

# VIRTUE ETHICS & ANIMAL USE

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

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# MORAL VIRTUE

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- ✘ **Virtue:** “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it”
  - + “it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions” (1107a1-5)
  - + “to feel [passions] at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way” (1106b20)
- ✘ **Focus on character**
  - + Forming the right habits for the right reasons
  - + Examine *particulars* of a specific case (avoid giving generalized prescriptions)

# HITTING THE MEAN

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## ✘ How do we achieve virtue?

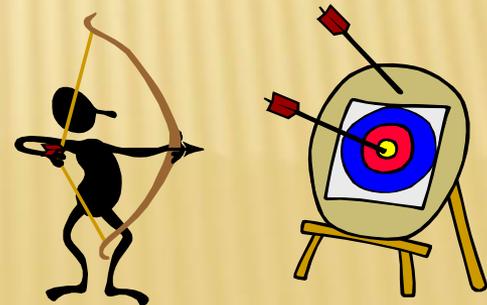
- + Moral perception: identify and understand morally salient features of situation; know own failings, inclinations, biases
- + Imagination: can envision self in various moral scenarios and dilemmas
- + Reasoning: contemplation, rationality
- + Feeling: have proper emotions; feel proper pleasure and pain towards good/evil

# HITTING THE MEAN

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## ✘ Archer metaphor

- + Need to first take stock of my leanings, errors, and strengths and compensate accordingly
- + Lucky archer hits mark without knowing what she's doing.
- + Skilled archer can pick up the bow and arrow in different climates, after long periods of time, etc. and still hit the mark.



# THE MEAN: DEPENDS ON PARTICULARS OF THE PERSON & SITUATION

EXAMPLE: HOW MUCH FEAR SHOULD THE VIRTUOUS PERSON FEEL WHEN CONFRONTED BY A BERSERKER ZOMBIE?

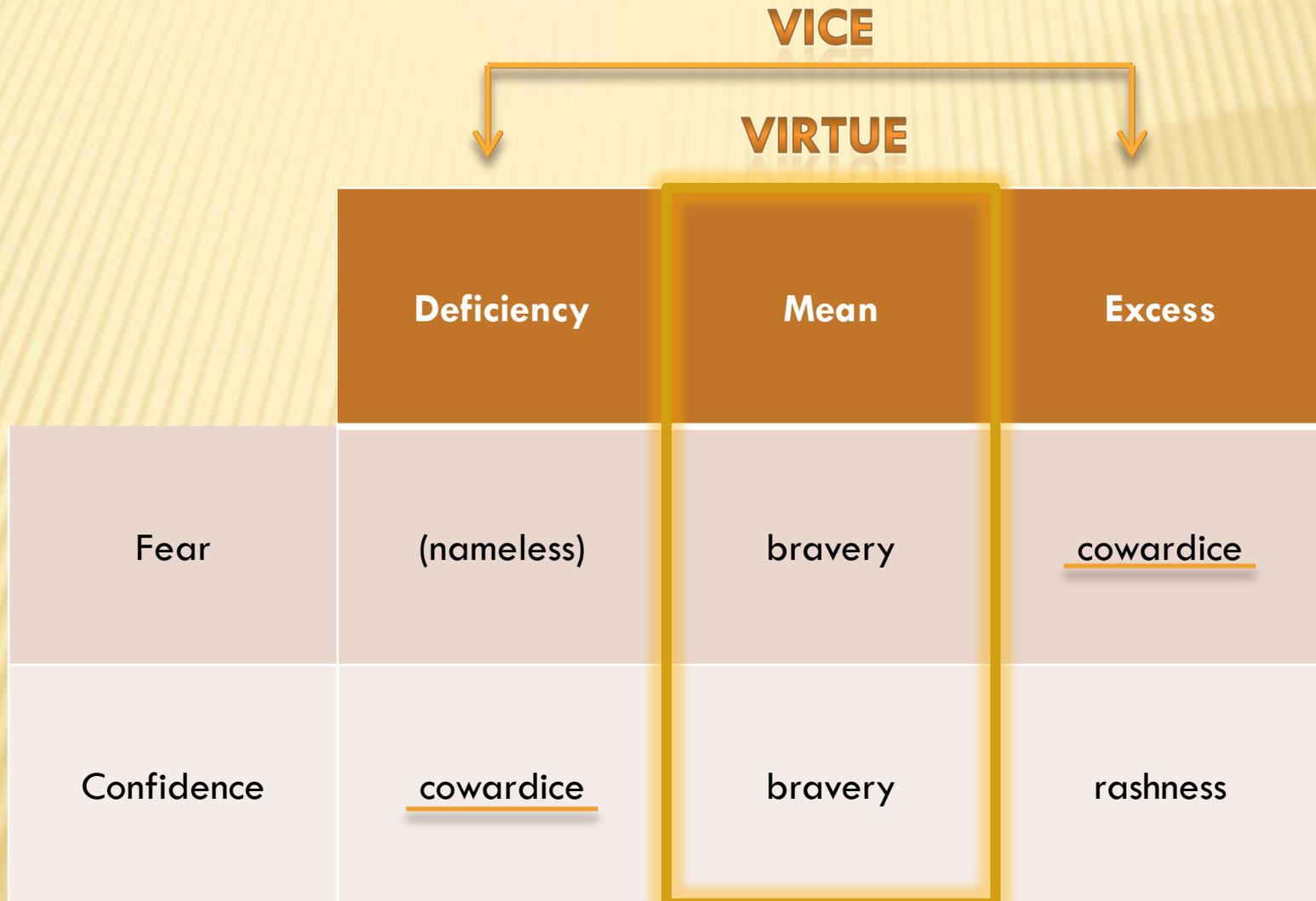
If the person is a well-trained soldier in battle...



If the person is a physically inept teacher...



# EXAMPLE: COURAGE



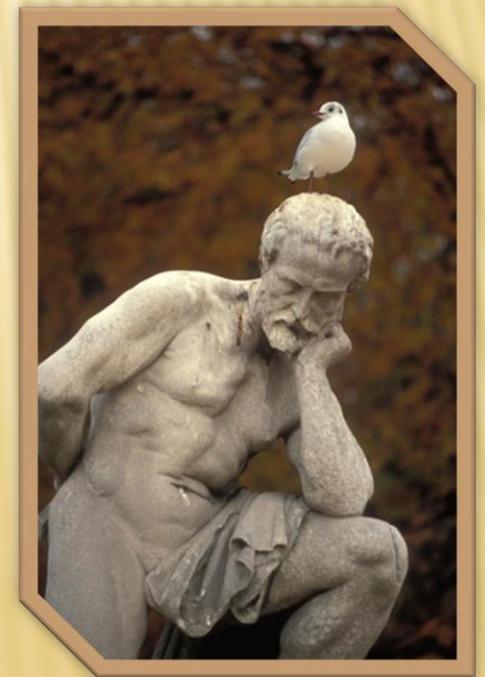
# HURSTHOUSE: CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE ETHICS

- ✘ **Strive toward excellence: “a strongly entrenched dispositional state of a person” (126)**
  - + Requires practical wisdom
- ✘ **Throwing out moral status arguments:**
  - + “it drastically underestimates the range of features that may, in context, be morally relevant in decision making” (121)
  - + Sometimes giving preferential treatment to our own species is morally permissible.



# VIRTUES RELEVANT TO ANIMAL ETHICS

- ✘ **Compassion/benevolence**
- ✘ **Honesty/truthfulness/forthrightness**
- ✘ **Wise use of resources**
- ✘ **Temperance**
- ✘ **Proper humility**
- ✘ **Respectful love**
- ✘ **Reverence**



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS?

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- ✘ **What do you find compelling about the virtue ethics approach for helping us think through animal issues?**
  - + **What is problematic about this approach?**
  
- ✘ **Discuss particular uses of animals (e.g., for food, experimentation) from a virtue ethics standpoint.**
  - + **Split into groups of 4 or 5!**
  - + **Do you see any gaps or problems with Hursthouse's analysis?**

**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

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