Social exclusion is a powerful concept, not because of its analytical clarity which is conspicuously lacking, but because of its flexibility. At an individual level, it mobilizes personal fears of being excluded or left out, which reach back into childhood as well as having immediate reference. At a political level, it has a broad appeal, both to those who value increased participation and those who seek greater social control. Crucially, social exclusion facilitates a shift between the different discourses in which it is embedded, so that the contested meaning of social exclusion now lies at the heart of political debate. The boundaries of this debate are set both by the real configuration of political forces and by the language in which it takes place. That language reflects and reproduces underlying ideas about what society is and how it works. The character of the new political discourse very clearly reflects the language of Durkheim, with its appeal to social integration, solidarity and social cohesion. What is less immediately obvious is that the model of social process embedded in contemporary political thought is also fundamentally Durkheimian; in a deep, as well as a superficial way, we live in a new Durkheimian hegemony. This is true of all three discourses of exclusion, despite their profound differences. They correspond to different possible (and occasionally impossible) interpretations of Durkheim’s sociology. The limits of political debate, and the possible manoeuvre between discourses of social exclusion, are set by the fact that we are all Durkheimians now.

The central themes in Durkheim’s work are social order, social cohesion and solidarity — and particularly how these may be effected in advanced industrial societies. *The Division of Labour in Society* argues that small-scale undifferentiated societies are held together by mechanical solidarity, in which there is a shared body of beliefs and sentiments called the conscience collective; social cohesion depends upon similarity. As the division of labour develops, society becomes more complex, and so too do the ties that bind. Organic solidarity replaces mechanical solidarity. Advanced societies are held together by the functional interdependence of their members. *The Division of Labour in Society* sees the integration and cohesion of advanced societies as brought about through interdependence in the sphere of
social production. Occupational specialization limits the scope of shared beliefs and sentiments as mechanical solidarity recedes. This does not mean the disappearance of the conscience collective, rather a change in its character; the shared elements become increasingly abstract and the concrete, substantive beliefs more differentiated and specific to particular social and occupational groups. That abstract element includes a commitment to individualism, in the sense of respect for the rights of individual persons rather than self-interest. Organic solidarity rests on difference, both in terms of functional interdependence and in the development of moral individualism. Social integration rests on a combination of integration through work and moral integration.

The mixture of SID and MUD which permeates current political thinking reflects this same combination, though in different proportions. Stakeholding, communitarianism and New Labour are all centrally concerned with how social cohesion may be maintained, under perceived conditions of disintegration. They draw, in different ways and to differing extents, on integration through work and interdependence, and through moral solidarity. Communitarianism focuses on the issue of moral order, and Etzioni makes direct reference to Durkheim. In one sense, Etzioni can be understood as a right-wing reading of Durkheim, emphasizing the dependence of social order on moral consensus. His struggle to establish that there is no contradiction between this and individual liberty recalls Durkheim’s argument that industrial societies both produce and depend on moral individualism, as well as on a transformed conscience collective. Etzioni contrasts the ‘thin’ social order sought by liberal individualists with the ‘thick’ social order pursued by communitarians which ‘contains a set of shared values, to which individuals are taught that they are obligated’, whereas Durkheim suggested that modernity necessarily involves a movement, if not from a thick to a thin consensus, at least from a concrete to an abstract one. Here Gray reflects Durkheim more precisely when he insists that ‘we cannot recapture a ‘thick’ common culture’, but must cultivate ‘a thinner … common culture of common understandings of fairness and tolerance’, and rejects Etzioni’s position as delusive. Elsewhere, Etzioni himself distinguishes his own position from that of more conservative communitarians in terms of pursuing a smaller, consensual core rather than an extensive monolithic set of values.

Willie Watts Miller develops the implications of the increasing abstraction of the conscience collective for a global ethic, in which