HISTORY OF MEDICINE AND BIOLOGY EXAM

Write on TWO of the following questions (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.

1. Hospitals in the United States changed rapidly in the period c. 1860-1930. Begin your essay by analyzing what you see as the important features of American hospitals immediately before the Civil War, taking note of some key ways in which they did or did not differ from their forebears in early modern Europe. Then construct an argument about how and why the institution of the hospital changed in the next seven decades.

2. By 1900 the study of human anatomy was universally recognized in the European-American tradition as the necessary foundation of medicine knowledge and practice. Choosing two coherent time periods between antiquity and 1900, write an essay in which you explore, in each period, the relationships between anatomy and more general aspects of medical knowledge and practice. Feel free also to include, if you wish, comments about the broader cultural valences of this medical science.

3. How do communities respond to epidemic disease, and how has this changed in the history of medicine? Write an essay that addresses this question, using examples from both the early modern period and from the period of the long nineteenth century (to 1914).

4. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection was both a set of pure ideas of transcendent power, and a cultural product of its time and place. Analyze the ways in which Darwin’s work, embodied in his three most significant books, shared common features—or failed to share them—with science and medicine in the European, and specifically British, world from the 1820s to the 1870s.

5. How did the germ theory of disease change medicine? Address this question by first analyzing the key “take home” messages that resulted from the laboratory research c. 1865-1895 on microscopic (and submicroscopic!) pathogens. Next, comment on how these results represented a continuity or discontinuity with respect to previous concepts of disease. Finally, discuss several ways the results restructured medicine and public health c. 1880-1920.

6. “Health” has been an object of personal and societal desire, certainly for as long as we have written records, and probably since hominids became self-aware. Drawing upon a broad, rather than narrow, time frame of historical evidence, write an essay around what you see as three or four important themes in the definition of, and search for, health.