

Lenski's Five Types of Society

by Sophia Tutorial



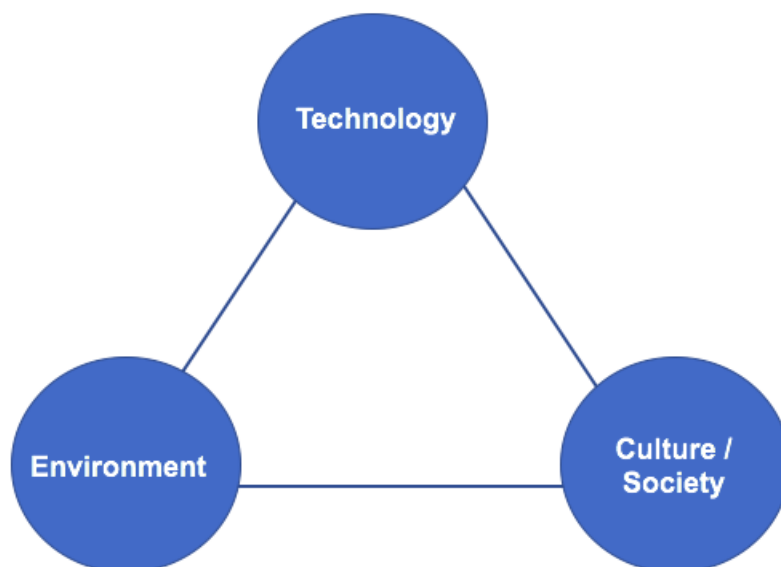
WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the work of sociologist Gerhard Lenski, through the exploration of:

1. Gerhard Lenski
2. Lenski's Five Stages of Social Organization
 - a. Hunting and Gathering
 - b. Horticulturalism and Pastoralism
 - c. Agriculture
 - d. Industry
 - e. Post-Industrial Society

1. GERHARD LENSKI

Sociologist **Gerhard Lenski** theorized about the relationship between technology, the environment, and human society. Lenski's ideas can be broken down in the triangle shown below:



Lenski was interested in how technology related to the environment and culture/society. Lenski argued that technology is crucial for developing culture and society. The level of technology that a group of people have

will then determine their cultural patterns and level and degree of social organization.

There is also a relationship between technology and the environment. The environment provides a set of conditions to work with, and people have technologies that respond to that environment. Out of this interplay results cultural patterns and social institutions, such as how people extract a living from the earth, how the economy is structured, etc.

Lenski maintained that this interplay also profoundly shapes people's worldviews, cultures, and society. Culture and society are always related to nature in this scheme via the medium of technology. In Lenski's time, social theorists were developing total schemes for socio-cultural evolution; in Lenski's case, he chose technology as his 'motor' for the evolution of society.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Gerhard Lenski

American sociologist who advanced the theory that technology is the most basic driving force in sociocultural evolution.

2. LENSKI'S FIVE STAGES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Originally, Lenski theorized that there are four stages of social organization, each with its own technologies. He viewed these technologies as giving rise to particular forms of social organization and culture.

2a. Hunting and Gathering

In these **hunting and gathering societies**, people hunted wild animals and gathered naturally occurring wild fruits, nuts and vegetables using simple tools, which is why this is the first level of technological advancement. They used simple tools such as a wooden spear, or a stone affixed to a spear that is thrown at an animal. They were gathering wild plants and hunting wild animals that were in uncontrolled parts of the environment. If this is your primary mode of subsistence, you have to follow the plants and animals wherever they happen to be in the environment at that particular season, which may range over a large area.

People in these societies made seasonal rounds and followed their food sources. Being primarily nomadic and moving around a lot, they didn't establish permanent settlements or accumulate many possessions, since they couldn't carry them.

Humans lived in this way for many, many years, but it is primarily extinct today. You don't see too many hunting and gathering societies anymore. If a great cataclysm occurred, it's possible that people might revert back to this way of living, but we have advanced technologically beyond it.



TERM TO KNOW

Hunting and Gathering Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood through hunting animals with simple tools and gathering naturally occurring vegetation.

2b. Horticulturalism and pastoralism

Horticulturalism is the act of raising and tending crops with small hand tools, and pastoralism is the act of domesticating animals for subsistence processes.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Think of the image of the sheep herder tending his flock of sheep. That's pastoralism. The man tending the rice paddies with his hand--that's horticulturalism.

The **horticultural and pastoral society** way of life began about 10,000 years ago when people learned to tend crops and domesticate animals. This produced a larger food surplus, which enabled the population to grow. As the population grew and became more sedentary, there was a diversification of social roles. Some people became leaders and religious practitioners, which introduced an element of inequality to the society that did not exist in the hunter/gatherer level of organization.



TERM TO KNOW

Horticultural and Pastoral Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using hand tools to cultivate crops and domesticated animals.

2c. Agriculture

In **agricultural societies**, people procured their livelihood by the use of plows driven by animals to support large scale cultivation, which began about 5,000 years ago.



THINK ABOUT IT

Why would the use of animal-driven plows be a huge boon to civilization? When you've got a plow attached to the back of an animal, think about how much more land you could till and how many more crops you could plant. This in turn relieves a lot of human labor, since you're tending the plow versus literally hacking the ground. It was still difficult, but it was a major breakthrough in technology.

This new technology created a massive surplus and allowed the population to skyrocket into the millions. It also freed a special class of people from labor, so inequality became a way of life. Some people are forced into slavery and serfdom, and are forced to work the land, while others are free to live an intellectual, governing life overseeing the structure of society.

In short, in this period, we begin to see a diversification of social roles and more inequality as society becomes more technologically complex. At the same time, cities emerge and they cluster around agricultural cultivation, because people are able to form permanent settlements around the areas where they are tending their crops.



TERM TO KNOW

Agricultural Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using animal driven plows and large-scale cultivation.

2d. Industry

In the **industrial society** age, Lenski theorized, people used machines and advanced energy sources to produce a livelihood. This was a widely transformative technology that destroyed the way humans had lived for the entirety of their existence prior to the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s.

IN CONTEXT

As the Industrial Revolution occurred and people started bringing machines into factories, the Enclosure Movement also occurred. The Enclosure Movement happened when all the feudal lords "enclosed their lands" and forced their serfs out. Feudal lords gained wealth by employing peasants to work their land for them in return for a small share of the produce. When the industrial revolution happened, feudal lords sought to divert their capital to more profitable avenues, like factory production, and so they kicked the serfs out of their lands and made them find work in new factories.

This was a primarily urban phenomenon, since all of the factories were located in cities. This, in turn, caused urbanization to grow. Science became geared towards making better machines, and machines became more efficient. All of this progress was a part of the Industrial Revolution and it was a completely new way of life.

It raised standards of living and gave people a longer life expectancy, so in this way, it was beneficial for society. However, it also caused massive inequality and environmental degradation. You're still dealing with the consequences of it today, with global warming and things like that. In essence, industrialization is the grand experiment of human life. It was unquestionably a benefit for society, but who knows the long term effects?



TERM TO KNOW

Industrial Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using machines and advanced sources of energy such as steam, coal, and water.

2e. Post-Industrial Society

There is a fifth stage of social organization, that Lenski wasn't able to see but developed after his time. This is the **post-industrial society**, which is defined by computer technology aiding in the production of goods and services in the economy.

IN CONTEXT

You're living in what is called the information society, which demands new skills of workers. As mentioned in earlier lessons, the manufacturing jobs in America are gone and they're not going to come back. Well-paying jobs now reward the ability to process information at a desk using a computer. You're not 'getting your hands dirty' like you used to working in a manufacturing plant. This requires training a new workforce with the skills that the post-industrial society demands.

What do you think will happen with post-industrial society? It's a mystery, really. The early emerging consensus is that post-industrial society has deepened the inequalities that began with industrialization. People who are caught on the wrong side of the post-industrial divide won't know how to make the cross over to the new information economy, which may cause a massive rift in society. Some argue we're seeing this now.

This type of dystopian scenario was foreshadowed by Kurt Vonnegut in his 1950s book called *Player Piano*. In this book, there is an elite, educated technical class that rules over the mass of society - people who are unemployed and lack the skills necessary. Current society may not be headed towards this type of dystopian society, but it does exemplify some of the early trends of post-industrialization.



TERM TO KNOW

Post-Industrial Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using computer-aided-technology and advanced information processing.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about sociologist **Gerhard Lenski** and his **four stages of social organization**. You also learned about a fifth stage that occurred post-Lenski, known as **post-industrial society**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



TERMS TO KNOW

Agricultural Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using animal driven plows and large-scale cultivation.

Horticultural and Pastoral Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using hand tools to cultivate crops and domesticated animals.

Hunting and Gathering Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood through hunting animals with simple tools and gathering naturally occurring vegetation.

Industrial Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using machines and advanced sources of energy such as steam, coal, and water.

Post-Industrial Society

Societies in which people procure their livelihood using computer-aided-technology and advanced information processing.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Gerhard Lenski

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