Creationism and Education

I. Pennock’s “Why Creationism Should Not be Taught in Public Schools” (*IDC*, ch. 35)

A. The Question (756-763)

1. The Public Schools (755-758)

   Note the way in which Pennock believes the question as to whether creationism should be taught varies in different educational contexts (private school, home school, higher education).

2. Kinds of Creationism (758-761)

   Note the various kinds of creationism, but especially the non-Christian forms.

3. Taught How? (761-763)

   What is the “dual model” approach most commonly advocated by creationists? (762)

B. Legal Arguments (763-765)

Pennock gives an overview here of the way the courts have ruled against creationist claims. But as the law is not always just and this question involves issues that go beyond the law, he accepts that these legal victories for evolutionists do not settle the question.

C. Creationist Extralegal Arguments (765-768)

1. What is the argument for the claim that it is unfair to not teach creationism alongside evolution? How is this argument bolstered by an appeal to majority rule and parental rights? How does Pennock respond to this/these arguments?

2. What is the argument that for the claim that it is a violation of academic freedom not to teach creationism alongside evolution? How does Pennock respond to this argument?

D. Epistemological Arguments (768-770)

1. What is the issue in the question “whose truths are to be taught”? (768)
2. How does Pennock question the first “problematic assumption” behind this epistemological argument that “questions about empirical fact are simply a matter of one’s peculiar point of view”? (768-769)

3. How does Pennock question the second “questionable assumption” that “it makes sense to talk about ‘the religious’ or even ‘the creationist’ viewpoint”? (769)

E. Religious Protection Arguments (770-773)

1. What reasons does Pennock advance for the claim that teaching creationism “improperly promotes one religious view over others”? (770)

2. How does Pennock argue against the suggestion that all religious points of view should be taught alongside evolution? (770-771)

3. Why does Pennock believe that excluding creationism from public education is in the interests of religious people who hold creationist views? (771-772)

F. Educational Arguments (772-775)

1. How does Pennock argue that creationism should not be taught under the subject heading of science? (772-773)

2. Why does Pennock oppose teaching creationism under the heading of “critical thinking” below the college level? (774-775)

II. Plantinga’s “Creation and Evolution: A Modest Proposal” (IDC, ch. 36)

A. Should Evolution be Taught in the Public Schools? (779-783)

1. In what way is our society radically pluralistic with regard to its “comprehensive beliefs”? What does Plantinga (borrowing the term from Rawls) mean by “comprehensive beliefs”? (780-781)

2. In what way are the purposes of the public schools determined by “a sort of implicit contract” among the citizens who support them? (781)

3. What does Plantinga mean by “the basic right” and how does he derive it from his account of the implicit contract which determines the purposes of public education? (781)
4. How does he illustrate the way the teaching of evolution violates “the basic right” of many Americans by reference to American Indian beliefs about their origins and religiously grounded beliefs about the young age of the earth? (782-783)

B. “Doesn’t truth have any rights here?” (783-786)

1. How does Plantinga respond to Pennock’s claim that it is not unfair to teach what is true? (783-784)

2. How does Plantinga respond to the suggestion that questions of empirical fact are to be resolved by way of science (what he formulates on p. 786 as “PC”)?
   a. How does Plantinga present his observations about the way scientific opinion has changed over the years as a challenge to the idea that scientific consensus should override the “basic right”? (785)
   b. How does Plantinga argue that “PC” is “just one comprehensive belief among others” and that, therefore, it would be unfair to teach comprehensive which entail either the affirmation or denial of “PC”? (785-786)

C. Teaching Evolution (and Creationism) Conditionally (786-790)

1. What does Plantinga mean by an “epistemic base”? (787)

2. How does the epistemic base of science (as currently practiced) differ in important respects from the epistemic bases of many religious people today? (788)

3. What does Plantinga mean in speaking of teaching evolution (and creationism) conditionally? (789)

4. Why does teaching evolution (and creationism) conditionally not unfair in the sense of teaching something that is incompatible with someone’s comprehensive beliefs? (789-790)

III. Pennock’s “Reply to Plantinga’s ‘Modest Proposal’” (IDC, ch. 37)

A. Why does Pennock believe that Plantinga’s “basic right” is not just?
1. Why does Pennock believe rational agents would not agree to the “basic rights” because of its effects on the curriculum taught in school? (794-795)

2. Why does Pennock believe that rational agents who also thought about what it would be like to be “a child growing up in the household of...parents who are bigots or ideologues and others who are simply narrow-minded or ignorant” would reject the “basic right” for this reason as well? (795)

Note: this second argument, more so than the first, depends on the Rawlsian style of reasoning about justice which Pennock is following here. I will provide a bit of background on this in class, but be sure to see his note 2 which gives a very short synopsis of it.

B. Private and Public Knowledge (795-796)

Why does Pennock believe rational agents would agree to not allow public schools to not teach views based on “private epistemologies” but instead insist that they limit what they teach to “public knowledge”? 