SOCI 215 #23: Pluralism
Reading: Hunter & Milofsky, Ch. 6

1. We should talk about the contrast Gordon gives us between radical, conservative, and liberal ideologies since what we get in Ch. 6 does not seem to fit Gordon.
   a. Here we have a contrast where radical and conservative are similar in that both reject government.
   b. Pluralism conveys a more complex picture than those other two ideologies since taking government seriously means that you have to assimilate and develop a position on the different parts of government
      i. Pluralism equates government with the society, where radicals and conservatives view the dynamic parts of society as existing separate from and influencing government.
      ii. Pluralism takes all of the service institutions funded and defined by government as essential parts of the landscape
      iii. Pluralism takes the decision-making part of government as a critical and necessary part of the system
          1. Elections
          2. Political decision makers
          3. The system of influence and pressure groups
      iv. Pluralism recognizes that government has significant vertical and horizontal levels
          1. Local, state, and national governmental units all operate independently but are nested within each other
          2. There is great diversity in style and in emphases from one governmental unit to another, which reflects functions and preferences.

2. An important theme in this chapter is the morality of policy and pluralists’ position on morality.
   a. Our discussions of rights and helping implies that one’s position on these issues relates to a morality of policy.
   b. Both radicalism and conservatism have an overarching morality but they do not necessarily advance moral positions about particular services
   c. Pluralism also is in principle morally neutral but it expects that the system will be made up of morally committed actors
      i. One part is the notion that competing interests shape decisions, and there’s an expectation that different interest positions are likely to be informed by moral commitment.
      ii. The institutions that make up the system are built around professional and technical systems that are moral—we will hear more about this later.
      iii. There is deep commitment to rights and to rule of law as moral principles.
3. Pluralism is built on a key contrast between acceptance that decision making is chaotic and changeable, on one hand, but that a certain rationality drives services on the other.
   a. The notion of pluralism is a recognition that there are many groups in society with influence, that they coexist, and that they are unpredictable.
   b. There is an acceptance that actors are uncoordinated, impossible to direct, and absolutely not centrally controlled by elites or planners.
   c. On the other hand, there is acceptance that a menu of services and of functions exist and are necessary to the division of labor and orderly functioning of society
   d. And that these services are shaped by procedures and bureaucracies that give stable order to the whole (even if the elements are not logical)
   e. There also is a conviction that the system is fundamentally unknowable—it is just too complex and changeable to be properly analyzed (at least not by academics).