I. Plantinga’s “When Faith and Reason Clash” (IDC, ch. 6)

A. A Variety of Responses (133-118)

1. What is the conflict Plantinga proposes to address in this essay? (113-114)

2. How does the “territorial division” approach (which he illustrates with Van Till’s views) try to address the conflict and why does Plantinga think it inadequate? (116-117)

B. Plantinga’s Approach to the Conflict of Faith and Reason (118-122)

1. Why does Plantinga believe it is mistaken for someone who accepts the Bible as the revealed word of God to conclude that it is science that must be wrong when faith and reason clash? (118-119)

2. Why does Plantinga believe it is mistaken for someone who accepts the Bible as the revealed word of God to conclude that it is her/his interpretation of the Bible that must be wrong when faith and reason clash? (118-121)

3. How does he say we should proceed when faith and reason clash? How does he illustrate his approach with his consideration of the variety of reasonable responses to the apparent conflict between Science and Genesis? (121-122)

C. Why does Plantinga believe that evolution is not religiously neutral? In particular, how does Richard Dawkins’ remark that “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist” illustrate Plantinga’s point? (124-126)

D. The Likelihood of Evolution (from a Theistic point of View) (126-139)

1. Note the way Plantinga distinguishes 5 claims that evolutionary theory makes. He believes we have good evidence for the first two, but not for the fifth. His focus will be on claims 3 & 4, relating to the descent of all life from a common ancestor and a Darwinian account of this through natural selection. (129)

2. Plantinga proposes to think about the likelihood of evolution (claims 3-4 specifically) from a Christian or theistic point of view, but sets aside what we might know on the basis of early Genesis. Prior to examining the
scientific evidence for evolution, why does he conclude that it is possible that God could have created through evolution, but “a bit more probable” that God did not create in this manner? (129-130)

3. After examining the scientific evidence, Plantinga argues that the likelihood of creation through evolution looks doubtful from a theistic point of view since he believes the evidence for evolution is rather weak. But since we’re only concerned with the question of the compatibility of Christianity and Darwinism, we don’t need to concern ourselves with his considerations here. Regardless of the strength or weakness of the evidence for evolution, we want to know whether there are aspects of the Christian faith which are incompatible with what Darwinism teaches about evolution. (130-135)

4. Plantinga considers the claim that from the perspective of methodological naturalism, the likelihood of evolution is vastly more probable than any of its rivals. Why does he consider this reasoning to involve a confusion between “scientifically acceptable hypotheses” and “all the acceptable hypotheses whatever”? (137-139)

Note: “methodological naturalism” is, roughly, the idea that science can only study hypotheses regarding natural events and processes, not supernatural events and processes. We’ll have more to say about this important idea in class.

E. Theistic Science (139-142)

Plantinga concludes with a call for a theistic or Christian science that would, unlike the natural sciences, constrained as they are by methodological naturalism, consider the question of our origins “from the perspective of all that we know.” (141) What do you think of the idea of a scientific investigation of nature informed by either generally theistic or more specifically theistic principles?

II. Van Till’s “When Faith and Reason Cooperate” (IDC, ch. 7)

A. “Faith, Reason, and Conflict” (147-152)

What is Van Till’s initial reason (articulated on p. 151) for believing “that the Bible has little of relevance to offer toward either the formulation or evaluation of scientific theories concerning biological history”?

B. “Is the ‘Grand Evolutionary Story’ Religiously Neutral?” (152-158)
1. How does Van Till agree with Plantinga that the Grand Evolutionary Story (GES) can form a part of a naturalistic/atheistic framework, but still argue that GES can be and is articulated and accepted in a way that is logically independent of both theism and naturalism? (152-154)

2. How does Van Till distinguish an authentically religious question to which he believes creation is the correct answer and an authentically scientific question to which he believes evolution is the correct answer? How does this distinction allow him to conclude that Dawkins’ claims of intellectual fulfillment are “shallow and unsatisfying”? (155)

3. How does Van Till’s imaginative story of the Soltheists illustrate what he believes is the inadequacy of both Dawkins’ (and other naturalist/athiests) claim to intellectual fulfillment through Darwinism and creationists’ claim to see Darwinism as a weapon in a war on Christian theism? (155-158)

C. “Should Christian Scholarship Reject Methodological Naturalism?” (158-163)

1. What does Van Till mean in speaking of the “functional integrity” of the world and why does he consider this a theological position that ought to motivate Christians to accept the plausibility of an evolutionary account of the development of life? (158)

2. Why does Van Till believe the acceptance of methodological naturalism is not a “concession to naturalism”? (161)

III. McMullin’s “Plantinga’s Defense of Special Creation” (IDC, ch. 8)

A. “Theistic Science” (165-168)

Why does McMullin object to Plantinga’s idea of a “theistic science” (see 167, in particular) while accepting “the use of theological considerations in the service of a larger and more comprehensive world-view in which natural science is only one factor” (168)?

B. “Galileo and Genesis” (171-176)

1. Why does McMullin believe it is “potentially destructive” to treat Biblical and scientific accounts as “competitors in the realm of cosmological explanation”? (175)

2. Why does McMullin believe that “Even if the theory of evolution could be entirely dismissed on scientific grounds, this would not of itself give us
any warrant for supposing that the biblical account of origins ought, therefore, to be taken literally?” (175)

C. On the Evidence for Evolution (176-185)

McMullin takes on Plantinga’s critique of the evidence for evolution. As mentioned in connection with Plantinga’s essay, this issue is really not that relevant to our concerns with the compatibility of Darwinism and Christianity. So we won’t be considering them.

D. “The Integrity of God’s Natural World” (185-190)

1. After examining Plantinga’s consideration of the likelihood of evolution in the light of the scientific evidence, McMullin returns to the theological dimensions of Plantinga’s argument by considering his claim that God’s special creation (through intervening in the natural order) of the diversity of life is “antecedently probable,” more likely than God’s creation through evolution simply on the basis of a consideration of the Bible. How does McMullin initially challenge this idea by characterizing “the train of events linking Abraham to Christ” as “unique”? (185)

2. How does McMullin believe St. Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis challenges Plantinga’s view of the antecedent probability of special creation? (186)

3. Plantinga characterized the view that God created through evolution as a “semi-deistic” view. How does McMullin challenge this by insisting that “there is no intrinsic connection whatever between the claim that God did, in fact, choose to work through evolutionary means and the far stronger claim that He could not have done otherwise”? (187-188)

4. How does McMullin believe the evolutionary thesis of our common ancestry “gives a meaning to life that it previously lacked”? (189)

IV. Plantinga’s Reply, “Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability” (IDC, ch. 9)

A. Is Science Religiously Neutral? (200-202)

What are the two ways in which Plantinga attempts to illustrate, against Van Till’s suggestion to the contrary, that “Scripture should teach us something running wholly contrary to a given scientific theory”?

B. Is Evolution Religiously Neutral? (202-205)
1. Plantinga accepts Van Till’s thesis that the “grand evolutionary story (GES)” logically consistent with both theism and naturalism. Why does he still believe that it is not religiously neutral? What special role does it play in relation to naturalism, for him, that it doesn’t play in relation to theism? (202-204)

2. How does Plantinga respond to Van Till’s claim that it is an error to treat creation and evolution as alternative answers to the same question? (204)

C. Misunderstandings (with McMullin) (205-217)

1. Misunderstandings 1-4 primarily relate to the scientific dimensions of the debate and we need not consider them in class.

2. How does Plantinga propose to clarify his use of the term semi-deism? (210-211)

3. “Galileo, Scripture, and Scripture Scholarship” (211-217)

   a. How does Plantinga respond to McMullin’s suggestion that it is undesirable to have theologians evaluating the validity of scientific reasoning and scientists evaluating the validity of theological interpretations? (... which McMullin believes to be not only a consequence of Galileo’s first principle dealing with conflicts of faith and reason but also Plantinga’s interpretive strategy of weighing the evidence for a scientific claim against the evidence for a particular interpretation of scripture) (212-213)

   b. How does Plantinga call into question McMullin’s view of the state of current theological interpretations of Genesis? What is the bearing of Wellhausen’s point that “many who claim that the author(s) of Genesis did not mean to say anything about ‘the factual course of events’ seem to be motivated more by what they think is the correct view of the matter than by what it is likely the historical authors had in mind.”? (216)

D. Theistic Science (217-221)

1. How does Plantinga answer McMullin’s objection to the very idea of a theistic or Christian science on the grounds that “it lacks the sort of warrant that ‘points to systematic observation, generalization and the testing of explanatory hypotheses’”? (218)
2. How does Plantinga answer McMullin’s objection that a Christian or "theistic" science would lack the universality of science? (220-221)

E. Antecedent Probabilities (221-225)

1. How does Plantinga challenge Van Till’s thesis of the functional integrity of God’s creation? (222)

2. Why does Plantinga conclude that “Perhaps the most reasonable attitude, here, is one of agnosticism: one just doesn’t know what these antecedent probabilities are.”? (225) Does this change in his position (from his claim in his first article that the antecedent probabilities favor special creation) effect his arguments in any way?