

LUCK

Coordinator(s): Jan Adler, Lynne Schmelter-Davis

The interest in luck as an important factor in our lives has expanded out of the world of gamblers to include scientists, philosophers, and artists. What we call luck has gone by other names in different times and places. In this study group we look at the concept of luck from a historical, philosophical and cross-cultural perspective. We read essays by philosophers and scientists that differentiate among luck, fate, fortune, and randomness. We also read research on luck by psychologists; political scientists' studies on how the concept of luck is used in the debate on income inequality; personal stories on illness and luck; and the relationship of luck and gratitude. We also read short stories and discuss films where luck plays a starring role.

Readings and other Required Materials:

We will be utilizing a course-pack

Jan Adler has coordinated a wide range of study groups at the IRP

Lynne Schmelter-Davis has a psychology background and considers herself a lucky duck in all manner of ways and wonders why ducks and dogs are often considered lucky.

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Week 1: Overview

Contemporary western definition of luck

Differences among chance, fate, fortune, luck and randomness.

Free will and luck

Luck as an agent personified as lady luck.

Week 2: Religion and Cross Cultural

Monotheistic religions vs polytheistic religions

Jewish view of mazel.

African proverbs

Norse concept of luck -hamingja

Week 3: Cross Cultural

Read *The Fatalist* Lermontov

Russian proverbs

Ganesh

Luck of the Irish

Chinese view of luck embodied in the person e.g. Lucky nose

Week 4: Historical

Chance and the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Machiavelli-Selection from *The Prince*

Quotes from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to start discussion of astrology

Week 5: Psychology and Luck

Psychological attributes of "lucky" people

Carl Jung and Synchronicity part of his essay on synchronicity from Volume 8 of the collected works of Carl Jung.

Make Your Own Luck, Rebecca Webber in Psychology Today, May 1, 2010.

The Improbability Principle by David Hand

Week 6: Psychology contd

Child development and luck

Research on Monkeys

Children and probability research

Week 7: Philosophy of luck

Moral Luck by Thomas Nagel

Epistemic Luck

Modes of Luck section from **Luck: The Brilliant Randomness Of Everyday Life** by Nicholas Rescher

Week 8: Morality and luck

Shirley Jackson *The Lottery*

Should political offices be distributed by lottery?

The Lottocracy by Alexander Guerrero

<http://aeon.co/magazine/society/forget-elections-lets-pick-reps-by-lottery/>

Should scarce resources be distributed by lottery?

Week 9: Income Inequality and Luck

Is A Hard Life Inherited, Nicholas Kristoff, NYT 8/10/14

Ronald Dworkin on inequality and luck.

WEEK 10: Gambling

Confidence Games from the book **Something for Nothing** by Jackson Lears

WEEK 11: Luck and medicine

'Bad luck' of random mutations plays predominant role in cancer, study shows

http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/01/150101142318.htm?utm_source=feedburner

Luck and gratitude

I Nearly Died So What, Meghan Daum, NYT, 11/14/14

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/opinion/sunday/i-nearly-died-so-what.html?emc=eta1>

WEEK 12: Movies with luck in starring role

No Country for Old Men