I. In the next section of the semester we will talk about the idea of social policy and organize the discussion around perspectives taken from three different ideologies of policy making: radical, liberal, and conservative—a framework borrowed from Gordon

A. Policy refers to

1. Centralized decisions about programs to address social problems that are implemented through institutions.

2. Political processes where the contents of policies are debated and then implemented by political and administrative authorities.

3. Idealized, research-based discussions about
   a. What needs exist that should be addressed by programs
   b. What makes programs work or fail
   c. How programs should be organized or re-organized so that they work better

4. While some view policy-making as an idealized, orderly process others see it as chaotic, somewhat random, and neither rational nor guided by academic or research wisdom

B. To Gordon, each of the ideologies is a “paradigm” or an overarching perspective on society that

1. Defines what makes up social reality, incorporating underlying assumptions about human nature

2. Defines the nature of the state
   a. What functions it performs
   b. What activities and programs it encompasses
   c. What the state SHOULD do
   d. How accountability works at the level of the state
   e. Whether social programs should be understood as rational, service defined social needs, or manipulated, serving class interests

3. Defines the nature and role of the market (as a radical economist, Gordon thinks the economy is the central institution of society)
a. Within the neo-classical economics theory that guides the liberal and conservative perspective, the market is:

i. A system by which suppliers provide goods and services and consumers purchase them

ii. Where prices are related to the amount of supply and the extent of demand

iii. The interaction of supply and demand creates a “perfect” decision system for determining how much of what things society needs

iv. The system is interactive so results “fall out” of the process rather than being directed by some central, all-knowing authority

b. Conservatives believe that the market is an effective substitute for government and that the government interferes with the efficiency of the market—it tends to be a utilitarian model

i. One strand of conservative discourse involves ways that government creates negative incentives that prevent desirable social outcomes.

ii. A second strand is that government is inherently bureaucratic and as such it is rigid and insensitive

iii. Government also is monopolistic so it does not support or foster the generation of choices and viable alternative ways of organizing services

c. Liberals believe that while the market is essential for creating a dynamic economic sector, that it will “fail” in providing key goods and services where no one can profit from provision.

i. It is essential for society to be sure that citizens have access to basic, humanitarian services (from our “Why Help?” discussion).

ii. Since for profit firms cannot make money off services for poor people, government must provide those services.

iii. Politics and public debate involve a collective decision-making process about what services should be offered and how they should be structured.
C. The radical perspective does not think that the market exist or works as the liberals and conservatives claim but rather that economic activity is a domain for domination by elites called capitalists.

1. Capitalists are fundamentally interested in expanding their economic operations.
2. They are ONLY concerned with defining and advancing their class interests.
3. Elite class interests are in direct opposition to the interests of the working classes.
4. All public institutions in society are fundamentally dependent on economic support by capitalists.
5. As a result all public institutions are shaped and guided by the class interests of elites.
6. This means that we must ALWAYS rewrite the service objectives of human service institutions to think about
   a. What class interests of the elites might be in play with that service institution.
   b. How social services can be shaped and designed to serve elite class interests.
   c. How we can “re-see” services as elite-class serving rather than as rational need-addressing programs.

II. Macionis lays out a similar framework for talking about social problems (a slightly different topic that policy problems)

A. Gordon is an economist writing in a general framework of policy studies that is somewhat outside of sociology

B. Macionis writing as a sociologist frames social problems in terms of sociological theories.

1. The major difference is that Macionis does not consider economic theory or the market as an orienting framework.
2. Macionis like Gordon wants us to recognize that when we place a problem in the context of a theoretical frame it changes the way reality is described in terms of what a problem fundamentally “is”
3. Macionis does not have a “conservative” perspective and replaces it with the “interactionist” perspective and this fundamentally change meanings.

C. The radical and liberal perspectives in Gordon end up being quite similar to the conflict and functionalist perspectives in Macionis.