Topic for the Week: Social Institutions: Economy and Governance

Readings for the Week: Macionis text, Chapter 12

Questions:

(1) What is a social institution? Provide examples of several important social institutions. Provide a concise definition for two important social institutions: economy and politics.

(2) Describe how economic systems have transformed since the days of preindustrial societies. According to Macionis, what has been the driving force in these transformations? What have been some of the social outcomes? Describe characteristics of industrial societies, and how these change as societies move to post-industrial systems of economic organization.

(3) What is the difference between the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy?

(4) Macionis says: “Every society’s economy makes a statement about justice by determining who gets what.” What is the nature of justice under capitalist and socialist economic systems? What are the defining characteristics of each system? Identify advantages and weaknesses of each system.

(5) What do work and workplaces look like in a post-industrial economy? How does this differ from other economic arrangements? What role do corporations play in a post-industrial economy? In what ways have corporations changed economic organization?

(6) What is meant by power? What is meant by authority? What is the basis of traditional authority? Of rational-legal authority? Of charismatic authority? Provide examples of each system of authority and describe how they work.

(7) Identify key characteristics of monarchies, democracies, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Which is the most stable form of government? The least stable? Why?

(8) What is meant by the welfare state? What are some of the consequences of living in a society with a strong welfare state?

(9) What role do political parties and special interests play in U.S. politics? Do either of these entities contribute to voter apathy? How?

(10) Distinguish the pluralist, power elite and Marxist models of political power. How is power characterized and distributed under each model? How is power exercised outside the system – through revolution or terrorism, for example?

(11) What are some reasons why human societies resort to violence and war to settle disputes? Do all wars share particular characteristics, or is each war unique in its causes and consequences? Describe some of the effects that war and militarism have on society.