

CHAPTER FIVE

“Fickled” Fate

Mythical references to the supposed powers of pagan gods and goddesses form the foundation upon which the idea of **fate** has rested through the centuries of history. **Fate** is the first of the five “luck theology” concepts we are going to examine closely. **Destiny**, **lot**, **fortune**, and **chance** will follow in succeeding chapters. Along the way, through these chapters, we will take the time to look at other words that are related to this study. You may need a clothespin for your nose and hip boots for your feet and legs as we wade into the slimy thinking that has produced the concept of **fate** and the other terms we are going to study. Bring both of them along just in case.

Few people challenge the meaning of **fate**. Common acceptance of the idea has legitimized the word. It is long overdue that we take a serious look at the ramifications of what **fate** is all about. What do you personally understand about **fate**, and how does this concept fit into your life? Do

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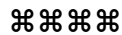
you believe your life has been influenced in some way by a force of **fate**? Maybe you have been conditioned to think **fate** is a perfectly normal word to use, but it is not. It is interesting to note, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, the Old English synonym for **fate** is “weird,” and this is exactly where the concept of **fate** belongs. It absolutely belongs in the category of the weird. It is suggestive of something mysterious, eerie, and odd. The fundamental idea of **fate** is that of a mysterious, supernatural power acting upon our lives.

Fate is often referred to as a “power of determination.” This supposed power of **fate** exists somewhere in the heavens, but hovers beyond our sight. It is said to possess the uncanny ability to act upon us by overstepping our ability to determine our personal future. This (supposedly) “great power of determination” cancels out our individual freedom of will, and we have no choice. We must submit to it. According to its popular concept, **fate's** power literally takes away our freedom to act. **Fate** stands in opposition to freedom. All of these weird ideas are precepts associated with **fate**.

Sadly, far too many have bought into the phony, groundless logic of **fate**. You and I constantly hear misguided references to what has been caused by this counterfeit power. Phrases like, “as **fate** would have it,” or “a twist of **fate**,” are commonplace. Often people are driven by the belief that **fate** has called them to success and even greatness. Others consider themselves to be paralyzed by what **fate** has adversely decreed. The doctrine of fatalism is predicated upon the premise that individual freedom must give way to a fixed and inevitable **destiny**. We constantly hear the fatalistic excuses of individuals that embrace such logic. They are too

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quick to abandon their personal responsibilities, and lay the blame for failure at **fate’s** door.



We are going to look at three separate dictionary definitions for **fate**. By taking the time to wade through all three of these definitions, we can grasp the fuller meaning behind **fate’s** concept.

Webster’s New World Dictionary:

Fate

- (1) The power supposed to determine the outcome of events before they occur;
- (2) Something inevitable supposedly determined by this power; hence
- (3) What happens or has happened to a person; lot; fortune: as, it was his *fate* to be a bachelor.

SYN.- fate refers to the inevitability of a course of events as supposedly predetermined by a god or other agency beyond human control. ¹

The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology:

Fate

From L. *fātum*, things spoken (by the gods) one’s destiny, from neuter past participle: plu. of *fāri* speak; the source of power supposed to control what happens. ²

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The Oxford English Dictionary:

Fate

The primary sense of the Latin word is a sentence or doom of the gods; but it was subsequently used as the equivalent of the Gr. *Moirai*, which, originally meaning only a person's 'lot' or 'portion', had come to express the more abstract conception explained below:

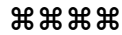
(1) The principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are unalterably predetermined from eternity.

(2) *Mythol.* a. The goddess of fate or destiny; in Homer *Moirai*. b. *pl.* In later Greek and Roman mythology, the three goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life (Gr. *Moirai* L. *Parcae*, *Fata*).³

The key elements in the idea of **fate** are easy to summarize: that which is predetermined, declared and actuated by a god or gods upon life. A god, who is always the central acting force, is believed by some to have the power to predetermine a future outcome. Next, that god speaks forth or declares his will. Lastly, people and events are locked-in and controlled by the god's power and what has been proclaimed will thusly come to pass. There is nothing more to it; that's all there is!

The key elements listed by our dictionaries only reflect what mythology first described about **fate** long ago. Nothing essential to **fate's** original inception is missing. The concept has successfully traveled through centuries of time to our day unscathed, untarnished and unchanged. The meaning of **fate**, however, will not escape the confines of this chapter unchallenged!

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The *Oxford English Dictionary's* reference to the goddess of **fate** and **destiny** needs a fuller discussion. The original, pinpoint commencement of fatalistic belief was conceived by the corrupted minds of men who rejected God and His Word. Some of these God-rejecting men claimed their idolatrous gods, had the power to control the universe and also their lives individually.

Authors of mythology have written prolifically about the imagined powers of the same false gods. They successfully incorporated the stupidity of pagan theological beliefs into their mythical narratives. In effect, they have relayed to us the absurd, pagan logic and belief, which personally influenced their thinking. We have limited documentation to clarify the actual ritual and practices involved in the worship of ancient gods. Today however, much of what is believed about ancient gods comes directly from mythological authorship. This is essentially true of **fate**.

Among the assumed powers of mythological gods and goddesses, the power of **fate** ruled supreme. Practically all pagan gods are described as having this paralyzing power to control humans, but usually in varying degrees. The god, Zeus, is said to have had the greatest power. He could decree the **fate** of both men and even lesser gods. However, according to mythical reasoning, above all the gods, and even Zeus, stood “**The Fates.**”

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It is by the collective literatures of Hosiad, Homer, and other ancient authors, that **fate's** meaning has been established. Mythology's authorship actually believed in **fate's** reality, and they defined its function. Their penmanship defined how **fate** worked and what it did. Their mythological writings described what they believed concerning their huge family of gods and goddesses. They described how these deities possessed **fate's** power and how they used it. Whether from "**The Fates**" or by the decree of a god, **fate** is described as being cast upon men and women to control and limit their lives.

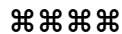
The *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* describes **The Fates** as follows:

They were three in number, daughters of Night, and they were called: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. Clotho, the spinner, personified the thread of life. Only in Hesiod's *Theogony* are they treated as goddesses. Lachesis was chance, the element of luck that a man had the right to expect. Atropos was inescapable fate, against which there was no appeal. The whole of man's life was shadowed by the Fates. They arrived at his birth with Ilithyia. When he was married the three Fates had to be invoked so that the union should be happy. And when the end approached the Fates hastened to cut the thread of his life.⁴

Hesiod's *Theogony* calls these sisters goddesses. To Homer they are portrayed as bestowing a gripping **destiny**.

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These poorly defined, mystical sisters are described as having the power to control the **fate** of every earthly and heavenly creature, and their power was assumed to be absolute. Mythical references to **The Fates** describe how they possessed great omniscience. Their all-knowing eyes could scan the future of mortals. Whatever they proclaimed about the future was going to come to pass. That is how they were perceived.



Through the ages, many have presumed the existence of **fate**. What mythology established about the idea of **fate**, early philosophers tried to clarify and enlarge.

Plato gathered myths and beliefs concerning Fate, and reshaped them in a certain order which was to be adhered to closely by subsequent thinkers. In his works, therefore, we can establish the stage and the implications which had been reached concerning Fate and its relation to Fortune. ⁵

Aristotle analyzes the realm of Fortune in terms often repeated in the Middle Ages, and which explains the many later usages of Fortune, Fate, and Chance. ⁶

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Early philosophers bolstered the credibility of **fate** and **fortune's** meaning. Many early thinkers verified mythological concepts by attempting to personally define them. In their vain attempts to define something they believed to exist, (but which in reality does not exist), they helped "luck theology" survive. They also helped to substantiate and certify the vocabulary by which "luck theology" continues to thrive and to live in the minds of men today.

Philosophers and theologians continued, all along in history, to redefine **fate's** meaning. They called it by several new names, including some of the following. **Fate** has been called: indeterminism and the law of nature – natural necessity – causal necessity – providence and – the order and connection of all causes inherent in the universe. They have said **fate** operates independent of reason and nature. They have said it operates through personal instinct. They have claimed **fate** is a cause unknown to human understanding. Others have said **fate** equals the sum total of principle causes.⁷

Through the ages, men such as Democritus, Aristotle, Apuleius, Chalcidius, Augustine, Saint Thomas of Aquinas, Boethius, Machiavelli, and a host of others, have tried to explain **fate's** true meaning. They have hammered and tried to reshape it. They have symbolized and personified it. They have taught of its morality and its lack thereof. They have taught how to escape it and also how providential care includes it. But none of these men established and confirmed **fate's** reality; they only talked about it! Augustine entered this senseless discussion of **fate** by trying to explain why terms like **fate**, **fortune** and **chance** exist. His view that the order of the universe might well be called **Fate**, and thusly Providence, was a step in the wrong direction. But, he stood