Brief Answers to Second Mid-Term

All questions are graded on a 10-point scale. Scores on Part A (questions 1-3) are then multiplied by four, since these are worth 40 points each, and those on Part B are left unchanged since they are worth ten points each. Below is a summary of the key ideas that we looked for in deciding your grade. By comparing your exam with the answers below you should be able to see what you may have left out or gotten wrong. Please speak with the TA if you have questions about your exam. Changes of grade are highly unlikely, but going over your exam could be useful in preparing for the next exam. If you wish to make an appointment with the TA, his email address is on the course web page and the syllabus.

1. (a = 4 points) Summarize what Durkheim means by “mechanical” solidarity and “organic” solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is a form of moral solidarity (sentiments of moral obligation and responsibility for others) in which people identify with and feel obligations to others because they are so similar to themselves. Organic solidarity is a form of moral solidarity in which dissimilar individuals recognize their mutual dependence upon one another and feel a sense of obligation and responsibility toward one another for that reason. (b = 1 point) Specify the type of society for which Durkheim believes each type of solidarity is most appropriate or typical. Mechanical solidarity is typical in early or more traditional societies in which there little division of labor and a low level of social differentiation. Organic solidarity is better suited and becomes more typical in modern societies because the complex division of labor creates more diversity among individuals. (c = 2 points) Explain what Durkheim means by the “collective conscience” (also translated as “common conscience”). The collective conscience refers to beliefs and moral sentiments that almost everyone in society shares in common. How does the collective conscience manifest itself differently under mechanical versus organic solidarity? The collective conscience is more powerful and all-encompassing under mechanical solidarity; it becomes less dominant and allows more individual variation of thought and belief under organic solidarity. (d = 2 points) Clarify the distinction Durkheim makes between “repressive” law and “restitutive” law. Repressive law requires punishment of the transgressor for violation of collective norms (the “collective conscience”). Restitutive law requires compensation by the transgressor to fulfill their ethical obligations to others they have harmed or treated unfairly. (e = 1 point) What connection does Durkheim make between the historical shift from one type of social solidarity to another and changes in the relative importance of these two forms of law? Repressive law is associated with and provides an empirical indicator of mechanical solidarity (and the power of the collective conscience) which predominates in early societies. Restitutive law is indicative of organic solidarity and tends to become more prevalent in modern society.

2. (a = 2 points) What does Durkheim mean by saying that suicide is a social fact and not merely an individual act or psychological phenomenon? Durkheim means that, apart from any variation among individuals in their susceptibility to suicide, there exists for each society (or community or social group) a distinctive aptitude for suicide that can be measured by the suicide rate (the number of suicides as a proportion of the total population). These rates tend to be relatively stable within societies but vary significantly between societies, suggesting that they are caused by forces outside the individual. (b = 3 points) Describe in general terms the social causes or conditions Durkheim says leads to each of the three types of suicide: “Egoistic suicide” occurs when the individual is not sufficiently integrated within the social group (family, community, or society) and lacks a sufficient sense of responsibility toward others. “Altruistic suicide” occurs when the individual is so completely submerged within the group that moral obligations to others outweigh any obligations to oneself. “Anomic suicide” occurs when there is not a proper balance between an individual’s desires and their means of realizing them, especially because of a lack of moral regulation or discipline that places constraints on potentially unlimited human desires. For each of the following comparison groups, which group does Durkheim say has the higher rate of suicide, and how does Durkheim explain the reason for each difference in terms of the three types of causes of suicide defined above? (c = 2 points) Protestants compared with Catholics. Protestants have higher suicide rates. This is an example of egoistic suicide. The difference is not explained by religious prohibitions on suicide, but by the fact that Protestants have lower levels of social integration within their religious communities. Protestantism encourages the individual pursuit of religious salvation, whereas Catholicism places greater emphasis on collective rituals and religious practices. (d = 2 points) Married men compared with unmarried men. This can be explained either as egoistic suicide or anomic suicide. Unmarried men have higher rates of suicide, either because of their lesser degree of social integration within
the family group or because they are not subject to the moral regulation of their sexual desires by the institution of marriage.  (e = 1 point) Men in the military compared with men in civilian life? Men in the military have higher rates of suicide. This is an example of altruistic suicide. The difference is not explained by the hardships or traumas of war, but by the extreme way military life and training acts to suppress individual egoism and self-interest by promoting values of obedience, duty, and obligation to the group.

3. (a = 2 points) What importance does Durkheim attach to the belief in supernatural powers or deities in his attempt to specify a common essence or central idea that lies at the root of all religious beliefs and practices? Durkheim argues that the belief in supernatural powers and/or deities are not common to all world religions and therefore cannot be viewed as the essence of religion. (b = 3 points) What does Durkheim mean by the distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane” and how does Durkheim employ this distinction in his effort to grasp the essence of religion? Durkheim argues that people in all societies recognize a diffuse power or force that transcends the mundane (“profane”) objects and activities of their everyday lives. Durkheim refers to this as the realm of the “sacred” and argues that the division of the world into sacred and profane is the essence of religion. In its most elementary sense, religion is a system of beliefs and ritual practices directed toward sacred things as distinguished from the profane things of the everyday world. (c = 3 points) What insights does Durkheim derive from the beliefs and practices of Australian Aboriginal totemism about the ultimate source and meaning of our experience of the sacred? In Australian Aboriginal totemism, according to Durkheim, the totem object is simultaneously the sacred object of ritual practices and the symbol that represents the clan as a social group. Durkheim deduces from this that the sacred and society are one and the same. The power of the totem represents the power of society over the individual. (d = 2 points) How does this allow Durkheim to argue for a middle position between those who believe in the truth of science and those who believe in the truth of religion? Durkheim rejects the literal truth of religious beliefs about the supernatural, deities, etc., but he also rejects the idea that religion is based purely on illusion or falsehood. Science (sociology) reveals a deeper truth about religion, which is that religion is an important way in which people acknowledge and show their respect for the moral authority of society over the individual.

4. Briefly explain the basic idea behind any two of the following three general features of Durkheim’s approach to the study and explanation of social phenomena: (a = 5 points) Positivism treats the natural sciences as the model for the social sciences and emphasizes the goal of objectivity in the study of social phenomenon; (b = 5 points) Organicism is the use of the biological organism as a metaphor for society and emphasizes the functional interdependence between different parts of society; (c = 5 points) Moralism argues that social order is mainly a moral phenomenon based on shared ideals and sentiments of a moral or ethical nature.

5. (a = 6 points) Briefly explain what Durkheim means by the “forced division of labor.” The forced division of labor describes a situation in which social practices and institutions (e.g., discrimination or the inheritance of occupational privilege) force individuals into occupational positions that are not suited to their talents or aptitudes, causing dissatisfaction and resentment. (b = 4 points) Does Durkheim believe the problems associated with the forced division of labor can be reduced or solved and, if so, how? He believes that the forced division of labor can be remedied by a more meritocratic system of occupational placement with equal educational opportunity and the elimination of privileges based on inheritance.

6. (a = 4 points) Even if you have already addressed this in one of the above questions, explain what Durkheim means by the concept of “anomie.” Anomie refers to a lack of sufficient moral constraint or regulation in which individuals are left adrift to pursue their own egotistical goals without a proper sense of limits or their moral obligations to others. (b = 6 points) Compare Durkheim’s concept of anomie with Marx’s concept of alienation in terms of how they illustrate the fundamentally different views of the two theorists about the obstacles to social harmony and personal fulfillment in modern society. Durkheim views these obstacles as basically moral in nature and believes they can be solved by reforms to promote a new (organic) form of moral solidarity. Marx views these obstacles as material in nature, rooted in the worker’s lack of control over the process and product of their labor, and believes they can only be overcome by a revolutionary change in the mode of production (socialism).