MARX
1. How does Marxist theory use and transform the ideas of ONE of the following groups: the British utilitarian economists, the French utopian socialists, the German idealist philosophers.

2. What does Marx mean by historical materialism? How does he use the criterion of historical materialism to organize his work?

3. How does Marxist theory explain the logic of false consciousness? What are his main examples.

4. How will false consciousness be overcome according to Marxist theory? (Hint: be sure to use the labor theory of value.)

5. What are Marx's major criticisms of the capitalist system? Does Marx think there is anything good about capitalism? If so, what?

6. What are the three principal analytic strengths of Marxism?

7. What are the three principal analytic weaknesses of Marxism?

8. How would Marx explain one of the following: the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the strength of the Chinese economy, the success of Pentecostal religions in South America, the rise of the “Occupy” movement in the U.S.? How satisfied are you with this analysis?

WEBER
1. Weber maintains that, in order to understand society, we must understand the subjective meanings actors attach to their own and others' behavior. How does ONE of the following writers - Simmel, Freud, Mead - help us to do this?

2. What does Weber mean by the concept of "elective affinity"? Describe the elective affinity between the major world religions and the groups that promoted them. How would you use the concept of elective affinity to describe the American credo of equal opportunity?

3. Describe the controlled comparison implicit in Weber's analysis of Protestantism.

4. Design a realistic controlled comparison of your own.

5. Weber distinguishes between "the religion of the adepts" and the "religion of the masses." How does he use this distinction in analyzing the Protestant ethic?

6. This same distinction (between “adepts” and “masses” can be made for any
philosophical, political, aesthetic or scientific idea. Give an example from contemporary society of the change in ideas as it goes from the experts to the lay public.

7. What does Weber identify as the three legitimate forms of domination? What organizational forms does each give rise to? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? How does Weber’s view of the state contrast with the views of Enlightenment (social contract) theorists?

8. How would you integrate Weber’s essay on Class, Status and Party with his call for a sociology that notices the meaning-making activities of social actors.

9. According to Weber, in what ways are science and religion compatible? In what ways are they incompatible?

10. According to Weber, what are the benefits and costs of living in a scientific age?

11. How does Weber define rationalization? According to him, what are the benefits and costs of rationalization?

12. What does Weber mean by an "ethic of responsibility"? An "ethic of ultimate ends"? How would you act in terms of these two ethics with regard to a major contemporary issue of interest to you?

13. What intellectual reasons does Weber have for being so pessimistic that he writes: "Not summer's bloom lies ahead...but, rather, a polar night of icy darkness and hardness"?

14. How would Weber add to or contradict a Marxist interpretation of one of the following: the Israel/Palestine conflict, the rise of Pentecostal religions in South America, the strength of the Chinese economy, the rise of the “Occupy” movement in the U.S.?

DURKHEIM
1. The master question that organizes all of Durkheim's work is: "How is social order possible?" What answers did he find?

2. How does the work of ONE of the following theorists derive from Durkheim: Goffman on ritual, Merton on functionalism, Michels on oligopoly?

3. According to Durkheim, what are mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity? How do they differ? Where are they found? How does one get transformed into the other?

4. What does Durkheim mean by anomic suicide? By anomie?
5. In what ways is the increasing division of labor a good thing according to Durkheim? In what ways is it a bad thing?

6. Why, according to Durkheim, do Protestants have a higher suicide rate than Catholics?

7. How might Durkheim's research on social solidarity be extended beyond the measurement of suicide rates in different religious communities?

8. How would Durkehim explain one of the following: the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the strength of the Chinese economy, the success of Pentecostal religions in South America, the rise of the “Occupy” movement in the U.S.? What would he add to the insights of Marx and Weber?

COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS
1. Marx, Weber and Durkheim all say that religion plays a crucial role in holding society together. What roles does each ascribe to religion? How are these views similar? How are they different?

2. Marx and Weber both have something to say about the relationship between ideas and experience. What does each say? How do their views compare?

3. Compare Weber's work on Protestantism to Durkheim's. What are the main substantive differences between these two theorists? What are the main methodological similarities?

4. Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are all troubled about the quality of life in modern society. Marx is worried about alienation, Weber about rationalization, Durkheim about anomie. Compare these three diagnoses of the ills of modern society. What policies would you develop, in the spirit of the theorist who proposed the concept, to overcome alienation, rationalization, and anomie?