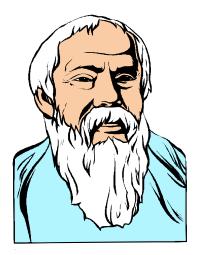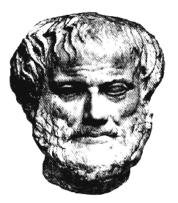# A virtue is a good habit.

Moral philosophy started in ancient Greece, when Socrates asked questions about virtue and encouraged people to think about such questions in a rational way.

For Plato, who was Socrates's star pupil, the lower must depend on the higher.

- Our soul needs to control the body. Our soul in turn needs to be guided by the Good, which is an objective pattern that our minds can grasp.

- There are four main virtues: wisdom, self-control (temperance), courage, and justice.

- St Augustine and other Christian thinkers accepted this but added three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.

Aristotle discussed many virtues, but divided them into two main groups: intellectual virtues and moral virtues.

- Virtue is a mean between extremes. Courage, for example, is midway between cowardice (having too much fear) and foolhardiness (having too little fear).

- We need practical wisdom to pick the virtues and determine the mean.

- Virtues aim at happiness (the excellent exercise of reason), which is the ultimate goal of our actions.

Virtue raises controversial issues. For example, here are claims by Ima Relativist and Ima Utilitarian.

Each culture has its own "socially approved habits," or virtues. There is no objective way to call the virtues of one culture better than the virtues of another culture.

Virtues are habits that promote the general good, seen in terms of pleasure and pain. The supreme virtue is the character trait to do the individual action that we think has the best total consequences.

Treat others as you want to be treated

The golden-rule consistency view, expressed in virtue terms, would talk about character traits like consistency, conscientiousness, and impartiality.

Corresponding to the golden rule is the character trait, (perhaps "compassion" or "consideration for others") that we have when we habitually treat others only as we consent to being treated in the same situation.

To apply the golden rule, it's important to have character traits like being informed and being imaginative.

Virtue versus duty?

- An extreme **ethics of duty** would say that "ought" is primary, virtue is derivative, and we could without loss dispense with talking about virtue.

- An extreme **ethics of virtue** would say that "virtue" is primary, duty is derivative, and we could without loss dispense with talking about duty.

- A middle view sees both duty and virtue as interdefinable (so neither is more basic) – and as different but complementary sides of the same moral coin.