

# **VIRTUE & EXPANDED RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FACE OF OPPRESSION**

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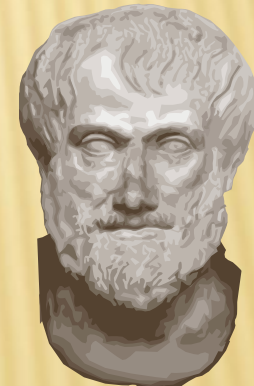
Oppression & Justice (Fall 2013)

Laura Guidry-Grimes

384-322 BCE, Greece

# ARISTOTLE

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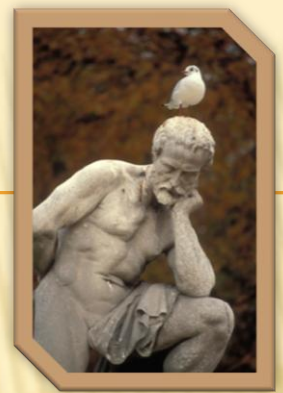


# MORAL VIRTUE

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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 (*ethos*) for the right reasons
  - + Examine *particulars* of a specific case (avoid giving generalized prescriptions)

# HITTING THE MEAN



## ✗ How do we achieve virtue?

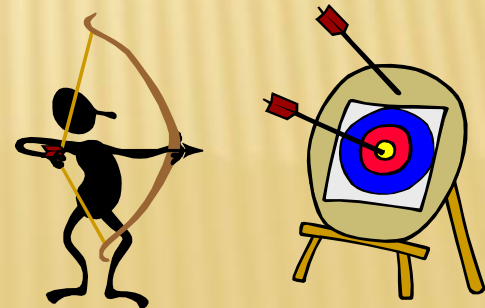
- + **Moral perception**: identify and understand morally salient features of situation; know own failings, inclinations, biases
- + **Imagination**: can envision self in various moral scenarios and dilemmas
- + **Reasoning**: contemplation, rationality
- + **Feeling**: have proper emotions; feel proper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



# HITTING THE MEAN

## ✕ Archer metaphor

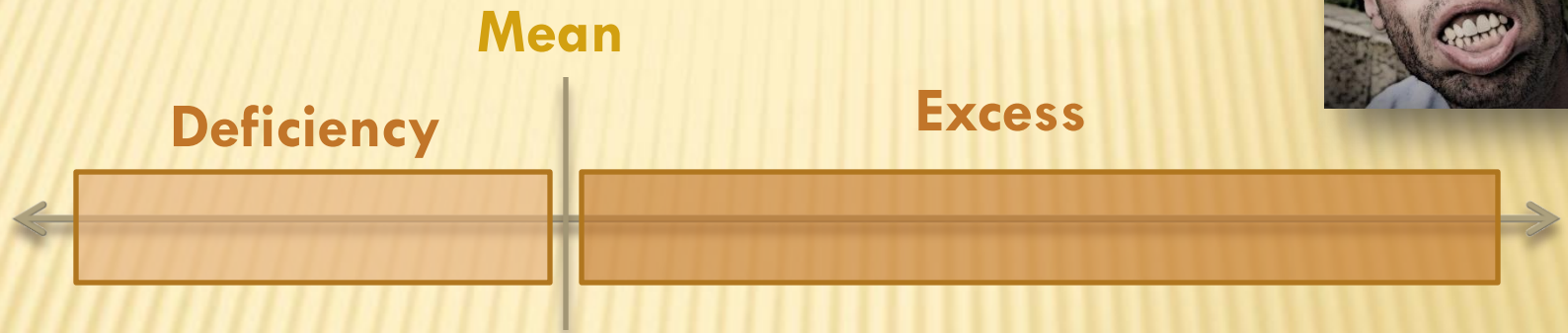
- + Need to first take stock of my leanings, errors, and strengths and compensate accordingly
- + Lucky archer hits mark without knowing what she's doing.
- + Skilled archer can pick up the bow and arrow in different climates, after long periods of time, etc. and still hit the mark.



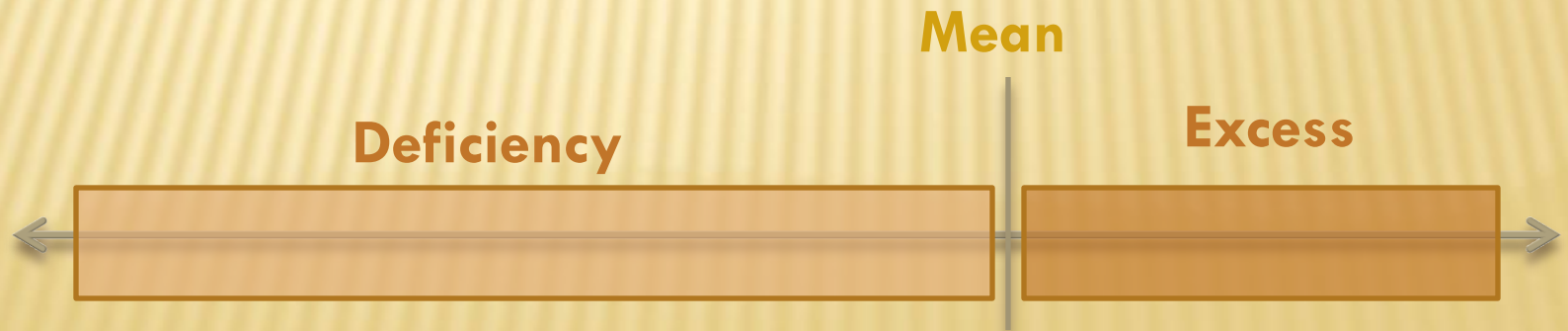
# THE MEAN: DEPENDS ON PARTICULARS OF THE PERSON & SITUATION

**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...



# ON JUSTICE

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- ✗ **Good political bodies should try to cultivate virtue in citizens**
  - + “Correct habituation distinguishes a good political system from a bad one” (1103b5)
  
- ✗ **Justice:** taking one’s fair share of goods and promoting just social arrangements
  
- ✗ **Injustice:** knowingly and willingly harming another against his/her wishes
  - + **Cannot suffer injustice (exploitation, etc) voluntarily**



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- ✗ *How can a political system promote virtue amongst its citizens without being unduly paternalistic?*
- ✗ *Does Aristotle's conception of individual injustice seem correct to you?*
  - + *Are there some challenging cases to this notion?*
  - + *Is it possible to suffer exploitative injustice voluntarily?*



Contemporary philosopher of race and gender

**PEG O'CONNOR**

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# LINKED CHAIN PARADIGM

## ✗ Intentions → Actions → Consequences

- + Can be of individuals or groups
- + Need to be able to recognize each of these links in the chain to assign responsibility
- + Assumes agential actions are always intentional and freely chosen

- ✗ *If someone had racist/sexist/heterosexist/ableist attitudes but was on a deserted island with no possibility of seeing other humans again, would he/she be responsible for changing those attitudes? Are those attitudes morally problematic?*



# FORMS OF RESPONSIBILITY

## × Collective

- + moral harm is made possible due to the action or inaction of the group; individuals not necessarily held responsible

## × Shared

- + aggregated responsibility of individuals who contribute to some degree to a moral harm when they have the power to do otherwise; no group necessarily discernible

## × Expanded (O'Connor's view)

- + responsible for attitudes, intentions, emotions, and behaviors that are not fully voluntary, free, or transparent; do not need to be part of clear causal link in actions



# EXPANDED RESPONSIBILITY

- ✗ **Attitudes can have numerous, sometimes opaque effects on interactions and behavior**
  - + Can having meaning “in our communal life rather than in the intentions of individual actors” (295)
  - + “beliefs such as this can begin to function normatively, becoming ones around which others will cluster” (295)
  - + Cannot always be (easily) subjected to scrutiny from self or others
- ✗ *Do you agree that we can be responsible for unintentional inactions? How far does this stretch?*

Group Work

# CASE DISCUSSION

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# HATE CRIMES AGAINST SIKHS SINCE 9/11

- ✗ **300 hate crimes committed against Sikhs from 2001-2012**
- ✗ **Examples:**
  - + 9/15/2001: Sikh shot outside of gas station by man citing his patriotism as his reason
  - + 11/18/2001: Teens burn a Sikh temple (Gobind Sadan) because they thought it was named for Osama bin Laden
  - + 2/6/2012: Sikh temple is defaced with references to 9/11
- ✗ ***Who are the moral actors in these cases? Who should be held responsible?***
  - + ***How should the U.S. promote social justice for the Sikh population, especially following the cultural vitriol and confusion of many Americans following 9/11?***



**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

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