

CHAPTER EIGHT

Fortune's Fallacy

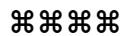
Many people believe the happy life is the **fortunate** life. **Fortune**, they claim, is a distinct help in human affairs. They say it brings success to our lives - the expected variety, and the unexpected variety also. They say that although **fortune** shocks us with unexpected behavior and irrationality, it controls the power of wealth, riches, prosperity, and renown. Have you ever been blessed by good **fortune**? Is **fortune** truly a legitimate entity with the ability to bestow benefits upon whomever it chooses? Who is the ultimate bestower of blessings? This is what we need to know.

The controversy which surrounds **luck** is blatantly portrayed in the concept of **fortune**. What has been taught about the concept of **fortune** helps to fortify teachings about **luck**. Consequently, our modern day ideas about **luck** rest comfortably upon the foundation that **fortune** has provided. **Fortune** is **luck's** older sister. Actually, **luck** gains its

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presumed legitimacy from what has been taught and believed for centuries about the idea of **fortune**.

The concept of **fortune** is no less illegitimate than the other concepts we have studied. Its origin is goddess worship. The idolatrous religions that produced empty beliefs regarding **fate** and **destiny** also produced the worthless concept of **fortune**. **Fortune** is usually viewed to be the favorable decision of some unknown force to bestow good. Its fundamental meaning, however, projects the unsound conclusions of an idolatrous mind-set. But, ancient beliefs about the concept of **fortune** continue to influence our present day logic and beliefs. Because of this injurious influence, we need to unravel **fortune's** twisted meaning.



In order to understand our Modern English word **fortune**, we must first understand a few essential aspects of Fortuna, the Roman goddess. Beliefs and rituals that were centered around this goddess ultimately produced today's meaning of **fortune**. We dealt with the goddess Fortuna in an earlier chapter. She was worshipped extensively throughout the Roman Empire. Plinty the Elder of first century Rome gives the following description of how widespread Fortuna worship became:

Everywhere in the whole world at every hour
by all men's voices fortune [Fortuna] alone is
invoked and named, alone accused, alone

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impeached, alone pondered, alone applauded,
alone rebuked and visited with reproaches;
deemed volatile and indeed by most men blind
as well, wayward, inconstant, uncertain, fickle
in her favors and favoring the unworthy. To
her is debited all that is spent and credited, all
that is received, she alone fills both pages in
the whole of mortals' account;¹

The intricate details of Fortuna worship are not essential to our study. What we do know about her accents the good benefits she could supposedly deliver, or bestow, upon those who worshipped at her feet.

According to the authorities, therefore, the worship of Fortuna was not a surrender to chance or randomness in which individual effort was abandoned; it was much more an attempt to propitiate the goddess so that she would smile on an undertaking. Fortuna may be capricious but her behavior is not random.²

So then, she was worshipped primarily for benefits, but her gifts were rewarded according to her whims and discretion. The aspect of uncertainty may have been associated with her character, but it was not a focal point. The focal point of her appeal centered upon what the Romans believed was her power to deliver a benefit. There were many gods and goddesses that were believed to "dole out" doom, but not Fortuna. She was not feared; rather she was sought for her blessings. To seek the acclaimed favor of this goddess was believed to be a legitimate means of achieving success.

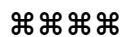
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The *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* gives the following description of Fortuna:

A golden statuette of Fortuna had always to remain in the sleeping quarters of Roman Emperors. Citizens who were distinguished by outstanding good or bad luck had a Fortuna. When overtaken at sea by a storm, Caesar said to the terrified pilot: "What do you fear? You carry Caesar and his Fortuna."

The countless representations of Fortuna show her chief attributes to be the wheel, the sphere, a ship's rudder and prow, and a cornucopia. ³

Fortuna's influence continues to live among us today. The wheel-of-fortune can be traced directly to her imagery. Her ship's rudder is suggestive of her supposed ability to direct the affairs of men. The cornucopia represents her bold claim to be a goddess of bountiful supply. The common modern-day terminology that describes the concept of **luck**, in the feminine gender, emanates directly from Fortuna. **Luck** became "Lady Luck" because of its close association with this Roman goddess.



There is no problem tracing our word **fortune** straight back to the goddess, Fortuna. The *Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* shows the development of Fortuna's name.

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... Latin *fortûna*, from a lost noun **fortus* (genitive **fortûs*), from *fors* (genitive *fortis*) chance, luck, possibly (as being what is brought) related to *ferre* carry, ⁴

The Latin word, *fors*, emphasizes what is brought forth or delivered, and Fortuna was the goddess who brought it forth. The basic meaning here is not the modern concept of **chance**.

Chance today implies without a cause. The fundamental meaning in **fortune's** etymology is the deliberate bringing forth of success, and this success was originally attributed to the widely acclaimed power named Fortuna. The renowned qualities and attributes of this goddess form the basis upon which our word, **fortune**, is construed. Our modern concept of **fortune** actually keeps the sordid theological beliefs that surrounded Fortuna alive and active.

As we are about to see, our current dictionary's explanation of **fortune** describes this very process - the process by which a supposed supernatural force grants something to an individual. The following definition of **fortune** also continues the same theological theme we saw earlier in the words, **fate**, **destiny**, and **lot**. All these words, as we already know, are subjects of theology. Our word **fortune** plainly developed from a pagan religious setting. *Webster's New World Dictionary's* definition is:

Fortune [ME.; OFr.; L. *fortuna*, chance, hap, fate, fortune...]

1. the supposed power considered to bring good or bad to people; luck; chance; fate; often personified. ⁵

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Notice that *Webster's* definition makes a reference to a "supposed power." However, this definition does not say who this supposed power is; nor does it go out of the way to name the "supposers." In reference to these "supposers," *Webster's* says they "considered" this unnamed power to bring good or bad to people. What *Webster's* should have actually said, is that they literally "believe in" **fortune's** power to bring good. In fact, *Webster's* unnamed "supposers" do believe in a certain, supernatural power called **fortune**, but in Roman history, this power was called Fortuna!

Webster's failure to name this power, and those who believed in it, is a lost opportunity. The editors of *Webster's New World Dictionary*, assuredly, knew both the name of the supposed power, and the identity of those who professed a belief in it. In their word derivative of **fortune**, they show the following:

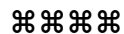
ME.; OFr.; L. *fortuna*

Only two word entries away, the name Fortuna is defined. There, the definition of Fortuna is simply: "in *Roman Mythology*, the goddess of fortune."⁶ Beyond question, the editors of this dictionary knew this "supposed power" to be the goddess Fortuna. It is also clear they knew it was Roman Mythology that helped to produce this goddess. Their cautious effort has failed to properly define a fictitious pagan concept in straightforward, legitimate language. They could have been much more forthcoming in their attempt to define its meaning. They could have defined **fortune** to be: the modern term that reflects the misguided and superstitious belief of ancient Romans, who worshipped a false goddess named Fortuna - Romans who mistakenly attributed to Fortuna the power to bring good benefits. That is what the

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editors of *Webster's New World Dictionary* should have done; but they chose rather, to give this word legitimacy by timidly concealing idolatrous belief.

Webster's definition of **fortune** conceals the idolatrous belief of Roman antiquity, but it accurately reflects current belief. Still today, there are many that seek to make a legitimate claim about a god-like power we now call **fortune**. The utilization of **fortune**, as it is defined currently, continues to elevate and legitimize the identical power that was traditionally associated with the goddess Fortuna. In history, Fortuna claimed to bestow prosperity; today, **fortune** is said to bestow it.



Another aspect of Fortuna worship that has remained a substantial element in our word **fortune** has to do with future expectations. *Webster's New World Dictionary's* second usage of **fortune** is:

2. What happens or is going to happen to one; one's lot, good or bad; especially one's future lot. ⁷

Those who worshipped Fortuna came to her with their hopes and expectations and laid them before her feet, so to speak. They were expecting this goddess to grant their request at some point in the future. They were looking desperately to a future fulfillment of their desires and requests. This "future expectation" concept has survived and remains a current part of *Webster's* modern definition for **fortune**.

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What developed around Fortuna worship became a belief system that was built upon her alluring promises. After fulfilling their required sacrificial duties, Fortuna's disciples became hopeful. They believed the power of this goddess would bring their requests to pass at a future time. They looked expectantly to her ability. Fortuna's credibility, however, only lived in the confused and twisted minds of those who bowed to her worthless image. Those who worshipped this worthless goddess were participating in an empty, meaningless insanity that led to their personal despair. Fortuna promised, but she never produced, leaving behind disappointed, despondent disciples.

Clearly, groundless pagan religious believing that hopes in a "future expectation," remains a substantial part of the modern conception of **fortune**. Frequently, people attribute what is going to happen in their future to the blessing of **fortune's** power. They embrace the validity of **fortune's** power and they hope in the future rewards that power will bring. They actually believe the power of **fortune** can be a determining factor in what lies ahead. Statements like the following, express their future expectations:

"With good **fortune** I can win the lottery."

"I hope I am **fortunate** enough to get that promotion."

We often hear people speak of themselves as having received a blessing by the hand of **fortune**. Obviously, when individuals confess, "It has been my good **fortune**," they name themselves the benefactor of **fortune's** power. Conversely, we hear individuals referring to themselves as