**Type of Society**

Although humans have established many types of societies throughout history, sociologists and anthropologists (experts who study early and tribal cultures) usually refer to six basic types of societies, each defined by its level of technology.

### hunting and gathering societies

The members of **hunting and gathering societies** primarily survive by hunting animals, fishing, and gathering plants. The vast majority of these societies existed in the past, with only a few (perhaps a million people total) living today on the verge of extinction.

To survive, early human societies completely depended upon their immediate environment. When the animals left the area, the plants died, or the rivers dried up, the society had to relocate to an area where resources were plentiful. Consequently, hunting and gathering societies, which were typically small, were quite mobile. In some cases, where resources in a locale were extraordinarily plentiful, small villages might form. But most hunting and gathering societies were **nomadic**, moving constantly in search of food and water.

Labor in hunting and gathering societies was divided equally among members. Because of the mobile nature of the society, these societies stored little in the form of surplus goods. Therefore, anyone who could hunt, fish, or gather fruits and vegetables did so. These societies probably also had at least some division of labor based on gender. Males probably traveled long distances to hunt and capture larger animals. Females hunted smaller animals, gathered plants, made clothing, protected and raised children, and helped the males to protect the community from rival groups.

Hunting and gathering societies were also **tribal**. Members shared an ancestral heritage and a common set of traditions and rituals. They also sacrificed their individuality for the sake of the larger tribal culture.

#### pastoral societies

Members of **pastoral societies**, which first emerged 12,000 years ago, pasture animals for food and transportation. Pastoral societies still exist today, primarily in the desert lands of North Africa where horticulture and manufacturing are not possible.

Domesticating animals allows for a more manageable food supply than do hunting and gathering. Hence, pastoral societies are able to produce a surplus of goods, which makes storing food for future use a possibility. With storage comes the desire to develop settlements that permit the society to remain in a single place for longer periods of time. And with stability comes the trade of surplus goods between neighboring pastoral communities.

Pastoral societies allow certain of its members (those who are not domesticating animals) to engage in nonsurvival activities. Traders, healers, spiritual leaders, craftspeople, and people with other specialty professions appear.

### Horticultural societies

Unlike pastoral societies that rely on domesticating animals, **horticultural societies**rely on cultivating fruits, vegetables, and plants. These societies first appeared in different parts of the planet about the same time as pastoral societies. Like hunting and gathering societies, horticultural societies had to be mobile. Depletion of the land's resources or dwindling water supplies, for example, forced the people to leave. Horticultural societies occasionally produced a surplus, which permitted storage as well as the emergence of other professions not related to the survival of the society.

### Agricultural societies

**Agricultural societies** use technological advances to cultivate crops (especially grains like wheat, rice, corn, and barley) over a large area. Sociologists use the phrase **Agricultural Revolution** to refer to the technological changes that occurred as long as 8,500 years ago that led to cultivating crops and raising farm animals. Increases in food supplies then led to larger populations than in earlier communities. This meant a greater surplus, which resulted in towns that became centers of trade supporting various rulers, educators, craftspeople, merchants, and religious leaders who did not have to worry about locating nourishment.

Greater degrees of social stratification appeared in agricultural societies. For example, women previously had higher social status because they shared labor more equally with men. In hunting and gathering societies, women even gathered more food than men. But as food stores improved and women took on lesser roles in providing food for the family, they became more subordinate to men.

As villages and towns expanded into neighboring areas, conflicts with other communities inevitably occurred. Farmers provided warriors with food in exchange for protection against invasion by enemies. A system of rulers with high social status also appeared. This **nobility** organized warriors to protect the society from invasion. In this way, the nobility managed to extract goods from the “lesser” persons of society.

#### Feudal societies

From the 9th to 15th centuries, **feudalism** was a form of society based on ownership of land. Unlike today's farmers, vassals under feudalism were bound to cultivating their lord's land. In exchange for military protection, the lords exploited the peasants into providing food, crops, crafts, homage, and other services to the owner of the land. The caste system of feudalism was often multigenerational; the families of peasants may have cultivated their lord's land for generations.

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, a new economic system emerged that began to replace feudalism. **Capitalism** is marked by open competition in a free market, in which the means of production are privately owned. Europe's exploration of the Americas served as one impetus for the development of capitalism. The introduction of foreign metals, silks, and spices stimulated great commercial activity in Europe.

#### **Industrial societies**

**Industrial societies** are based on using machines (particularly fuel‐driven ones) to produce goods. Sociologists refer to the period during the 18th century when the production of goods in mechanized factories began as the **Industrial Revolution**. The Industrial Revolution appeared first in Britain, and then quickly spread to the rest of the world.

As productivity increased, means of transportation improved to better facilitate the transfer of products from place to place. Great wealth was attained by the few who owned factories, and the “masses” found jobs working in the factories.

Industrialization brought about changes in almost every aspect of society. As factories became the center of work, “home cottages” as the usual workplace became less prevalent, as did the family's role in providing vocational training and education. Public education via schools and eventually the mass media became the norm. People's life expectancy increased as their health improved. Political institutions changed into modern models of governance. Cultural diversity increased, as did social mobility. Large cities emerged as places to find jobs in factories. Social power moved into the hands of business elites and governmental officials, leading to struggles between industrialists and workers. Labor unions and welfare organizations formed in response to these disputes and concerns over workers' welfare, including children who toiled in factories. Rapid changes in industrial technology also continued, especially the production of larger machines and faster means of transportation. The Industrial Revolution also saw to the development of **bureaucratic** forms of organization, complete with written rules, job descriptions, impersonal positions, and hierarchical methods of management.

### Postindustrial societies

Sociologists note that with the advent of the computer microchip, the world is witnessing a technological revolution. This revolution is creating a **postindustrial society** based on information, knowledge, and the selling of services. That is, rather than being driven by the factory production of goods, society is being shaped by the human mind, aided by computer technology. Although factories will always exist, the key to wealth and power seems to lie in the ability to generate, store, manipulate, and sell information.

Sociologists speculate about the characteristics of postindustrial society in the near future. They predict increased levels of education and training, consumerism, availability of goods, and social mobility. While they hope for a decline in inequality as technical skills and “know‐how” begin to determine class rather than the ownership of property, sociologists are also concerned about potential social divisions based on those who have appropriate education and those who do not. Sociologists believe society will become more concerned with the welfare of all members of society. They hope postindustrial society will be less characterized by social conflict, as everyone works together to solve society's problems through science.