

Relation between Individual and Society

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Abstract

The relation between individual and society is very close. Essentially, “society” is the regularities, customs and ground rules of antihuman behavior. These practices are tremendously important to know how humans act and interact with each other. Society does not exist independently without individual. The individual lives and acts within society but society is nothing, in spite of the combination of individuals for cooperative effort. On the other hand, society exists to serve individuals—not the other way around. Human life and society almost go together. Man is biologically and psychologically equipped to live in groups, in society. Society has become an essential condition for human life to arise and to continue. The relationship between individual and society is ultimately one of the profound of all the problems of social philosophy. It is more philosophical rather than sociological because it involves the question of values. Man depends on society. It is in the society that an individual is surrounded and encompassed by culture, as a societal force. It is in the society again that he has to conform to the norms, occupy statuses and become members of groups. The question of the relationship between the individual and the society is the starting point of many discussions. It is closely connected with the question of the relationship of man and society. The relation between the two depends upon one fact that the individual and the society are mutually dependent, one grows with the help of the other. The aim of this paper is to show the questions: how a man is a social animal and how individual and society affect each other?

Keywords

Society, Social Life, Individual

1. Introduction

Man is a social animal. He has a natural urge to live an associated life with others. Man needs society for his existence or survival. The human child depends on his parents and others for its survival and growth. The inherent

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capacities of the child can develop only in society. The ultimate goal of society is to promote good and happy life for its individuals. It creates conditions and opportunities for the all round development of individual personality. Society ensures harmony and cooperation among individuals in spite of their occasional conflicts and tensions. If society helps the individuals in numerous ways, great men also contribute to society by their wisdom and experience. Thus, society and individuals are bound by an intimate and harmonious bond and the conflicts between the two are apparent and momentary. In a well-ordered society, there would be lasting harmony between the two.

2. Society

The term “society” means relationships social beings, men, express their nature by creating and re-creating an organization which guides and controls their behavior in myriad ways. Society liberates and limits the activities of men and it is a necessary condition of every human being and need to fulfillment of life. Society is a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid many divisions of controls of human behavior and of liberties. This changing system, we call society and it is always changing [1]. Society exists only where social beings “behave” toward one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another.

Society not confined to man [2]. It should be clear that society is not limited to human beings. There are many degrees of animal societies, likely the ants, the bee, the hornet, are known to most school children. It has been contended that wherever there is life there is society, because life means heredity and, so far as we know, can arise only out of and in the presence of other life. All higher animals at least have a very definite society, arising out of the requirements their nature and the conditions involved in the perpetuation of their species [3]. In society each member seeks something and gives something. A society can also consist of likeminded people governed by their own norms and values within a dominant, large society moreover; a society may be illustrated as an economic, social or industrial infrastructure, made up of a varied collection of individuals. Finally, we can say that the word “society” may also refer to an organized voluntary association of people for religious, benevolent, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic or other purposes [4]. Society is universal and pervasive and has no defined boundary or assignable limits. A society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or modes of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into those relations or who differ from them in behavior. In this way we can conclude that, society is the whole complex of social behavior and the network of social relationship [5].

3. Nature of Society: [6]

Society is an abstract term that connotes the complex of inter-relations that exist between and among the members of the group. Society exists wherever there are good or bad, proper or improper relationships between human beings. These social relationships are not evident, they do not have any concrete form, and hence society is abstract. Society is not a group of people; it means in essence a state or condition, a relationship and is therefore necessarily an abstraction. Society is organization of relationship. It is the total complex of human relationships. It includes whole range of human relations. Social relationships invariably possess a physical element, which takes the form of awareness of another’s presence, common objective or common interest [7]. Now we can say that society is the union itself, the organization, the sum of formal relations in which associating individuals are bound together. Societies consist in mutual interaction and inter relation of individuals and of the structure formed by their relations.

4. Social Life

As a human being man cannot live without association. So man’s life is to an enormous extent a group life. Because individuals cannot be understood apart from their relations with one another; the relations cannot be understood apart from the units (or terms) of the relationship. A man of society may be aided by the understanding of say, neurons and synapses, but his quest remains the analysis of social relationships [8]. The role of social life is clarified when we consider the process by which they develop in the life of the individual. Kant [9] thought that it was just antagonism which served to awaken man’s power to overcome his inertia and in the search for power to win for himself a place among his fellow-men, “with whom he cannot live at all.” Without this resistance, the spiteful competition of vanity, the insatiable desire of gain and power, the natural capacities of hu-

manity would have slumbered undeveloped [10].

Social life is the combination of various components such as activities, people and places. While all of these components are required to define a social life, the nature of each component is different for every person and can change for each person, as affected by a variety of external influences. In fact, the complex social life of our day his actions indeed, even his thoughts and feelings are influenced in large measure by a social life which surrounds him like an atmosphere [11]. It is true that, human achievement is marked by his ability to do, so to a more remarkable degree than any other animal. Everywhere there is a social life setting limitations and predominatingly influencing individual action. In government, in religion, in industry, in education, in family association—in everything that builds up modern life, so men are cooperating. Because they work together, combine and organize for specific purposes, so that no man lives to himself. This unity of effort is to make society [12].

There are different kinds of social life and these are depends on various factors. There are also more immediate things that can affect one's social life on a day-to-day basis. Availability of friends and/or dates, current cash flow, personal schedule, recent positive restaurant reviews and perhaps a post on Perez Hilton of where the celebs are hanging out can all determine with whom you interact, the nature of activities, how often you socialize and where such social activities take place [13]. These types of factors of social life are normal and for normal people. Nevertheless, social life depends on different things such as a) The political life; b) The economic life; c) Voluntary associations; d) Educational associations; e) Methods of communication and; f) The family [14].

However, I have come to realize that my social life, or at least the very little going out that counts as “social” is completely determined by things that should have nothing to do with determining one's social life.

5. Man Is a Social Animal

Though accurate information about the exact origin of society is not known still it is an accepted fact that man has been living in society since time immemorial. Long ago, Aristotle expressed that “Man is essentially a social animal by nature”. He cannot live without society, if he does so; he is either beast or God. Man has to live in society for his existence and welfare. In almost all aspect of his life he feels the need of society. Biologically and psychologically he compelled to live in society.

Man can never develop his personality, language, culture and “inner deep” by living outside the society. The essence of the fact is that man has always belonged to a society of some sort, without which man cannot exist at all. Society fulfills all his needs and provides security. Every human took birth, grows, live and die in society. Without society human's life is just like fish out of water. Hence there exists a great deal of close relationships between man and society. Both are closely inter-related, interconnected and inter-dependent. Relationship between the two is bilateral in nature. But this close relationship between man and society raises one of the most important questions i.e. in what sense man is a social animal? No doubt Aristotle said so long ago. However, man is a social animal mainly because of the following three reasons:

5.1. Man Is a Social Animal by Nature

Man is a social animal because his nature makes him so. Sociality or sociability is his natural instinct. He can't but live in society. All his human qualities such as: to think, to enquire, to learn language, to play and work only developed in human society. All this developed through interaction with others. One can't be a normal being in isolation. His nature compels him to live with his fellow beings. He can't afford to live alone. Famous sociologist MacIver has cited three cases in which infants were isolated from all social relationships to make experiments about man's social nature.

The first case was of Kasper Hauser who from his childhood until his seventeenth year was brought up in woods of Nuremberg. In his case it was found that at the age of seventeen he could hardly walk, had the mind of an infant and mutter only a few meaningless phrases. In spite of his subsequent education he could never make himself a normal man.

The second case was of two Hindu children who in 1920 were discovered in a wolf den. One of the children died soon after discovery. The other could walk only on all four, possessed no language except wolf like growls. She was shy of human being and afraid of them. It was only after careful and sympathetic training that she could learn some social habits.

The third case was of Anna, an illegitimate American child who had been placed in a room at age of six

months and discovered five years later. On discovery it was found that she could not walk or speech and was indifferent to people around her.

All the above cases prove that man is social by nature. Human nature develops in man only when he lives in society, only when he shares with his fellow begins a common life. Society is something which fulfils a vital need in man's constitution, it is not something accidentally added to or super imposed on human nature. He knows himself and his fellow beings within the framework of society. Indeed, man is social by nature. The social nature is not super-imposed on him or added to him rather it is inborn.

5.2. Necessity Makes Man a Social Animal

Man is a social animal not only by nature but also by necessity. It is said that needs and necessities makes man social. Man has many needs and necessities. Out of these different needs social, mental and physical needs are very important and needs fulfillment. He can't fulfill these needs without living in society.

All his needs and necessities compel him to live in society. Many of his needs and necessities will remain unfulfilled without the co-operation of his fellow beings. His psychological safety, social recognition, loves and self-actualization needs only fulfilled only within the course of living in society. He is totally dependent for his survival upon the existence of society. Human baby is brought up under the care of his parents and family members.

He would not survive even a day without the support of society. All his basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, health and education are fulfilled only within the framework of society. He also needs society for his social and mental developments. His need for self-preservation compels him to live in society. Individual also satisfy his sex needs in a socially accepted way in a society.

To fulfill his security concern at the old age individual lives in society. Similarly helplessness at the time of birth compels him to live in society. A nutrition, shelter, warmth and affection need compels him to live in society. Thus for the satisfaction of human wants man lives in society. Hence it is also true that not only for nature but also for the fulfillment of his needs and necessities man lives in society.

5.3. Man Lives in Society for His Mental and Intellectual Development

This is yet another reason for which man is a social animal. Society not only fulfils his physical needs and determines his social nature but also determines his personality and guides the course of development of human mind.

Development of human mind and self is possible only living in society. Society moulds our attitudes, beliefs, morals, ideals and thereby moulds individual personality. With the course of living and with the process of socialization man's personality develops and he became a fully fledged individual. Man acquires a self or personality only living in a society. From birth to death individual acquires different social qualities by social interaction with his fellow beings which moulds his personality. Individual mind without society remains undeveloped at infant stage. The cultural heritage determines man's personality by molding his attitudes, beliefs, morals and ideals. With the help of social heritage man's in born potentialities are unfolded.

Thus, from the above discussion we conclude that Man is a social animal. His nature and necessities makes him a social being. He also depends on society to be a human being. He acquires personality within society. There exists a very close relationship between individual and society like that of cells and body.

6. Relation between Individual and Society

Human cannot survive without society and societies cannot exist without members. Still there may be conflicts between the individual and society; one can imagine that social systems function better when they have considerable control over their individual members, but that this is a mixed blessing for the system's members. Likewise can competition with other societies strengthen the social system, while wearing out its constituent members? This idea was voiced by Rousseau (1769) who believed that we lived better in the original state of nature than under civilization, and who was for that reason less positive about classic Greek civilization than his contemporaries. The relation between individual and society has been an interesting and a complex problem at the same time. It can be stated more or less that it has defied all solutions so far. No sociologist has been able to give

a solution of the relation between the two that will be fully satisfactory and convincing by reducing the conflict between the two to the minimum and by showing a way in which both will tend to bring about a healthy growth of each other. Aristotle has treated of the individual only from the point of view of the state and he wants the individual to fit in the mechanism of the state and the society. It is very clear that relation between individual and society are very close. So we will discuss here Rawls three models of the relation between the individual and society:

6.1. Utilitarianism

The first model is Rawls's presentation of the position of classical utilitarianism. His most telling argument against the utilitarian position is that it conflates the system of desires of all individuals and arrives at the good for a society by treating it as one large individual choice. It is a summing up over the field of individual desires. Utilitarianism has often been described as individualistic, but Rawls argues convincingly that the classical utilitarian position does not take seriously the plurality and distinctness of individuals [15]. It applies to society the principle of choice for one man. Rawls also observes that the notion of the ideal observer or the impartial sympathetic spectator is closely bound up with this classical utilitarian position. It is only from the perspective of some such hypothetical sympathetic ideal person that the various individual interests can be summed over an entire society [16]. The paradigm presented here, and rejected by Rawls, is one in which the interests of society are considered as the interests of one person. Plurality is ignored, and the desires of individuals are conflated. The tension between individual and society is resolved by subordinating the individual to the social sum. The social order is conceived as a unity. The principles of individual choice, derived from the experience of the self as a unity, are applied to society as a whole. Rawls rightly rejects this position as being unable to account for justice, except perhaps by some administrative decision that it is desirable for the whole to give individuals some minimum level of liberty and happiness. But individual persons do not enter into the theoretical position. They are merely sources or directions from which desires are drawn.

6.2. Justice as Fairness

The second paradigm is that which characterizes the original position. It has already been suggested that this is a picture of an aggregate of individuals, mutually disinterested, and conceived primarily as will. While not necessarily egoistic, their interests are each of their own choosing. They have their own life plans. They coexist on the same geographical territory and they have roughly similar needs and interests so that mutually advantageous cooperation among them is possible.

I shall emphasize this aspect of the circumstances of justice by assuming that the parties take no interest in one another's interest...Thus, one can say, in brief, that the circumstances of justice obtain whenever mutually disinterested persons put forward conflicting claims to the division of social advantages under conditions of moderate scarcity [17].

Here the tension between individual and society is resolved in favor of plurality, of an aggregate of mutually disinterested individuals occupying the same space at the same time. It is resolved in favor of the plural, while giving up any social unity which might obtain. The classical utilitarian model and the original position as sketched by Rawls provide paradigms for two polar ways in which the tension between the plurality of individuals and the unity of social structure might be resolved. One resolution favors unity and the other favors plurality.

6.3. The Idea of a Social Union

The third paradigm is included under Rawls's discussion of the congruence of justice and goodness, and of the problem of stability. It is described as a good, as an end in itself which is a shared end. This paradigm is distinct both from the conflated application to the entire society of the principle of choice for one person and from the conception of society as an aggregate of mutually disinterested individuals. The idea of a social union is described in contrast to the idea of a private society. A private society is essentially the second model as realized in the actual world. It stems from a consideration of the conditions of the original position as descriptive of a social order. Over against this notion of private society, Rawls proposes his idea of a social union [18]. It is one in which final ends are shared and communal institutes are valued.

6.4. Marx and Engels on Relationship between Individuals and Society

The direct elaborations of Marx and Engels on relationships between individual action and social process can be divided into three categories for purposes of discussion: 1) general statements concerning the dialectical relations between the two and the historicity of human nature; 2) concrete descriptions—often angry, sometimes satirical—of the impact on people of their particular relations to the production process and the examination, as a major concern, of “estrangement” or “alienation”; and 3) analyses of consciousness with particular attention to the pervasive power of commodity fetishism in class society [19].

Besides, the relationship between individual and society can be viewed from another three angles: Functionalist, Inter-actionist, and Culture and personality.

6.4.1. Functionalist View: How Society Affects the Individual?

What is the relation between individual and society? Functionalists regard the individual as formed by society through the influence of such institutions as the family, school and workplace. Early sociologists such as Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and even Karl Marx were functionalists, examined society as existing apart from the individual. For Durkheim, society is reality; it is first in origin and importance to the individual. Durkheim’s keen discussion of the collective consciousness showed the ways in which social interactions and relationships and ultimately society influence the individual’s attitudes, ideas and sentiments. He utilized his theory of “collective representation” in explaining the phenomena of religion, suicide and the concept of social solidarity. In contrast to Auguste Comte (known as father of sociology), who regarded the individual as a mere abstraction, a somewhat more substantial position by Durkheim held that the individual was the recipient of group influence and social heritage. In sociological circle, this was the “burning question” (individual v/s society) of the day [20].

How society is important in the formation of individual’s personality is clearly reflected in the cases of isolated and feral children (children who were raised in the company of animals such as bears and wolves). The studies of feral children, referred to earlier, have clearly demonstrated the importance of social interaction and human association in the development of personality.

6.4.2. Inter-Actionist View: How Is Society Constructed?

How an individual helps in building society? For inter-actionists, it is through the interaction of the people that the society is formed. The main champion of this approach was Max Weber (social action theorist), who said that society is built up out of the interpretations of individuals. The structuralists (or functionalists) tend to approach the relationship of self (individual) and society from the point of the influence of society on the individual. Inter-actionists, on the other hand, tend to work from self (individual) “outwards”, stressing that people create society.

A prominent theorist of the last century, Talcott Parsons developed a general theory for the study of society called action theory, based on the methodological principle of voluntarism and the epistemological principle of analytical realism. The theory attempted to establish a balance between two major methodological traditions: the utilitarian-positivist and hermeneutic-idealistic traditions. For Parsons, voluntarism established a third alternative between these two. More than a theory of society, Parsons presented a theory of social evolution and a concrete interpretation of the “drives” and directions of world history. He added that, the structure of society which determines roles and norms, and the cultural system which determines the ultimate values of ends. His theory was severely criticized by George Homans. In his Presidential address, “bringing man back in”, Homans re-established the need to study individual social interactions, the building blocks of society. A recent well-known theorist Anthony Giddens has not accepted the idea of some sociologists that society has an existence over and above individuals. He argues: “Human actions and their reactions are the only reality and we cannot regard societies or systems as having an existence over and above individuals.” [21].

6.4.3. Culture and Personality View: How Individual and Society Affect Each Other? Or How Individual and Society Interacts?

Both the above views are incomplete. In reality, it is not society or individual but it is society and individual which helps in understanding the total reality. The extreme view of individual or society has long been abandoned. Sociologists from Cooley to the present have recognized that neither society nor the individual can exist without each other. This view was laid down mainly by Margaret Mead, Kardiner and others who maintained

that society's culture affects personality (individual) and, in turn, personality helps in the formation of society's culture. These anthropologists have studied how society shapes or controls individuals and how, in turn, individuals create and change society. Thus, to conclude, it can be stated that the relationship between society and individual is not one-sided. Both are essential for the comprehension of either. Both go hand in hand, each is essentially dependent on the other. Both are interdependent on each, other.

The individual should be subordinated to society and the individual should sacrifice their welfare at the cost of society. Both these views are extreme which see the relationship between individual and society from merely the one or the other side. But surely all is not harmonious between individual and society. The individual and society interact on one another and depend on one another. Social integration is never complete and harmonious.

7. Conclusion

The wellbeing of nations can occur at the cost of the well-being of their citizens, and this seems to have happened in the past. Yet in present day conditions, there is no such conflict. Society and individual are made mutually dependent and responsible and mutually complementary. The result is that society progresses well with the minimum possible restrictions on the individual. A very wide scope is given to the natural development of the energies of the individual in such a manner that in the end. Society will benefit the best by it. While society reaps the best advantage of the properly utilized and developed energies of the individuals, an attempt is made to see that the normal and sometimes even the abnormal weaknesses of the individuals have the least possible effect on the society. Spirit of service and duty to the society is the ideal of the individual and spirit of tolerance, broadmindedness and security of the individual is the worry of the society. There is no rigid rule to develop the individual in a particular pattern suitable to the rules of the society. Society demands greater sacrifices from its greater individuals while the fruits of the works of all are meant equally for all. The general rule is: the higher the status and culture of the individual are, the lesser his rights are and the greater his duties are. A sincere attempt is made by the sociologists to bring to the minimum the clash between the individual and the society, so that there will be few psychological problems for the individual and the society both. The inherent capacities, energies and weaknesses of the individual are properly taken into account and the evolution of the relation between the two is made as natural as possible. Human values and idealism being given due respect, the development of the relation between the two is more or less philosophical.

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