Social dilemmas

✔ Social dilemma: potential for a society’s long-term ruin because of individuals’ tendency to pursue their own short-term interests (p. 288)

✔ Tragedy of the commons: situation in which people acting individually and in their own self interest use up commonly available (but limited) resources, creating disaster for the entire community (p. 289)

✔ Free-rider problem: tendency for people to refrain from contributing to the common good when a resource is available without requiring any personal cost or contribution (p. 243)
  • Once considered a major problem for social movements; some argued that social movements must provide “selective incentives”

✔ Critique
  • People do not always pursue their own short-term interests
  • Instead, people connect their identities to those of their families, networks, ethnic groups, religions, nations, etc.
Max Weber argued that bureaucracies were becoming the organizational model of the 19th Century

- Bureaucracy: large hierarchical organization governed by formal rules and regulations and having clearly specified work tasks (p. 292)

Weber saw bureaucracy as leading example of rationalization, the most important social development of modernity; decisions should be based on efficiency, not tradition

Elements of bureaucracy

- Impersonality: Decision-making criteria that ignore personal characteristics not related organizational goals
- Division of labor: Subdivision of different people or groups in different tasks, characteristics of most bureaucracies (p. 292)
- Hierarchy of authority: Ranking of people or tasks in a bureaucracy from those at the top, where there is a great deal of power and authority, to those at the bottom, where there is little power and authority (p. 292)
What does a non-bureaucratic organization look like?

Gypsum plant described by Alvin Gouldner (1950)

- Half of workers related to other workers
- Little paperwork; things handled on case-to-case basis
- Workers could try different jobs until they found one they liked; rhythm determined by workers
- Workers used plant materials and services
- Workers were happy, but customers and company managers were not