Major Field: Modern European History

Instructions: Answer one question in each of the following three categories. You should have a total of three answers. Be sure that each of your answers includes historiographical discussion, addressing the state of the scholarly literature in the relevant field. Instructions on when to pick up and return the examination will be provided by History Department staff.

I.
a) Imagine that you are giving a course called “Problems in Modern European History” to first-semester history graduate students. What would be your pedagogical aims for students coming from a wide range of backgrounds and areas of interest? How would you structure the course? Give your program (readings, teaching approach, goals) for at least two sessions; at least one of these should not be on intellectual history.

b) Expanding on Francois Furet's well-known polemic Interpreting the French Revolution, write a comparative essay on the range of ways in which historians in the past century have interpreted the revolutions in France, Russia, and Germany. Evaluate these interpretations critically.

II.
a) We tend to think of the 1914-1945 era as one of tragedy and destruction. One could, however, look to it for signs of advance of democratic institutions and the French Revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality. To what extend do you think that this approach is fruitful? How does the destructive era of the world wars lay the ground for the social democratic societies of postwar Western Europe? Discuss for at least two different countries.

b) In the decade or so after World War II, how did post-war artists, writers, and intellectuals strive to reconstruct a new, coherent, national culture and identity in these three countries: Germany, France, and the Soviet Union.

III.
a) "C'est la faute de Voltaire--It's Voltaire's fault" was a common accusation leveled by anti-revolutionary critics, from Edmund Burke onward, against the perceived excesses of the Enlightenment and the Revolution in France. Write an essay on the dialectical relationship between the major stages of French intellectual history from the mid-eighteenth century to the post-Napoleonic period. In what ways have historians (including Berlin, Israel, and McMahon) interpreted this evolving historical relation? In your answer, be sure to characterize carefully key terms such as "radical," "revolutionary," "conservatism," and "Counter-Enlightenment."

b) German-speaking Europe is sometimes considered the land of political reaction, in contrast to progressive France. How would you respond to this as a description of nineteenth-century German social and political thought? To what extent can Hegel, Marx, and others be viewed as furthering the legacy of the Enlightenment? You may extend your answer into the twentieth century if you would like.