Russian History

PLEASE ANSWER THREE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Read through the questions carefully and decide how you wish to answer them. Good luck.

1. The subjects of the Russian state were overwhelmingly rural in location and economy well into the second half of the twentieth century. How did the “peasantness” of Russia shape political, economic, cultural, and social relations and traditions? Drawing examples from at least three different periods of Russian history (however you define them), discuss the Russian peasant as object and as agent in the context of state power.

2. If 1991 marked the collapse of the “last remaining colonial empire on Earth,” when did it begin? Outline the history of the Russian/Soviet empire and discuss its (changing?) ideological underpinnings and articulations. What were the unifying principles of this empire? Is “empire” the most useful term for interpreting the relations between the Russian center and the multiple ethnicities and nations that constituted Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union? Can we speak of a continuous imperial ideology across the 1917 divide, or was the Soviet “brotherhood of nations” fundamentally non-imperial?

3. From the 16th century to the fall of the Romanovs in 1917, Russia's monarchs styled themselves “autocrats.” Many historical debates rotate around the meaning of this practice, and its importance for understanding Russian history in various periods. Write an essay that analyzes debates around the meaning of autocracy and its implications for larger historical developments in two of the following periods: the mid-17th century; the 18th century; and the early twentieth century.

4. The “problem of Stalin” is a complex set of historical and historiographical questions which have dominated the study of the Soviet Union for the past eighty-five years. How would you define this “problem” in terms accessible to undergraduates: What are the elements of the problem? What are the historical interpretations?

5. One central debate in modern Russian intellectual history—at least as historians commonly write it—is whether Russia is a part of “Europe.” Write an essay that considers when this question seems to have been important, for what reason, and to whom, across time. (Note: you are not expected to argue for or against Russia's “Europeanness.” Rather, this is a question that asks you to focus on the meaning of the debate itself, and the range of opinions about it, within Russia).