EUROPEAN ECONOMIC HISTORY EXAM

Write an essay on one topic from Part I and one from Part II (2 hours per question). Be specific about historical episodes and evidence and include reflections on the relevant historiography of the topic. Take care to avoid overlap in your choice of examples and evidence for your two essays.

Part I.

1. “Peasant possession of the means of subsistence constitutes a barrier to economic development.” Explain the rationale behind this assertion. Evaluate it in terms of the trajectories of the French and English economies—and, if you wish, any other additional west European economies, such as those of the Northern and/or Southern Netherlands (Flanders)—for the period between 1450 and 1750.

2. For a good part of the twentieth century, Malthusian-Ricardian theory provided the most widely accepted framework for understanding the European economy in the epoch before the industrial revolution. Specify the model and explain how it was applied to grasp/explain the long term economic evolution of medieval and early modern Europe, both in terms of income distribution and economic growth. To what extent, and in what ways, does the theory provide a good account of the historical trajectory it aims to comprehend. To what extent, and in what ways, if it all, does it fall short.

3. The rise of trade and towns, leading to what in the recent historiography is termed “Smithian growth,” has long been viewed as the central driving force behind economic development in medieval and early modern Europe. Write an essay in which you lay out the argument and evaluate it in terms of its utility in understanding the economic trajectories of the different European regions during this long epoch—eastern Europe (East Prussia, Poland), western Europe (say France), and England.

Part II.

1. Discuss the role of the Low Countries and Britain in the agricultural and industrial revolutions; its spread on the European continent during the 19th century. What was the impact of international trade relations besides the local factors of the transformation in the mirror of the most recent literature on the topic?

2. Analyze the theoretical background of Soviet industrialization policy; the factors of temporary achievements and the causes of the final economic failure of the Soviet Bloc.

3. Discuss the economic cycles of the second half of the twentieth century; the causes of the exceptional postwar prosperity, the Oil Crisis and structural crisis of the 1970s-1980s, and the new chapter, opened by globalization form the 1980s.