Preliminary Exam in Early Modern European History

choose one from each of the three sections

I. Religion and Culture

1) In a 1987 article in The Sixteenth Century Journal, Merry Wiesner called for a renewed approach to “gender analysis of the Reformation” that would “completely rethink categories of analysis and ways of asking questions in order to integrate the new material (i.e., new empirical studies) and come up with a better understanding of the period.” As part of this effort she argued for the need to develop new methodologies to address gender and overcoming lingering resistance to theory. How would you evaluate the achievements in this field in the twenty-five years since Wiesner wrote her article? Have scholars answered her call and in what ways has gender analysis changed our understanding of the Reformation and vice versa? What outstanding questions remain?

2) To what extent did early modern Europeans produce a reformation of the body in the sixteenth century? Discuss in relation to historical topics such as images, the Eucharist, marriage, or ecclesiology, and in relation to historiographic developments which promote or hinder arguments about a reformation of the body.

II. Politics and Authority

1) Summarize the stakes and the status of the debate on "absolutism" over the last twenty-five years or so. In what ways would a comparative perspective on absolutism and state formation contribute to the debate?

2) How has recent scholarship in history reshaped our understanding of early modern politics, power, and authority? In your response consider specific examples (historical and historiographic) that focus on urban and rural cultures as they re-inscribed and localized authority within their respective social spaces.

III. Society and Economy

1) In a 2004 AHR article, Sheilagh Ogilvie defined “social capital” as “the name given to a store of value generated when a group of individuals invests resources in fostering a body of relationships with each other”; these relationships in turn create trust through shared norms, information sharing and sanctions on deviant behavior. In what ways does the concept of “social capital” help explain economic exchange, social relations and knowledge production in early modern Europe? How would you assess, in light of the sources you have read, her claim that social capital as often produced exclusion and inequality as social harmony?

2) How did the household economy, family structures, work, and consumption develop between 1450 and 1750 in Europe? How have scholars linked these issues (households, family structure, work, and consumption) to other key themes in the period, such as state formation, the Reformations, or European expansion?