Class #15: Political Ideologies

Discussion Questions for October 17, 2013


Because writing assignments are meant to prepare you for class discussions, you must post a draft question on the Moodle Forum for this date if you want your submission to count. After posting a draft, you must revise and resubmit your final response for a grade by the following Sunday night. In the case of questions posted below, the final draft of your question is due by the end of the day on Sunday, October 20. Include your name, the full question number, and the text of the question on both your draft and final submissions.

Discussion Questions

15-1. Based on reading Gordon's "Introduction", explain how that author views and presents the three ideological positions as mutually exclusive.

In Hunter and Milofsky's book, Pragmatic Liberalism, one of the assertions is that the major ideologies that have informed public policy debates and arguments over the last forty years have been understood to be mutually exclusive of each other. That is, one cannot simultaneously hold conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives because the theories underlying each model are mutually exclusive and fundamentally in conflict with each other. One argument of Hunter and Milofsky is that this is not really true.

15-2. Macionis, like Gordon, provides three orientations for understanding social problems. How are the orientations presented by the two authors similar and different?

Gordon is a radical economist, so it is not surprising that in his presentation economic ideas play a big role. One of the central ideas is that of "the market". One thing that might puzzle students who have taken some economics courses is how you can apply the concept of the market to social problems and social services. The market is anchored in ideas of supply and demand, which seem to be related to businesses and when businesses grow or decline and how consumers needs are met.

15-3. Explain the difference between personally accepting a conservative, radical, or liberal political perspective, on one hand, and accepting that the conservative, radical, or liberal perspective accurately describes and analyzes a particular social situation or social problem. Does an accurate analysis mean that we must accept the action agenda of a particular perspective?

Some of our readings describe situations and give analyses that fit particular ideological perspectives. We will see that the realities of business
dominance in health care fits the radical analysis of social services. When we look at schools, Bryk will give an analysis that is more consistent with a conservative view and Kozol gives a perspective that is somewhere between liberal and radical. If we personally think of ourselves as conservative or radical how do we deal with these empirical situations that fit a contrary model? If you're a conservative does that mean you have to deny that big business dominates health care? If you're a radical does that mean you cannot accept that motivated, exclusive communities might produce the best education for children? This question asks you to make sense of the difference between personal ideological beliefs and empirical situations that fit the assumptions of different models.