

# **Philosophy & the Question of Modernity**

Dr. Joseph Minich, Instructor

## **Course Description**

Interpreters of our civilization often invoke something called modernity. But just what is this phenomenon? What sets apart our moment from past moments? Alternatively, are the differences between past and present overblown? Asking and answering such questions inevitably involves a reading of human beings and of the story that they're in. In this course, we will look at how several thinkers interpret man and his story relative to the question of modernity. Our goal will be to learn from and critique these thinkers in order that we might gesture toward a more complete understanding of our civilization, as well as our task within it. Among the items discussed will be the nature of secularism, the debate over whether we live in a "disenchanted" age, the relationship between modernity and communal trust, and the role played by non-intellectual factors (technology, etc) in all of the above.

## **Course Format**

The format of the course will be a roughly equivalent mix of lecture and guided discussion. It is assumed that students will come having read and engaged with the text selection for that day, and with thoughts (and critical questions) prepared to contribute. Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Supplementary student interaction (both informal and formal) is highly encouraged, and I also aim to make myself available to you.

## **Course Objectives**

This course aims (1) to introduce students to crucial large-scale interpretations of our civilization and historical moment, (2) to dialogically engage, learn from, and help train students in the art of thinking well, and (3) to persuade students of the veracity of the Christian faith.

## **Course Requirements**

1. Weekly reading (due before each class). 40% of grade.
2. Prepared critical comments or questions (due during each class). 10% of grade.
3. Paper proposal (due on the 6th class session). 10% of grade.
4. 3k-4k word integrative paper (due on the final day of class). 40% of grade.

## Course Texts & Schedule

Crawford, Matthew. “Algorithmic Governance and Political Legitimacy” in *American Affairs Journal* (PDF).

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology” in *Basic Writings* (PDF).

Marx, Karl. “Estranged Labor,” in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (PDF).

Minich, Joseph. “Atheism and Narrative,” in *Bulwarks of Unbelief* (PDF).

Sacasas, L.M. “The Analog City and the Digital City” in *The New Atlantis* (PDF).

Schorske, Carl. Selections from *Fin-De-Siecle: Politics and Culture* (PDF).

Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Trueman, Carl. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Reading
1	TBD	Introduction to “Modernity”	Minich, 10-64, Trueman, 1-104
2	TBD	Labor & Technology	Marx, 1-10; Heidegger, 311-41
3	TBD	The Institutions of Modernity	Giddens, 1-78
4	TBD	Modernity & Communal Trust	Giddens, 79-178
5	TBD	Modernity, Society, Secularization 1	Taylor, 1-100
6	TBD	Modernity, Society, Secularization 2	Taylor, 101-96
7	TBD	Modernity, the Self, & Art	Trueman, 105-200, Schorske (TBD)
8	TBD	Modernity, Sexuality, Politics	Trueman, 201-70
9	TBD	Modernity & The Internet	Sacasas, 1-24, Crawford, 1-20
10	TBD	Modernity as a Task	Trueman, 271-408