Early European Cultural and Intellectual History Since 1450

Answer ONE question from Part I and ONE question from Part II. You are allowed four hours to complete this examination (two hours per question). You are on your honor not to consult any other materials, including notes or papers stored on your computer. Please return your completed exam paper to the graduate office by 5 PM today. Good luck.

Part I

1. One of the basic questions facing contemporary cultural and intellectual historians is to account for the nature, origin and career of “modernity.” Most historians locate modernity’s origins in the early modern period but differ as to when it began, how it can be described, who its founder were and which institutions served as vehicles for its propagation. Choose six historians who have proposed different interpretations of the questions and discuss the manner in which they have framed and attempted to answer this question and which answer(s) if any, you find the most satisfying.

2. Discuss the importance of humanism in effecting the basic changes that occurred in European cultural and intellectual history from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. In what areas was humanism more a hindrance than an agent of change?

3. Discuss the development of early modern political theory from Machiavelli to Rousseau, focusing upon the manner in which the thinkers dealt with what Pocock called the time dimension of politics.

4. In his book, Theology and the Scientific Imagination, Amos Funkenstein argued that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a “secular theology,” emerged, propounded by the thinkers most associated with the scientific revolution (e.g. Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz and Newton). He concluded that:

   Never before or after were science, philosophy, and theology seen as almost one and the same occupation.

Others, who deal with these figures as representatives of the scientific revolution consider them as agents in the secularization of “dechristianization” of European thought. Which of these interpretation do you find the most compelling and why? Is there any way the two can be combined to form a more complete and satisfying explanation for religious life and change in the early modern period?

5. The “history of the book” has over the past few decades become a major field of cultural and intellectual history. What, in your view has this concentration upon “print culture”—taken in its broadest sense as referring to the transformation that the discovery and extended use of the new technique for the reproduction of texts brought to all domains of life—done to expand and illuminate early modern intellectual and cultural history? Where
does it fail to capture what is central to early modern cultural and intellectual history? Illustrate your answer by concrete examples.

Part II-Modern Cultural & Intellectual History Since 1450

1. Recently, scholars have focused attention on varieties of Enlightenment rather than on a single (and singular) movement. What varieties of Enlightenment thought and expression can you identify? What are the common threads and points of divergence among them? Which scholars of the Enlightenment might you consult to make sense of this phenomenon?

2. What new forms of political discourse and cultural expression do we see emerging on the Continent in the wake of the First World War? Are there lines of continuity that we can identify between the tumultuous post-World War I era and the earlier fin-de-siècle age (e.g., the spirit of cultural innovation of the “politics in a sharper key that Carl Schorske identifies in late nineteenth-century Vienna”)?

3. Discuss two challenges or alternatives to the model of the nation-state as the ideal form of collective organization in modern European thought? Do you believe that the nation-state has run its course in European history? To whom might you look for support in accepting or rejecting this proposition?

4. Friedrich Meinecke regarded historicism (Historismus) as “one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever occurred in Western thought.” On what basis could he have made this claim? And who emerged in modern European intellectual culture as critics of historicism? On what did they base their claims?

5. Discuss the significance of Martin Heidegger to German and European thought—both in his day and subsequently. As a matter of historical interpretation and ethical propriety, do you believe that Heidegger’s embrace of Nazism (e.g., his 1933 rectorial address at Freiburg) fatally compromises his thought?