Course Description: This course is an introduction to the basic issues in philosophical ethics with a special emphasis on the thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas. First we shall consider the nature of ethics in the context of Plato’s Gorgias and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. In particular we will look at Socrates’ criticism of Gorgias’ account of rhetoric, Callicles’ rejection of conventional morality, and Aristotle’s definition of human happiness. Second, we will focus on the different ways in which consequentialism and traditional morality evaluate individual human acts. We will discuss killing innocents in warfare and the relevance of the distinction between contraception and Natural Family Planning. Third, we will separately examine the particular cardinal virtues, namely prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Last, we will return to the theme of happiness by looking at Aristotle’s account of the kinds of happiness, and Thomas Aquinas’s development of this approach.

Texts: The books below are available from the UST bookstore. They will be supplemented with other readings on Blackboard.


Evaluation: Students will be expected to take two exams during the semester and one cumulative exam. There will also be two 3-4 page papers on assigned topics (due February 7, April 20). Plagiarism will result in failure for the course. Class participation is expected in the form of asking relevant questions or making relevant comments. You must read the assignment if you wish to participate. Civil Deportment is required (e.g., no chewing gum, inappropriate language, eating, hats, obnoxious comments, etc). Do not turn on your computer or cell phone, or look at them during class. You can type up your notes after class. Absences will hurt your grade. Assuming relatively few absences, the breakdown will be:
Smaller Tests: 40% (20% each)
Paper: 20% (10% each)
Final Exam: 30%
Participation: 10%

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Counseling and Disability Services Office in Crooker Center. This office can be reached at (713) 525-2169 or 6953.