

May 2002

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
Department of History

Senior Comprehensive Exams

INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

Please answer each question separately. Your answer to each question must not exceed five double-spaced typewritten pages. On the cover of each answer be certain to indicate your name, the appropriate comprehensive field (i.e., The United States, The United Kingdom), as well as the number of the question you have answered. Your answer should be written in your own words and include the correct citations for any sources you use, as in any paper or final exercise. Be sure to include at the end of your essay the statement "This represents my own work in accordance with University regulations" and sign your name.

All answers must be turned in at the History Department office by **3:00 P.M. WEDNESDAY, MAY 15th.** **There will be no extensions.** For further explanation of the Grading of Departmental Comprehensive Examinations, see bottom of page 5 of "Information for Majors."

Answer ONE question from Part I and ONE question from Part II

Part I

1. "Rhetoric is the greatest bar between us and our ancestors. Where they heard powerful words robustly marshaled, resounding as trumpet blasts and like trumpet blasts capable of moving men and women to action, we hear only words, pompous and empty. This change of perspective makes it hard, if not impossible, for us to understand the concerns of teachers, the methods of preachers and the formation of politicians in the centuries before our own." Discuss.

2. "Early modern revolutionaries looked backwards, hoping to restore a perfect state of things that had supposedly existed in the past and that some set of texts or documents described. Modern revolutionaries look forwards, towards a golden future that has never existed on earth, and that they hope and plan to bring into being." Discuss, in the light of at least two concrete instances.

3. Did a Scientific Revolution take place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Historians disagree. Take a position and argue for it, using at least two substantial sources to support your arguments.

4. When did western intellectuals definitively decide that books did not contain the most important truths about life, the universe, and everything? Stake out a position and support it with precise references to at least three major thinkers or movements.

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5. Does magic deserve a place in intellectual history? Take a position and argue for it, making precise reference to at least two or three major texts and thinkers.

6. Who created the idea or project of the American west? What has been its fate over time? Discuss, in the light of at least three thinkers or movements.

Part II

7. “Historians discover all sorts of things in their sources: unread texts, unknown facts, forgotten conversations, all of which may add facts to the record or remove them from it. But the interpretations that they apply to these materials come not from the documents they study but from their own circumstances and convictions—from, that is, the larger political, cultural, and intellectual contexts within which they work. On this larger level, there is no truth in history, only opinion.” Discuss.

8. Historians traditionally argue that intellectuals came into existence, as a self-conscious group within society, in the age of the Dreyfus affair—when the term “intellectual” came into common use. Are they right to do so? Or are there earlier groups who can legitimately be called intellectuals? Be sure to support your answer by a careful examination of at least two different groups of thinkers and writers—and to define your terms.

9. What was Enlightenment? An abstract project elaborated by a few philosophers? A concrete program for transforming the world? A machine for the oppression of women, non-Europeans, and children? A plot to make the world humane? Or none of the above? Sketch your own definition, and support it by close examination of two or three individuals or groups. Be sure that you look both at the social organization and the intellectual content of the Enlightenment.

10. “Until the nineteenth century, when European universities turned into centers of political and social radicalism, most universities played the opposite role, serving as bastions for the established order in state, church and society. Curricula were designed to cover what was already known, not to teach students how to discover anything new; standard methods of instruction promoted passive reception of knowledge rather than active use of it; and only members of a social and political elite could gain access to them as students. Intellectual historians could reasonably ignore them.” Discuss.

11. “The real creators of meaning are not authors but readers.” Discuss, in the light of two or three concrete cases.

12. “Europe is usually seen as the territory of thinkers, America as that of actors. In fact, however, American history has been far more often determined by ideas than European history.” Discuss, in the light of two or three major events or movements in American history.