract theory c) Egoists d) Mutual good-will

Ans to Q No 2: a) Hobbes b) Hobbes

Ans to Q No 3: It is a theory which holds that society can be compared to an organism. Just as a human body is interconnected with other parts, so also society and individual are interdependent. One cannot be discussed apart from the other. So, both are interconnected.

Ans to Q No 4: According to organic theory, we cannot think of a society without individual. From the sociological perspective too, as for instance, interactionism also makes it clear that both are interconnected.

Ans to Q No 5: Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim are the advocates of the organic theory.

Ans to Q No 6: a) True b) False c) False

Ans to Q No 7: The main goal of the theory of Group of Mind is to realize the social self, which is realized within society.

Ans to Q No 8: Social self is nothing but the highest nature of self, which is hidden in every individual self.

Ans to Q No 9: a) True b) True c) True

Ans to Q No 10: Nominalism is a concept in sociology, which holds that individual is the only reality.

Ans to Q No 11: Interactionism is a concept in sociology, which holds that both individual and society interact upon each other to discuss meaningfully the concept of individual and society.

Ans to Q No 12: Allport and Homanas are the two advocates of neo-nominalism.

Ans to Q No 13: Realism is a concept in philosophy which upholds the view that both group and individual are real.

Ans to Q No 14: a) Nominalism b) Living organism c) Realism d) One sided research



6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very short questions

Q1: Define the organic theory

Q2: What is social contract theory?

Q3: What do you mean by interactionism?

Q4: Who are the advocates of the social contract theory?

Q5: What is neo-nominalism?

Q6: What is realism?

B) Short questions (Answer in about 150 words)

Q1: Briefly explain the social contract theory.

Q2: What is organic theory of society? Briefly explain

Q3: Write a brief note on interactionism.

Q4: Write a short note on neo-nominalism.

Q5: What do you mean by theory of group of mind? Explain

Q6: Explain in brief the concept of realism.

C) Long questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q1: What are the theories of individual and society? Which one is more satisfactory, according to you? Explain

Q2: What is social contract theory? Discuss.

Q3: What is organic theory of society? Explain.

Q4: What is the theory of Group of Mind? Is it satisfactory? Discuss.

Q5: What are the concepts in sociology regarding the relation between individual and society? Are they satisfactory?

Q6: What is nominalism? Do you find any similar viewpoints between nominalism and the social contract theory? Discuss.

Q7: What is interactionism in sociology? Is this concept similar to the organic theory of society? Discuss.

Q8: What is neo-nominalism? Do you find any similarity between neo-nominalism and the group mind theory? Discuss.

Q9: What is realism? Is it a satisfactory account of the relation between individual and society? Discuss.

Q10: What is reductionism? Is it a satisfactory concept in society? Discuss.

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