EUROPE, RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

Please answer one question from Part I and one question from Part II. You are allowed a total of 4 hours to complete this exam (two hours per question.) You are on your honor not to consult any materials, including notes or papers or anything stored in your computer. You are also on your honor not to discuss the exam or its content with any faculty or student until the exam period is over.

PART I:

1. What is secularization (or may we use this term for the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance?) and how did it work in western Europe from the late Middle Ages to the eve of the Scientific Revolution? What was the role of Renaissance thought, philological developments, and humanistic concerns in the evolution of secular views? You must provide specific examples and a broad grasp of the development of European culture, and specifically of Renaissance Italy, from the mid-fourteenth century to the beginning of the Scientific Revolution.

2. Both the Renaissance in Italy and, in the same vein, the Scientific Revolution that swept parts of western Europe from the late fifteenth century onwards had, as a counterpart, Renaissance cultural elites’ embracing of astrology, alchemy, hermeticism, magic, as well as a widespread popular belief in witches. How do you make sense of this seemingly contradictory nature of Renaissance and early modern European society? It had, they also had on the one hand, a deep concern for humanistic enterprises, a new science and new forms of knowledge. How can one reconcile these two, contradictory impulses? On the other hand, it witnesses the strong grip and attraction of Renaissance mysteries and the witch hunt? Provide examples and references to your reading.

3. What is unique about Machiavelli’s The Prince in the context of late medieval and Renaissance political life? What arguments was he advancing in this book? Why was he doing so and to what an extent did his work reflect new political and cultural developments in the West? What are the different historiographical interpretations of Machiavelli’s world and work?

4. What was different (or was not different) about the culture of Renaissance Italy as compared to late medieval culture? What was the nature of its literary, artistic, and political achievements? Make specific references to humanism, rhetoric, and neo-Platonist culture. Provide a thorough discussion of Renaissance contributions, place them in a historical context, and include references to some of the most significant texts and historiographical controversies.
5. Renaissance historiography has long lived in the immense shadow cast by Jacob Burckhardt’s (1818-1897) influential and paradigmatic interpretation of the Renaissance. What were Burckhardt’s most salient contributions and how they have been critiqued or confirmed by leading Renaissance historians over the last three decades?

PART II:

1. What political ideas developed from the Reformation?

2. What role did the religious wars of the 16th century have in the cultural and political development of Europe?

3. Discuss the development of court culture over the “long sixteenth century.”

4. Discuss the different political strategies of the three contemporaries: Francis I, Charles V, and Henry VIII.

5. How important was Humanism for the Reformation?