Module 1: Introduction

This is the first time and the last time that I will ever start a seminar (or a course of any kind) with an “Introduction.” It is the first time, because it is the first time that I have ever taught anything online, and such an “Introduction” will help to acquaint you both with me and with some ways that things this semester will be different from standard in-person seminars. This is the last time I will employ such an “Introduction,” because this looks to be the final class that I will ever teach. I am slated to retire at the end of this semester, ending a 38-year career at Emory and 42 years of full-time teaching.

PAGE 1: Introductions

I have provided short professional and personal histories below, but I have also created a video statement on Voice Thread, so that you can see what I look like, what I sound like, and learn a few things about me, as I respond to (something like) the following questions:

1. What is your Emory profile? Are you a graduate or an undergraduate student?
   a. If a graduate student, which department are you from? If you have a focal area within that discipline, what is it? How long have you been a student at Emory? What is your undergraduate background (institution(s), major(s))?
   b. If a senior in Emory College, what is/are your major(s)?
2. What brought you to this seminar? Why did you register for this seminar?
3. Answer at least one of the following three questions:
   a. What movie have you seen more than any other and why?
   b. What are your hobbies and why (or how did you get started with them)?
   c. What is one of your favorite places to visit and why?
4. Tell us something unusual about yourself.

[Here is the link to my initial entry on VoiceThread:]

[link to McCauley welcome statement on VoiceThread]

Because at least some of us will not have opportunities for even the most elementary forms of normal socializing this semester, I would like to ask each of you to create an entry on this Voice Thread, responding to the prompts above. To do so . . . [instructions about how they create an entry on VoiceThread]

Finally, I ask each of you to email me to set up an individual Zoom session sometime before Labor Day (September 7) for us to talk for 10 minutes or so.

McCauley

Professional Biographical Sketch: I am a philosopher of science and a theoretical cognitive scientist. I spent the first 25 years I was at Emory in the Department of Philosophy.
Then in 2008 I agreed to serve as the inaugural Director of the Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture (CMBC), which I did for two terms until 2016. If you wish to get a sense of my research interests over the years, you can check out my two websites:

http://www.robertmcccauley.com/ (popular website for the general public)

https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/robertnmccauley/ (scholarly website)

Over the decades I have pursued two lines of research, which have occasionally come together over the last dozen years or so. The first is as a theoretical cognitive scientist, interested in the promise of the methods, theories, and findings of the cognitive sciences for explaining and understanding aspects of religions and religiosity. The second is as a philosopher of (cognitive) science, interested in models of cross-scientific relations and of how the sciences do or do not hang together methodologically, theoretically, and ontologically.

Personal Biographical Sketch: At points my personal story, which follows, sounds like a professional story. That is because I recognized when I was an undergraduate that I wanted the life of an intellectual, and I have never looked back.

I was born in what was (at least at one time, by at least one measure, as reported at least once by NBC News) the poorest county in America. During my infancy, my family moved to Pittsburgh, where I grew up. Although I remain a Pittsburgher at heart to this day, I joined the Pittsburgh diaspora in the 1970s by attending Western Michigan University on an athletic scholarship, where I met the young woman I would marry a few years later as well as two other lifelong friends, one of whom, Tom Lawson, with whom I have written two books. I went on to graduate school on a Danforth Graduate Fellowship at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, where I completed my master’s degree and got married, before transferring to the doctoral program in the U of C’s Department of Philosophy. Four years later, upon my wife completing here M.A. in social work and my PhD in the philosophy of science, we got jobs in Indianapolis, where I taught at a small college. Teaching thirty-six classes there in three years, I learned a lot about teaching. In my fourth year, I used an American Council of Learned Societies Study Fellowship to spend a year studying experimental psychology at Purdue University, where my wife was getting her PhD. Near the end of that year I accepted Emory’s offer of a position as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy. We moved to Atlanta, and seven months later our daughter was born. In subsequent years I progressed through the ranks at Emory, my wife had a practice as a marriage and family therapist and then became a hospital administrator, and our daughter grew up, an only child.

My sense was that Emory was a good place when I arrived. In my thirty-seven years here, I have seen the University expand and improve to become a great place. During those same thirty-seven years in Atlanta, I have seen the city and region grow enormously. But I have never adjusted to the summer heat, and I have never felt like I fit into anything much beyond the segment of the Emory community of which I am a part. Beyond the fact that I no longer care to contend with either large amounts or prolonged bouts of snow, I am not a Southerner.

Our daughter, by contrast, has grown up here, attended Emory, gone away to graduate school, and returned to Atlanta after getting married. She does regard herself as a Southerner. She and our son-in-law (also an Emory alum) have blessed us with three granddaughters, whom we have been seeing (only) at a distance now for many months.

Prevented from travel, from live cultural events, and from golf, the transition to retirement looks like it will be an (unexpected) challenge. These activities are precluded, because COVID-19 presents a greater challenge to our household than many, as we rank among the most vulnerable segment of the population (ergo, I am teaching this seminar online). I do have
another book project in mind, so, perhaps, this hiatus from other activities will enhance my efficiency on that front in the coming year or two.

PAGE 2: A Semester Online

We are living in unusual times. The University, the College, and the faculty of arts and sciences have devoted substantial time and resources to doing what they can to ensure that Emory is prepared to fulfill its institutional mission and, simultaneously, to protect the community from COVID-19.

As noted in my personal history, my wife and I are among the most vulnerable population and sheltering-in-place. These circumstances will require several adjustments. Following are some of the more prominent ones:

Office Hours and contacting me

I will be holding office hours and all individual meetings online as well. (Although I have an office on campus, I have not even been in the building since mid-February. I understand that at least some of you may be facing similar constraints.) [How are online office hours held? On email? On Zoom?]

Although we live but three miles northeast of campus, our street is a DEAD ZONE for cell phones (for all companies), and for reasons that we have never understood, WIFI calling only works some of the time. Consequently, the best way to contact me is via email at my regular Emory email address: philrn@emory.edu I will do my best to check email regularly through the weekdays and periodically on weekends as well.

Seminar meetings

Our seminar meets on Wednesdays from 1:00 to 4:00. This will happen on Zoom.

- You must log into Zoom via your authenticated Emory account
- I am asking everyone to have their cameras on during our seminar meetings. Seeing one another facilitates communication.
  - If that presents a problem for anyone, you should email me as early as possible to discuss this.
  - Zoom permits you to use a virtual background, which ensures your privacy and the privacy of anyone with whom you reside. [some link here to instructions about how to get virtual backgrounds when Zooming?]
- I plan to schedule the seminar sessions on Zoom from 12:50 to 4:10. We meet from 1:00 to 4:00, but this will provide some time for informal interaction before or after our meeting for those so inclined.
- Although Zoom seems reasonably well-suited for seminar sessions, I am assuming that we will take more than just a single break (as I typically do in conventional seminars).
- Be prepared for the fact that it may take me a while to master Zoom (if ever!). Things (e.g., transitions to showing a PowerPoint slide) will often move more slowly and laboriously than they would in a conventional seminar. I am going to fumble around at times and make mistakes. Please be patient with me, but if you can help me, please do not hesitate to share your knowledge with me then and there.

Technological Issues

- No one has perfect internet connections all of the time. Alas, that includes me. Although my connection usually works fine, if I suddenly disappear because I have lost my internet connection, [then WHAT DO I TELL THEM TO DO????]
• I may use headphones or a full headset on Zoom, but whether I do or not, you should not hesitate to do so, if you would prefer.

Netiquette

In an all online seminar we will almost certainly have some asynchronous collective communications about substantive issues that we have read about or discussed, whether via email or via the Discussion board in the seminar’s Canvas site. Neither producing such communications nor commenting on them is required, but both are quite welcome. (See the discussion of participation in the Evaluation section of the syllabus.) The neologism “netiquette” points to best practices when participating in such online exchanges. Those guidelines can probably be best summarized by the simple admonition to always be respectful of each other. Some consequences of that general principle and some other practices worth highlighting include:

• In the interests of protecting one another’s privacy, never copy any content, including questions or responses by you or anyone else, from these emails or discussion boards and share it with anyone outside of our class.
• Report glitches to me asap, please.
• In order to avoid repetition, read everything before replying. Therefore . . .
• Be concise. (I recommend this about all of your writing!)
• Use formal writing style (e.g., no emojis) just as you would in any other academic engagement (e.g., use grammar and spell checkers).
• Provide detailed citations of sources.
• Be pleasant and polite (no YELLING or rants). Be forgiving of others’ mistakes.
• Finally, you cannot un-ring the bell. Once you have hit the send button, you have rung the bell.

Module 2: Syllabus

PAGE 1: Description and Objectives

This seminar presumes that it makes sense to distinguish civilizations from other sorts of human cultural arrangements, such as those characteristic of hunter-gatherers and of small-scale societies. A variety of considerations come into play with talk of “civilization.”

• Civilizations involve substantial numbers of people grouped together in large-scale societies.
• Civilized arrangements always involve people routinely crossing paths and interacting civilly with people who are neither their relatives nor extended kin (on any of their operative notions of kinship)
• Civilizations also systematically manage large parts of their environments, including some plants and animals, for the purposes of producing bountiful stocks of food, virtually always in the form of agriculture
• Civilizations divide labor among myriad specializations. That typically has at least four salient consequences. As with all division of labor:
  o Such specialized focus on tasks usually leads to improving processes and technologies.
  o Civilizations involve elaborate social hierarchies for the organization and management of all of those specialists and their work.
Such hierarchical arrangements involve both substantial inequities in the allocation of resources and organized religions that, among other things, justify such inequities.

These things do not happen without states, i.e., governments with basically impersonal bureaucracies that take care of the variety of tasks associated with:
- taxes (i.e., the accumulation of resources so that they can be reallocated),
- laws,
- and record-keeping.

The need to address those three functions in large scale societies almost guarantees the creation of lasting, externalized systems of representation, of which the most important, by far, is literacy. Literate record keeping is the progenitor of history.

This rough pattern is a fairly uncontroversial, general characterization (so far as it goes) of the emergence of civilizations across our planet over the past eight thousand years or so, at least so long as no one insists on its universal applicability or on one-way causal arrows connecting any of these factors.

As its title suggests, this multidisciplinary seminar will address the natural and cultural foundations of civilization.

- The natural foundations are of two sorts. The first concerns the evolution of our species and of our striking cognitive and social abilities. The second concerns the natural environments that humans occupy and those environments’ resources and challenges.
- The cultural foundations involve (at least) the variety and evolution of the social, technological, intellectual, and imaginative resources (in the broadest senses of those terms) that are shared in and contribute to the survival and persistence of human groups.

Historians and philosophers have been arguing for centuries about whether the methods of science can be brought to bear fruitfully on questions about historical change, such as those concerning the emergence of civilizations. In the light of at least two developments, that debate has, over the past decade or two, lost some of its traditional intensity. The first is rise of the digital humanities. Most humanists may not be appealing directly to scientific research, but they have discovered the power of scientists’ computational tools and modeling. The second is, in effect, what philosophers call an “existence proof.” The best way to defeat a universal claim against something’s possibility is to produce an example of that thing. Over the past twenty-five years a few dozen works that employ scientific theorizing, investigative tools, and research findings have appeared that have clearly furnished enhanced explanatory understanding of changes over time among human groups (in both prehistoric and historical times) and of the emergence of civilizations, in particular. During this seminar, we will read five of the best of these works. I will also call a few ancillary readings (recommended, but not required) to your attention, written mostly by humanists who have welcomed scientific contributions to historical inquiry.

This seminar should enable you to
- describe the principal geographical, ecological, biological, cognitive, and cultural variables connected with the increasing numbers and spread of our species around the planet,
- recognize the major forms of communal arrangements in which humans have lived throughout the history of our species,
- trace the order in which those arrangements have arisen,
• identify the major variables (material, social, cultural, economic, etc.) involved in distinguishing one form of human communal arrangements from another,
• characterize both the ultimate and proximate variables and their relations to one another that have determined the fates of human societies,
• survey the distinctive technologies attached to civilizations
• compare the relative strengths and weaknesses of scientific and traditional interpretive approaches to understanding and explaining historical developments

PAGE 2: Books and Readings

This seminar is overwhelmingly based on books (as opposed to journal articles). Students should purchase all of the following books (though copies of each are on 2-hour reserve at Woodruff Library).


Two comments about book purchasing:
(1) all but Scott’s book are available in paperback; inexpensive copies of the others can be found on used-book websites and
(2) when I last checked, the Scott book was cheaper at Yale UP’s website than it was on Amazon.

Two recommended books for supplementary reading:


PAGE 3: **Evaluation**

The evaluation of the performance of students taking the seminar for a regular grade will turn on three factors:

(1) 70% of the grade will arise from a 13-15 page double-spaced paper, which is due in my email inbox as an MS Word file by 4:00 on **Wednesday, December 2**. Further items of note:
   a. Be sure to **use page numbers** and to include a one inch margin at the sides and at the top and bottom of each page.
   b. I will be happy to read and comment on drafts delivered to me not later than **Friday, November 27**.
   c. You should use scientific style references with a reference list at the end. (This list is **not** included in the calculation of the paper’s length. Do **not** use the traditional MLA/humanities format using Latin abbreviations such as *ibid.* or *op. cit.*)
   d. You may use either footnotes or endnotes, but the pages of the latter are included in calculating the length of the paper.
   e. **You should schedule a preliminary meeting with me to discuss your paper topic by no later than Friday, October 30. (It is your responsibility to make an appointment with me.) You must get your topic approved.**

(2) 20% of the grade will arise from you taking responsibility for facilitating discussion about at least two of the required readings during the semester. Typically, this will be somewhere between one third (corresponding to approximately 50 minutes of seminar time) and one half (corresponding to approximately 75 minutes of seminar time) of the reading for any given session. Considerations that are relevant include:
   1. your command of the reading,
   2. the organization and clarity that you bring to the session, and, most importantly,
   3. your provocation of an engaging discussion.
Readings are reserved for this purpose on a first-come-first-served basis. Because of the complexities that the technology introduces, **students must meet with me in advance on Zoom to discuss the reading, your plan for your part of the seminar session in question, and the technology.** (See the addendum to this syllabus, entitled “Some Thoughts about Seminar Presentations.”) Students should sign up to take responsibility for readings by emailing me directly.

(3) 10% of the grade will arise from your participation in the seminar overall; considerations that are relevant include attendance, quantity and quality of both contributions and questions in seminar sessions, and discussions outside of class (for the incurably shy). Obviously, the only “discussions outside of class” to which I will be privy are those that you carry out with me directly via email (or, preferably, Zoom) or those that occur in the Discussion section of the Canvas site for this seminar. How many of those there are is entirely up to all of you.

This semester will include a couple of new ways in which to participate.
   1. Watch some (terrific!) videos. The first (a NOVA 2-hour special on the history of the earth’s climate) comes during the first week. The second and third come in the first week of October. Technically, the second video
(episode 1 of the National Geographic special on *Guns, Germs, and Steel*) is required, but the third video (the second episode of that same series) is optional. Just let me know, if you take the time to watch the first and the third videos.

(2) Take a field trip on your own! If remaining sheltered-in-place is not your thing, then consider the possibility of taking a field trip connected with this seminar on your own. At least three sites worth seeing (all are Georgia State Historic Sites) are within a 2-hour drive of campus (all are northwest of Atlanta up I-75):

- Etowah Indian Mounds: [https://gastateparks.org/EtowahIndianMounds](https://gastateparks.org/EtowahIndianMounds)
- New Echota: [https://gastateparks.org/NewEchota](https://gastateparks.org/NewEchota)
- Chief Vann House: [https://gastateparks.org/ChiefVannHouse](https://gastateparks.org/ChiefVannHouse)

PAGE 4: **Assignments:** Required readings for each session are listed under the instruction “Read.” Other relevant readings that I would encourage you to look at, if you have the time, are listed under the instruction “See.”

**August 19**  
**Introduction**

*See:* “Polar Extremes” (2 hours) [link to video]


**August 26**  
**The Minds of Our Ancestors**


September 2 Achieving Cognitive Fluidity


September 9 Out of Africa


September 16 The Peopling of the Old World


September 23 The Peopling of the New World


**September 30**  
**Up to the Starting Line**


**October 7**  
**The Birth of Agriculture and Where It Spread and Why**


episode 1 of “Guns, Germs, and Steel” (National Geographic Special) [link to video]

See: episode 2 of “Guns, Germs, and Steel” (National Geographic Special) [link to video]

Etowah Indian Mounds State Historic Site

**October 14**  
**From Food to Guns, Germs, and Steel**


New Echota and Chief Van State Historic Sites
October 21  Review and the Agro-ecology of the Early State

October 28  Early States and Their Discontents

November 4  Not as Clever as We Suppose

November 11  Ways in Which Culture Shapes Our Species

November 18  A New Kind of Animal
Addendum: Some Thoughts about Seminar Presentations

1. Although you may spend a short time (presumably, at the beginning) summarizing the reading's contents, this is NOT what most of the time should be allotted to. In summarizing the contents (by whatever means you think will prove most effective), the focus should be on the principal positions and the principal (philosophical, theoretical, conceptual, mathematical, and/or empirical) arguments for those positions. Often, it may be helpful to reconstruct the intellectual context from which the reading has emerged, but this depends upon its comparative importance and the time available.

2. **DO NOT spend your time providing a comprehensive summary that rehearses every point in the reading.** You may use Power Point, but **DO NOT come with a presentation that simply goes through the text summarizing every move that is made.** Your job is to help us focus on what is most important and what is most interesting. Choose the two or three (surely, no more than five) most important points, findings, developments, arguments, or criticisms in the text.

3. If the reading is especially polemical, then a brief rehearsal of the opposing position(s) might also be in order. Finding some way to summarize the opposing arguments and to tabulate where they are successful and the reasons for the tabulation is one strategy. An account of the points that are made particularly effectively (and why) could also be helpful.

4. **BUT,** on the other hand, **do NOT assume that you must do all of the work.** Actually, **your major goal should be to foster a lively, constructive discussion** among the seminar participants. So, you could come in and after highlighting the major arguments, **throw it (with lots of penetrating and provocative questions!)** to them to hash out.

5. Whatever approach you decide to employ, **you should come prepared as the seminar's expert on the reading for which you have taken responsibility.** By that I do not mean that you must do any, let alone loads, of secondary reading (though you are welcome to), but rather that you are going to have clear command of the reading in question. This means that if a disagreement or a question arises about its contents that the other participants cannot work out, you will be able to speak to these matters by directing us to the relevant chapter and verse in the text.

6. Informed, careful criticism of the reading is legitimate and welcome; however, your criticisms of any readings will carry much more credibility if you have first unequivocally demonstrated that you thoroughly understand the position you are criticizing.

7. **Coming in,** be prepared psychologically for the fact that you are going to get interrupted more than you probably expect and that things will not go either as smoothly or as efficiently as you are planning. **Also,** be prepared emotionally for the fact that I may well be the person who will be interrupting you most frequently. Do not assume that my comments are critical. Most of the time they are aimed at encouraging greater attention to some point. (All too often I find myself exhorting discussion leaders, in effect, to attend more carefully to the first sentence of item 4 above.)