# 3. Society – *tolerantia ecclesiastica*

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated a number different ways of describing society. These descriptions do not define society but they do constitute different aspects of the word society. Descriptions of people and society are based on a notion of society which is not normally verbalised. The categories in society which arise from these various attempts originate from these inadequate definitions. The categories are abstractions even though they attempt to describe social phenomena and a social reality. Abstractions can easily become such that they exist without being made concrete, which creates uncertainty. It is a question of approximate definitions. One presents a concept at the same time as one says that there exists an ambiguity, e.g. in the concept of class. One does not discuss this ambiguity because one lacks the tools to do so. The discussion moves to how these abstractions should be conceived of without anything being done about the ambiguity.

“A society is a group of people who are associated by a network of social relationships with a certain persistence and continuity” (Wikipedia (Swedish site)). Readers are taught to apply such a cognitive structure as a description of reality. Different theories present different ways of looking at society. This difference is described but not explained.

Since I do not approve of any of the definitions offered, my task is to show what the definition looks like. This chapter is the start of a long journey into the conceptual world. It is a new way of looking at society as a sociological-philosophical concept. It is at the same time necessary to address those philosophical questions which are relevant in this context. Sociology is associated with philosophy of the social sciences.

The expression *human community* is an abstract construction. What I will do in this chapter is attempt to figure out this concept. It should be possible to analyse society as a community of people in its parts and to describe it within man’s conceptual world.

The inspiration for my analysis comes from Uuno Saarnio’s concept of toleration which is based on a categorisation undertaken by Leibniz. I construct society based on this concept. Saarnio’s typology of the whole constitutes a major part of the concept of society and is dealt with in the following chapter.