Virtue Ethics:

Plato & Socrates
Socrates (born 470, died 399, Athens) Details about Socrates are derived from three contemporary sources: Besides the dialogues of Plato there are the plays of Aristophanes and the dialogues of Xenophon. It is unclear how Socrates earned a living. According to Xenophon’s Symposium, Socrates is reported as saying he devotes himself only to what he regards as the most important art or occupation: discussing philosophy. Xenophon and Aristophanes respectively portray Socrates as accepting payment for teaching and running a sophist school with Chaerephon, while in Plato’s Apology of Socrates and Symposium Socrates explicitly denies accepting payment for teaching. In the Apology, Socrates cites his poverty as proof that he is not a teacher. His final words suggest that he was very poor indeed: he requests that his friend Crito pay off a small debt (a rooster) to the god Asclepius.

Several of Plato’s dialogs refer to Socrates’ military service. Socrates says he served in the Athenian army during three campaigns: at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. In the Symposium Alcibiades describes Socrates’ valour in the battles of Potidaea and Delium, recounting how he saved his life in the former battle (219e-221b). Socrates’ exceptional service at Delium is also mentioned in the Laches, by the general the dialogue is named after (181b). In the Apology Socrates compares his military service to his courtroom troubles, and says that anyone on the jury who thinks he ought to retreat from philosophy must also think that soldiers should ditch when it looks like they will be killed in battle.
The Death of Socrates:
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- ....**Socrates:** The young men who observe me later imitate what I do. When they expose esteemed men as unwise, these latter men blame me for leading the youth astray. Going further, they say I deliberately stir up trouble by challenging traditional beliefs and promoting strange religious ideas, including my own gods. .....But my chief accuser here, Miletus, is the one who is doing wrong. Although he professes to be concerned about the youth of our community, he does not care about them at all. Tell me, Miletus, is it better to live among good citizens or bad ones?
- ....**Miletus:** Good ones.
- ....**Socrates:** Is there someone who would rather be hurt than helped by people around him?
- ....**Miletus:** No.
- ....**Socrates:** Do I deliberately corrupt youth?
- ....**Miletus:** Yes.
- ....**Socrates:** All right, then, why would I want to corrupt people when I know that doing so will make them want to harm me. You just agreed that no one would want to live around people he knows would harm him. As for religion, do you accuse me of teaching different gods or of being an atheist?
- ....**Miletus:** You are an atheist.
- ....**Socrates:** But you say I teach spiritual concepts and believe in strange divine beings. How curious it is that I believe in gods and not believe in gods at the same time. The fact is, it appears that you and others here are going to condemn me simply because I have the courage to tell the truth. In this respect, I am like Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors in the Trojan War. He knew that if he avenged the death of his friend Patroclus by killing the Trojan warrior Hector, he was fated to die. But rather than live in disgrace, he killed Hector and died with honor. In my case, if you offered to free me if I stopped practicing philosophy in my honest and truthful way, I would reject your offer. As long as I live, I shall obey God and continue to tell the truth to anyone I encounter. Of course, it would be foolhardy of you to execute me, for it would be hard to replace a gadfly like me. God commissioned me to search for the truth, and I have done so with all my heart to the extent that I have neglected my own needs for the sake of you. Since I was a child, a divine voice has spoken to me, has given me signs, telling me to prod and question other men in order to put them on the road toward true wisdom. But if I am evil, let the young men I corrupted and their relatives come forth and speak against me. They will not, of course, because they know that I am not evil.
- By a vote of 280 to 220, the council finds Socrates guilty and sentences him to death. However, under Athenian law, a convicted person can propose an alternative sentence. Socrates proposes a small fine and, in an act of defiance, suggests that he be allowed to dine at taxpayer expense at a public table reserved for esteemed citizens of Athens. The council rejects his proposal by an even larger vote. A month later, he is executed by the prescribed method of capital punishment: drinking poison.
Plato:

- Born 428/427, Athens, Greece—died 348/347, Athens, ancient Greek philosopher, student of Socrates (470–399), teacher of Aristotle (384–322), and founder of the Academy.

- The son of Ariston (his father) and Perictione (his mother), Plato was born in the year after the death of the great Athenian statesman Pericles. His brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus are portrayed as interlocutors in Plato's masterpiece the Republic, and his half brother Antiphon figures in the Parmenides.

- Plato's family was aristocratic and distinguished: his father's side claimed descent from the god Poseidon, and his mother's side was related to the lawgiver Solon (630–560). Less creditably, his mother's close relatives Critias and Charmides were among the Thirty Tyrants who seized power in Athens and ruled briefly until the restoration of democracy in 403.
Plato's Academy, founded in the 380s, was the ultimate ancestor of the modern university (hence the English term *academic*); an influential centre of research and learning, it attracted many men of outstanding ability. The great mathematicians Theaetetus (417–369) and Eudoxus of Cnidus (395–342) were associated with it. Although Plato was not a research mathematician, he was aware of the results of those who were, and he made use of them in his own work. For 20 years Aristotle was also a member of the Academy. He started his own school, the Lyceum, only after Plato's death, when he was passed over as Plato's successor at the Academy, probably because of his connections to the court of Macedonia.
The Good Life:

- “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.” (Apology 38a)

- “The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for that runs deeper than death.” (Apology 38-39e)

  => the importance of being vigilant about separating opinion (doxa) from knowledge (episteme)

  => being good/virtuous is essential to having a good life – one cannot have the kind of life one desires without living it in a certain way.
The Good Life:

- “How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem...” (Phaedo)

- “When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you to trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing--then reprove them, as I have reproved you...” (Apology 41e-42a)

=> Must not be a life solely devoted to the pursuit of pleasure.

=> Must be the life of reason devoted to the pursuit of knowledge/truth/virtue.
The Virtuous Person

is ...

• ruled by reason and highly self-disciplined
• guided by a proper understanding of truth, honor, justice, beauty, etc...
• concerned about the development of the character
• conscientious & avoids claiming to know things that have not been properly examined and demonstrated to be so
• not swayed by popular opinion or emotional rhetoric
• not concerned about seeking comfort or illusions of happiness.
### The Tripartite Soul:

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To achieve balance one’s reason must become the driver who uses the willpower to control the appetites. (p.402)
Plato wrote of a polis in his central work, *The Republic*. This polis was to be ruled by philosopher-kings (& queens) who exemplified the best of humanity – chosen for their aptitude and rational excellence and were to be given the best education possible to prepare them for governance. The Auxiliaries who were the soldiers and law enforcement officials were to help the philosopher kings to keep control over the Merchants and general population. This model mirrors the tripartite soul.
On Viciousness: “Only Ignorance leads to wrongdoing.” (p. 401)