

**Environmental Ethics (Introduction to Ethics)**  
**Focus on Climate Change**  
**CE 2505**

San Francisco Theological Seminary

Spring 2011

Tu, Fri: 10:20 to 11:50

Carol Robb

[crobb@sfts.edu](mailto:crobb@sfts.edu)

Off hrs: 1:30- 3 Tue

Mary Ashley

[mashley@ses.gtu.edu](mailto:mashley@ses.gtu.edu)

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to Christian social ethics, and to the literature of environmental ethics. This semester the focus is climate change. We will approach the question of how to respond to climate change, using philosophical ethics, the literature of the IPCC, theology, and biblical studies as informing disciplines.

This course satisfies the SFTS requirement for an elective in ethics. Other seminaries of the GTU may also accept this course as fulfillment of the requirement for an introductory course.

**Course Objectives**

The following objectives will guide our work through the semester, and should serve as the basis for evaluation of the usefulness of the course requirements and the whole course experience. When you finish this class, you as students will be able to do the following:

- a. Define and use some key language and concepts of philosophical and theological ethics. Your capacity will be documented by way of a take-home exam that focuses on these matters.
- b. Converse in theological and biblical language that helps the church reflect on ecological matters. Two of the assigned texts in the second half of the semester were chosen specifically to exemplify ways of articulating the theological issues generated by the topics related to ecology, and specifically climate change. Your final paper will allow you to document your capacities along these lines.
- c. Exhibit skills necessary for public leadership, such as the ability to state one's own stance, give reasons, acknowledge different points of view, and give reasons why those points of view are not compelling—all skills that members of faith communities could contribute to social discourse on matters in conflict. The final paper is to be written in the form of a moral argument, and will be organized to allow you to document this capacity.
- d. Develop at least an early stage praxis of ecological living, and document new skills you have acquired to enrich that praxis of living more lightly on the earth. The class participants will choose a project in which these new skills will be learned and practiced. A short (2 page) report due toward the end of the semester along with your participation in the project(s) will allow you to document these new skills.

## Course Requirements

- a. Regular reading of the daily assignments, and informed participation in class discussion of the assignments. Several learning strategies will be used in our class sessions, but none of them will be productive without your prior preparation of the reading. Because some people's default position is to verbalize easily, and other people's default position is to quietly observe, new learning for you may involve encouraging the silent to speak, or it may involve taking courage to speak. One discipline we will use in this class is this: On those inevitable days when we have not been able to do the assigned reading, come to class, but do not participate in the discussion. The response, "Today I need to pass," will be appropriate for you on those days, if I call upon you. Absences: Please inform me if you have to miss class. After 3 absences, I will decrease your grade by ½ point for every additional day you miss. (Participation constitutes 25% of the grade.)
- b. Participation in the design and implementation of a class project. The project this class will choose is up to you as a class, and will depend on the prior experience you bring to this class. Since the purpose is to teach ourselves something new about how to live more lightly on the earth, the project is oriented toward practical skills. The purpose of the project is not to teach others to change their ways. It is to teach ourselves. A short report (2 pages) **due May 10** is where you document your new skills in living more lightly on the earth. (25% of grade) The report is to address these questions: (1) In what class project did you participate? (2) What did you do for the project? Be specific. (3) What did you learn about everyday patterns that will help you live more lightly on the earth?
- c. A midterm exam, take-home, and due in class Tuesday, March 29. This requirement will allow you to document you are learning the major tools of discourse in ethics. (Quality of the exam answers constitutes 25% of the final grade.)
- d. A final paper. Due Tuesday May 17. The model for your final paper is a moral argument, consistent with objectives c. and d. above. You are asked to communicate your research in a brief (10 to 12 minutes) but exciting way to your classmates. The paper should be 12 to 15 pages in length. You are encouraged, but not required, to work on this writing project with others in the class, in groups not to exceed 3 members. The paper format should be consistent with Kate Turabian's Guide to Writing of Term Papers and Theses, which includes the style acceptable to the JAAR, per seminary policy. (Quality of written paper plus presentation to class constitutes 25% of grade.)
- e. We will use the inclusive language policy of SFTS and the GTU for verbal and written language about human beings and about God. This is a skill in the

preparation of leadership for the churches, and also arguably consistent with the attempt to live with ecological integrity.

f. Because life in theological education involves whole persons, who have multiple important commitments, some of which require attention at the same time, deadlines for exams and papers are sometimes difficult to meet. We have found the best way to honor those multiple commitments and at the same time be fair to those who make sacrifices to meet the class deadlines is this: If you feel you need to request a small extension, negotiate with me about that first. If I agree to a small extension, your grade will be docked ½ point per day the paper is late (i.e. from a B to a B-).

g. Students with special needs should confer with me at the beginning of the class to make arrangements for how you will document that you have fulfilled the requirements for the course.

**Relevance of Course to SFTS Degree Program Learning Objectives:** This course should be relevant to students' efforts to develop the habits of personal integrity, a sense of the impact of cultural and political situations of life and thought, a sense for grounding theology in practical reality, and hermeneutical responsibility in the interpretation of Scripture and all communication. Additionally, it should help students demonstrate skills relevant to leading in ethical witness to society and articulating the global witness and mission of the church. It may also help students prepare for non-congregational ministries.

In summary, this course should help students to achieve and document two M.Div. Program Learning Objectives: #2: Reflect Theologically (broadly defined) on Christian faith, the church and the world; and #4: Equip churches and communities for mission and ministry.

### **Required Reading**

William Baxter, People or Penguins, the Case for Optimal Pollution (New York: Columbia, 1974)

James Garvey, The Ethics of Climate Change (Continuum, 2008)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) Climate Change 2007, "Summary for Policy Makers at <http://www.ipcc.ch> (scroll down)

Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology (Fortress, 2008)

Lisa H. Newton, Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Moral Life (Prentice-Hall, 2003)

Carol Robb, Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change (Fortress, 2010)

Paul W. Taylor, Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics (Princeton: 1986)

### **Other Resources**

*The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming*, Approved by the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 2008. (Available on line at [pcusa.org/acswp](http://pcusa.org/acswp))

James Martin-Schramm, *Climate Justice: Ethics, Energy, and Public Policy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010)

### **Course Outline**

Feb 1 Introduction to the course and to each other, and to Modes of Moral Discourse

#### **The Modes of Moral Discourse**

Feb 4 1. Teleology: William F. Baxter, People or Penguins, Ch 1, 2

Feb 8 Baxter, Ch 3, 4

Feb 11 Baxter, Ch 5

Feb 15 2. Deontology: Paul W. Taylor, Respect for Nature, Ch 1

Feb 18 Taylor, Ch 2

Feb 22 Taylor, Ch 3

Feb 25 Taylor, Ch 4

Mar 1 Taylor, Ch 5

Mar 4 Taylor, Ch 6

Mar 8 3. Virtue: Lisa Newton, Ethics and Sustainability, Ch 1

Mar 11 Newton, Ch 2

Mar 15 Newton Ch 3

Mar 18 Synthesis of Modes of Moral Discourse, Discussion of Authorities

**Mar 21-25: Reading Week**

Mar 29 **Exam due back.** Video

**Reflection on Climate Change: Authorities in Conversation**

Apr 1 Climatology: IPCC, Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) Climate Change 2007, Summary for Policymakers ( <http://www.ipcc.ch>) or provided in class

Apr 5 Thinking philosophically: James Garvey, *The Ethics of Climate Change* Intro, Ch 1, 2

Apr 8 **T. V. Moore Lectures** (no class) Calculate your carbon footprint and copy to bring to class ([www.coolcalifornia.org](http://www.coolcalifornia.org) or other carbon calculator)

Apr 12 Garvey, Ch 3, 4, Share carbon footprint in class.

Apr 15 Garvey, Ch 5, 6, Epilogue

Apr 19 Thinking biblically: Carol Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit*, Ch 3, 4

Apr 22 Good Friday, Earth Day, No Class

Apr 26 Robb, Ch 5, 6

Apr 29 Robb, Ch 7, 8

May 3 Thinking theologically: Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology* Ch 1, 2, 3

May 6 McFague, Ch 4, 5

May 10 **2 page Class project report due.** McFague, Ch 7, 8, 9

May 13 **Writing Day**

May 17 **Final Paper due: Students present summaries.**

May 21 More presentations. **Last Day of Class**