Masters Exam, Theory Minor, Fall 2007

HISTORY

1. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes the new features and changes which capitalism brings about as the traditional European feudal society is transformed. (a) Summarize his view of the rise of capitalism, its distinguishing features, and especially its achievements. (b) Then summarize some of the negative features he sees in capitalism, especially the two principal weaknesses which, in his view, will bring about the eventual fall of capitalism.

2. What is “transcendentalism,” and what makes it a distinctly American political theory? Answer this by exploring one theme about which there is general agreement among transcendentalists, and one about which there is more variety of opinion.

3. Discuss Max Weber's tripartite theory of authority or legitimate domination. How do they differ from force [Macht]? Go into detail on legal-rational (bureaucratic) domination and charismatic domination, based on his writings and contemporary applications of them.

CONTEMPORARY

1. Summarize and discuss two of the following sets of writings by Foucault, which are listed in chronological order: (1) His analysis of the rise of the modern mental institution, including some of the historical stages leading to this. Also take up the modern asylum's relationship to the Enlightenment and to the modernist concept of reason, and the role of the medicalization of knowledge about mental illness. (2) His analysis of the rise of disciplinary power in the prison, the military, and the school. Be sure to look at issues such as his view that prison exemplifies the "microphysics of power," versus economic interpretations of the role and history of prison by Rusche and others. How do issues such as "docile bodies," the "gaze," medical and scientific knowledge, and normalizing judgment, come in to Foucault's discussion of the prison, the military, and the school? (3) His analysis of modern sexuality and sexual repression. What is the "repressive hypothesis" and why does he try to refute it? How do prohibitions on sex also serve to sexualize? How does medicalization of homosexuality relate to the concept of the "normal"? [Important: As you take up two of these, also mention some of his broad theoretical concepts such as the nature of disciplinary institutions, the circular nature of power, the relationship between power and knowledge. Also take up how he later (after #1) develops a critique of both the repressive hypothesis and of the concept of ideology, concepts Foucault himself had used in his critique of analysis of the mental institution.]

2. Many of the Frankfurt School texts, especially those by Fromm, have been concerned with the critical appropriation of Freudian psychoanalytic categories. Summarize and discuss these writings, with regard to issues such as: How do they connect Marxist and other social theories connected with Freudian ones? How is this used to revise traditional concepts of Marxism, especially with regard to the working class? How does this relate to a theory of the causes of fascism?

3. Link a contemporary trend in political thinking with an historical figure, noting both similarities and differences between the two. You might, for example, compare Thomas Hobbes and contemporary realism, Margaret Fuller and contemporary feminism, John Locke and contemporary liberalism, or Frances Wright and Frederick Douglass and contemporary critical race theory.
EPISTEMOLOGY

1. Summarize Marx's critique of ideology in the opening pages of *The German Ideology*. Then go into detail on his argument on historical materialism. Be sure to discuss the following issues: What do materialism and idealism have to do with ideology and how does human consciousness connect to material reality? What are his stages of social and economic development?

2. Discuss the work of Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu, or Althusser, stressing their critique of the Western liberal notion of the human subject. How does this connect to themes from Foucault? Then discuss the themes of Foucault's major works on the mental institution and the prison. What do these various texts tell us about Foucault's critique of modernity?

3. Study of the Native Americans provides at least two challenges to traditional epistemology. The first concerns *how we learn*, as seen in work on experiential knowledge in the *Dene*. The second concerns *what counts as knowledge*, and can be seen in work on local, or indigenous, knowledge in environmental studies. Choose either one of these and discuss it in relation to mainstream Western views of either knowledge or of Native Americans.