

INTRODUCTION

Natural Philosophies of Fortune—Luck, Vitality, and Uncontrolled Relatedness

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Abstract: Despite the resurgence of interdisciplinary interest in concepts of fortune, luck, and chance, anthropology has failed to engage with the social imagination of these concepts and their incorporation into quotidian moralities and decisions. This essay, which introduces the first of two special issues on this topic, will first present different conceptions and uses of notions of luck and chance and their relation with moral ontologies and notions of skeptical efficacy. By focusing on the interface between cosmology, economics, and human relatedness—that is, cosmoeconomics—this introduction shall then highlight how idioms of luck and fortune foreground a social topology that explicates how innate conceptions of vitality and ‘mystical’ influence, deemed to be of uncertain and uncontrolled nature, are nonetheless able to connect humans and non-humans, organisms and material entities.

Keywords: chance, contingency, cosmoeconomics, fortune, luck, nature, uncontrolled relatedness, vitality

I am Zarathustra the godless! I cook every chance in my pot. And only when it hath been quite cooked do I welcome it as my food.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

In Philip K. Dick’s science fiction novel *The Game-Players of Titan* (2009), Earth is an infertile planet, and groups of humans called the Bindmen play a board game, Bluff, in which the players gamble with real estate, their wives, and their own positions in society. Above all rise the ‘vug’, aliens obsessed with gambling who imposed the game on humans in order to encourage exogenous wife-swapping. What is called ‘luck’ in the game is nothing other than reproductive



vitality: the maximization of the chances of obtaining fertile human couples. Alas, luck is a dangerous quality: an overabundance of vitality leads to the death of the players, since the vug are afraid of excessively lucky beings. The crucial argument of the novel is strikingly anthropological and reflects the questions central to this project: How do societies negotiate the uncertainties of daily life? How do people obtain and manage luck and fortune in their attempts to reproduce their sources of life? What are the dangers and the moral predicaments of an excess of fortune?

The starting point of this special issue and its companion issue was a conference entitled “Economies of Fortune and Luck: Perspectives from Inner Asia and Beyond,” convened on 5–8 June 2008 at King’s College Cambridge. The conference attempted to assess the shifting ontologies of the notions of ‘fortune’ and ‘luck’ in Asian societies and highlighted the role of related ‘concept-events’ in the moral constitution of personhood, the symbolic reproduction of the household, and the (re)creation of subjectivities in correspondence with felicitous events or critical achievements. While showing concerns for non-Western notions of accidents (e.g., Goldman 1993; cf. da Col and Humphrey 2012, forthcoming), misfortune (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1968; Fortes 1959; Herzfeld 1981; Whyte 1997), uncertainty and risks (Caplan 2000; Douglas 1994; Douglas and Wildavsky 1983), or (in)auspiciousness (Parry 1991; Raheja 1988), anthropologists have rarely addressed the role played by terms such as ‘luck’ and ‘fortune’ in constituting distinctive and alternative ‘economies’ (cf. da Col 2012). Whereas previous scholarship of Asian economic ethics had privileged the role of karma and the corresponding economy of spiritual merit (Keyes and Daniel 1983), the conference aimed to highlight the everyday life of practices and beliefs that store and maintain an immanent yet haphazard field of energies that in turn are thought to sustain efficacious actions, economic activities, and political success. This multifarious and opaque field—both semantic and phenomenological—which I have elsewhere addressed as a ‘field of fortune’ (da Col 2007, 2012), is manifested in qualities and potentials that are subject to being displayed, embodied, contained, transacted, stolen, wasted, and parasitized upon, such as the Tibetan *yang*, the Mongolian *hishig* (Empson, this issue), the Siberian *zol* (Hamayon, this issue), the Panamese *la fuerza* (Gudeman, this issue), or the Indian *bhāgya* (Guenzi 2012, forthcoming). The cosmological imagination underpinning these forms of exchange remained hardly explored in anthropological literature.

While the conference mostly focused on Asia, the resulting issues offer a wider geographical coverage in an attempt to muse on the equivocation that the semantic field of fortune and luck entails in different societies. This first issue deals with the multifarious meanings ascribed to the set of cosmological forces expressing the element of vitality in different societies and considers those events that are deemed to escape the regularity of recognized forms of causality and the direct control of human intentionality. In Western cosmology, such forces and events fall within a semantic province contoured by terms such as ‘luck’, ‘godspeed’, ‘fortune’, ‘auspiciousness’, ‘chance’, ‘providence’,

‘grace’, ‘fate’, ‘destiny’, and so forth. Thus, what follows is an anthropological inquiry into conceptual disjunctures, an exercise in ethnographic theory that approaches fortune and luck as ‘concept-events’ (da Col and Graeber 2011), generating novel forms of subjectivities, inversions of familiar terms (Strathern 1990b), and the reworking of distinctions, contradictions, and partitions between our own great cosmological divides: the religious and the economic, the moral and the material, the agentive and the random, the necessary and the contingent, the temporal immanent and the transcendent future. To embark on a systematic historical and philosophical review of the concepts of fortune, luck, chance, and contingency is beyond the scope of this issue. Hence, the following contributions are primarily concerned with the ways in which anthropological literature can engage in this exercise through the voices of the human collectives, the anthropologies and ‘natural philosophies’ (Evans-Pritchard 1937) produced by them.¹

The Omnipotence of Luck and Chance

As with the gift or hospitality (Candea and da Col 2012), luck and fortune appear to be tropes liable to affect all spheres of human sociality. In moral reflections, luck and fortune problematize notions of agency and responsibility; in political cosmologies, they intervene in the (dis)connections between will, action, and efficacy and confine the magnitude of human authority; in economic exchange, they single out the tensions between personal skills, choice, and notions of value, as in gift giving, where fortune and luck embed spiritual properties within material entities. Through their relationship with temporality, luck and fortune unfold the nature of events encountered during the course of social activities. Yet this ‘omni-potency’ of luck and fortune calls for a definition of the corresponding analytical boundaries: the plethora and multiplicity of fortunes need to be accounted for as well as ‘counted’.

Despite their frequent and varied appearance in the ethnographic literature, fortune and luck have not been objects of much theoretical foregrounding. The last two decades have witnessed an explosion of interdisciplinary enthusiasm for the study of ideas of luck (Oates 1995; Rescher 2001), risk (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990; Luhmann 2005), and of ideas of chance and futurity in philosophy, the social sciences and cultural studies (cf. David 1962; Hacking 1984, 1990). We have witnessed an increasing number of popular essays and novels on the role of randomness and luck in our lives, many of them now bestsellers, such as *The Dice Man* (Rhinehart 1998), *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell 2000), *The Luck Factor* (Wiseman 2003), *Fooled by Randomness* (Taleb 2005), and *The Black Swan* (Taleb 2010). Amid this chorus, anthropology has remained fairly muted in spite of the fact that this recent resurgence of interdisciplinary work often draws on debates that have been staples of anthropological inquiry: morality, fate, causation, uncertainty, events, and play (Bateson 1955; Köpping 1997; see also Caillouis [1958] 2001; Geertz 1972; Huizinga 2003). The recent anthropological exceptions to this general

disciplinary neglect have mostly been concerned with Greece (Herzfeld 1981; Malaby 2003; Papataxiarchēs 1999) or China (Oxfeld 1993), with some rare examples from elsewhere (e.g., Zimmer 1987). However, during the period when this project was first conceived and its articles were being readied for publication, there has been a prodigious flourishing of ethnographies of gambling, reaffirming how the social meanings attributed to games, chance, risk, and luck are connected with notions of morality, sovereignty, justice, and the emergence of neo-liberal subjectivities (Bosco, Liu, and West 2009; Cattelino 2008; Sallaz 2009). Some of this work (Cassidy 2010; Chu 2010; Festa 2007; Mimica 2006) has articulated how games of luck are not merely a matter of skill, nor are they motivated simply by the desire for wealth; instead, such games are exercises in style in which worldviews are cultivated, performed, and generated during the act of gambling. In these ethnographies, the gesture and the act of gambling spring up as the deployment of a vital and gendered potentiality deemed as being crucial to human existence and the reproduction or the espousal of a new temporal stance (cf. da Col and Humphrey 2012, forthcoming), a process that recursively regenerates the self. And yet, while misfortunate or inauspicious events have been a familiar topic of ethnographic inquiry since Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* ([1937] 1968), specific notions and ontologies of fortune and luck have rarely been scrutinized.

Among the handful of anthropologists who have pursued this intellectual project, some have contributed to and/or advised on these special issues. Roberte Hamayon (1990, 1996, 2001, this issue) has noted that among pre-Soviet Siberian hunters, luck is subject to a mode of obtainment as opposed to a mode of production. An intriguing double bind of this symbolic economy is that good luck arises from games played by Siberian hunters with the animal-bestowing spirits. Inge Daniels (2003, this issue) has observed how in Japan material 'good luck' (*engi*) is not an innate property of things but is produced through an appropriate circulation of spiritual gifts. Rebecca Empson (2011, this issue) has highlighted the relational component of fortune and prosperity (*hishig*) in Mongolia and its topology of separation and containment, which guarantee the continuity and social imagination of Mongolian ideas of property and personhood. Martin Holbraad (2007, 2010) has explored the alterity-making and conceptually displacing potential of the *aché*, the powder-cum-power involved in Cuban divination, and he later expounded on the cosmological reconfiguration at stake in gambling. Charles Stafford (2007) observed the increasing secularization of fate calculations (*suan ming*) in contemporary China, highlighting cases where such practices—unlike other forms of divination—do not fall into the domain of superstition (*mixin*) but are regarded as computations and research in native forms of natural science. Elsewhere, I have reflected on the moral configurations and creative subjectivities emerging from fortunate events, out of a decision made to ascribe agency to one of the many 'fortune-like' terms and forces at one's disposal. Indeed, the most resilient analytical issue is how to name 'fortune' (da Col 2007, this issue).

Wonders and Paradoxes of Luck and Chance

The metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding.

— Jorge Luis Borges, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*

Any such inquiry calls for a return to the quandary of the inadequacy between the order of the represented and its life-world referents. What follows is a thought experiment, a conceptual unfolding, an exercise in ‘ethnographic theory’ (da Col and Graeber 2011). It retraces an intellectual lineage that includes scholars such as Hocart (1914), Mauss (1972), Fortes (1959), Pitt-Rivers (1974, [1992] 2012), Prytz-Johansen (1954), Keesing (1984, 1985), and Westermarck (1911), along with their interests in the displacing and equivocal nature of the Maori *mana*, *hau*, or *mauri*, the Tallensi *yin*, the Christian *charis* (grace), the Islamic *baraka*, and all those *mana* concepts that Lévi-Strauss ([1950] 1987: 63–64) famously defined as encompassing the antinomies between “force and action; quality and state; substantive, adjective and verb all at once; abstract and concrete; omnipresent and localised.” On their own merit, luck and fortune are the ideal subjects for such an inquiry because of the equivocations arising from the attempts to subsume their alterity *cum* contingent nature into a linguistic translation or conceptual homonymy. That said, what is gained by considering ontological categories as ‘floating signifiers’, or as entities that have ‘zero symbolic value’ and are capable of assuming any meaning whatsoever? Instead of reducing heteronyms to ‘synonyms’ (e.g., the Mongolian *himor* = luck) or subsuming them under umbrella notions, such as likening fortune to an affect, an energy or electricity, which would simply generate further *mana* concepts (Viveiros de Castro 2012), this issue aims to be an exercise in ethnographic theory and irreduction (da Col and Graeber 2011; Latour 1988). Pascal Boyer (1986, 1990) certainly has a point when he suggests that not all *mana* concepts should be taken literally and that their understanding should be located within their discursive specificity. Still, how can we account for different cosmologies of fortune when our own terms that are synonymous with luck remain undefined?

With concepts that range from the Greek Tyche and the Roman Fortuna to the Christian Providence and Machiavelli’s ‘opportunism’ and developments that include the doctrine of absolute chance, named ‘tychism’ by Peirce (1892), the emergence of interest in probability, statistics, risks, and randomness in the seventeenth century, and the elaboration of the theory of parapraxes (Freudian slips) in psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century, fortune, luck, and chance in Western cosmology have affected notions of causality and morality in all possible metaphysical and moral worlds. But the stability of language is challenged by the protean nature of the terms for fortune, luck, and fate, which seem to flow, collapse, or be subsumed into each other or come into view either as encompassing images or more often as figure-ground reversals (Wagner 1987) in which one actualized yet singular concept foregrounds a plurality of forces, only to recede later into the background. On the one hand,

terms like ‘luck’ and ‘fortune’ may be used without any cosmological allusion. For the Azande, tripping on a root might not always be a question of misfortune but rather the consequence of distraction. While Boyer (1986) argues that people do discriminate between the meaningful and meaningless use of ‘empty concepts’, the ethnographies presented in this issue show how terms used to name luck are not meaningless but simply transient tropes of passage for transforming an ‘inconsistent’ to a ‘consistent multiplicity’ of forces and meanings in coincidence of precise events.²

Alterities may remain concealed in everyday life until those disruptive moments that reveal their wondrous aspect. As Latour once suggested, among forces “[t]here is no preestablished harmony ... harmony is *postestablished* locally through tinkering” (1988: 164; emphasis in original). Thus, the irreducible and mercurial nature of fortune and luck is less an epistemological conundrum to be solved than an ontological property to be upheld. The opacity of fortune and luck is not a riddle to be deciphered but an essential element of many of the cosmologies presented in this issue, their Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy (cf. also Wagner, this issue). As Strathern (2004: 53) puts it: “A world obsessed with ones and the multiplications and divisions of ones creates problems for the conceptualization of relationships.” Several of the articles in this issue (Empson, da Col, Hamayon) show that any attempt to produce a precise taxonomy of fortune and luck is aporetic and is similar to the situation of twentieth-century quantum physics mentioned by Roy Wagner (1977b): one ends up either with a universe of absolute necessity, in which everything can be predicted and where there is no place for either chance or luck, or with a universe of absolute contingency. Luck is the instantiation of one among the better possible worlds: a lucky event must come within the boundaries of cosmological imagination and hence cannot be absolutely contingent. Hamayon (this issue) remarks importantly that “an event is attributed to someone’s luck only when an agency or intentionality is thought to be involved.” Luck thus implies both a non-empirical type of causality attributed to external sources (stars, gods, charms, spirits, etc.) and a subjective expectation.³

Both Wagner and Graeber (this issue) argue that notions of fortune and luck are manifestations of the quandaries of the inherent limits of human knowledge. According to Graeber, these notions rest on a temporal form of dyslexia, an anxiety about what we have done in the past and how that realization will affect what we will do in the future, a topic to which we shall return in detail in the companion issue. When confronted with its effects, fortune seems *a posteriori* the result of a series of necessary events or actions. This “paradox of performativity” is illustrated by Graeber in his discussion of the Malagasy concept of *hasina* (this issue). The conundrum involving chance or luck is reflected in the time-honored paradox of the heap and the relation between event and apperception. When does an accumulation of grains of sand become a heap? Obviously, when it does so, it is always too late for the perceiving subject. It was already a heap, a single grain earlier, but the supplementary event can be realized only retroactively since the perceiving subject performatively apperceives the image where the heap suddenly ‘appears’ in what it already was.

Some of the contributors show how ‘chance-like’ and probability concepts have come to seem so commonsensical to people inhabiting worlds dominated by financial and statistical institutions that we tend to forget how peculiar their basis really is. Graeber (this issue) recollects a dialogue that he had with a Malagasy friend while waiting for a bus and realizing that he needed to buy some cigarettes. “What do you think the chance is that a bus will come in the next five minutes? ... [i]s it likely to?” asks Graeber. “What do you mean?” the friend responds. “Is there a very large chance it will come? Or just a small chance?” To which his friend replies, “A chance can be big or small? ... How would I know?” So while the entity ‘chance’ manifested itself as a homonymous signifier between the two—Graeber’s friend indeed ‘recognized’ the word—the referent concealed a heteronymous set of meanings. It is no coincidence that contemporary concepts such as chance, probability, and risk emerged at the end of the seventeenth century and developed in close association with mercantile capitalism, modern forms of gambling, statistical science, and the familiar apparatus of finance—stocks, bonds, and commodity futures (David 1962; Hacking 1984, 1990; Maurer 2005; Reith 1999). Chance and mercantile capitalism are twinborn. Market patterns follow the wheel of fortune, and one can intervene only by means of the tiny corrections suggested by the *techné* of the venture capitalist: variables of probability, Markov chains, and stochastic procedures.

The Roman Goddess Fortuna was first the mother of Jupiter but was later transformed into his daughter, subject to his authority (Billington 1996). The *laki* (Mosko 2012, forthcoming) evoked today in Melanesian gambling negotiates Western notions of possessive individualism in a world inhabited by dividual persons. The Tibetan *yang* (da Col, this issue) or the Mongolian *hishig* (Empson, this issue) may denote abstract wealth but also the collected magnification of vitality and the future luck of the household and its members. Notably, Broz and Willerslev (2012, forthcoming) suggest that hunting luck among the Siberian Yukaghirs and the Altaian Telengits is welcomed insofar as it remains protean and highly unstable, since a successful kill might result in an act of collective sharing, a gift to the local spirit-master, or a theft from its domain, leading to the punishment of the hunter. Stafford (2012, forthcoming) observes that the Chinese *ming* (fate) encompasses a tripartite problem: a cosmological dilemma, based on incomplete knowledge of the mechanics of the universe; a spirit-oriented dilemma, accounting for the events determined by our relations with spirits, gods, and ancestors; and a social dilemma, reflecting on what can be done about it.

However, are there societies without fortune? We are used to associating fortune with the unexpected, the serendipitous, the positive surprise. Notably, Astuti (1991) presents the case of the Vezo of Madagascar, who live a present-oriented life and are constantly ‘surprised’ by events in the ways ‘we’ would mark as happenstances. For the Vezo, Astuti (ibid.: 101) states:

This kind of ‘surprise’ is not an emotional reaction to the unknown and the unpredictable; rather, it is a positive strategy, an act of creativity. People’s disposition and willingness to be ‘surprised’ at every unfulfillment of their hopes about production preserves this hope ... So long as one is prepared to be ‘surprised’ when

things go wrong, one can continue to hope that things will never go wrong again and act accordingly. 'Surprise' allows the Vezo to avoid learning to 'manage' money and to continue to enjoy wearing expensive clothes and eating rich food ... Although no-one ever stated this explicitly, 'surprise', as a positive alternative to planning and saving, is what makes the Vezo Vezo.

Gow and Margiotti (this issue) show two cases in Greater Amazonia where Western images of fortune, luck, and fate cannot be applied since no linguistic homonym can be found. The Kuna of Panama conceive of their 'occasional' encounters with the *poni*, the malevolent spirits of the forest, in terms of a lack of engagement with a process of prophylactic construction of fearlessness, strength, and courage achieved via the recognition of specific kin ties. This would include the avoidance of particular affective modes—such as jealousy—considered as deleterious to kin relationships and liable to result in *poni* encounters. The bad hunting luck of the Piro hunters is instead related to a lack of desire on the part of animals, since the latter are thought to present themselves only to good hunters, being affected by a delusional state where they are seeking virile companions, like lustful women attracted by potentially good sexual partners. Fate, for the Piro, is not subject to debate since it equates with death and inexorability.

Howell (this issue) observes that the Chewong of Malaysia have no conceptual room for luck or fortune: in her words they are a 'luckless' society. The Chewong ontology of events is exquisitely ethical and emphasizes how the application of correct knowledge consists in adhering to rules such as avoidances, taboo, and the maintenance of appropriate relationships with non-human beings. Misfortune or other unfavorable events are only due to transgression. A good and prosperous life is warranted by the correct application of daily ritual practice. As in the case of the Kuna, misfortune occurs as the result of breach or omission. It is not surprising that the Greeks held in high regard the antithesis of *tuche* (fortune) and *techné* (craft or science), the ideal being that where *tuche* rules, *techné* may prevail (Nussbaum 2001). However, this notion of causation applies only within the familiar boundaries of the forest where Chewong dwell and not outside of it. Chance and randomness are forces from the outside: the stranger is the domain of absolute contingency, from where one may also attempt to retrieve fortunate charms.

Notably, Gow and Margiotti (this issue) venture to suggest a peculiar environmental explanation for the paucity of concepts of luck in Greater Amazonia. According to the authors, the people of Greater Amazonia enjoy a combination of agriculture and foraging, with crops such as manioc or sweet potatoes that are remarkably reliable, providing a consistent daily return, albeit of low nutritional quality. The high subsistence risk is located "in their sources of protein and fat, which are overwhelmingly wild" and largely beyond the control of human agency. Societies in Greater Amazonia, Gow and Margiotti suggest, seem to have chosen "a basic subsistence strategy that pushes risk outside of the cultivated domestic zone into the wild and, in doing so, have freed themselves from having to worry about fortune, luck, and destiny." This insight leads to our next point—the distributional and economic properties of fortune.

Theologies of Fortune

By highlighting the ambiguities of the terms, rather than focusing on fortune and luck within the context of ideas of auspiciousness, karma (Keyes and Daniel 1983), and/or techniques of divination or revelation (Turner 1975), this issue also returns to the classic Weberian concern with the interface between the economic and the cosmological, specifically in relation to what Weber ([1922–1923] 1991: 271) defined as the problem of “the distribution of fortune” in the world, leading to “the ineradicable need for a theodicy” (see also da Col and Humphrey 2012, forthcoming; Malaby 2003, 2012, forthcoming). Weber posited a distinction between a “theodicy of suffering” (*Theodizee des Leidens*) leading to his inquiry into how religion explains suffering through “compensatory promises,” and a “theodicy of good fortune” (*Theodizee des Glückes*), which would explain why all fortune should be “legitimate fortune.” Where karmic conceptions would be a solution to a theodicy of suffering, theodicies of fortune and luck would be concerned with the predicaments arising from producing, obtaining, or consuming sources of wealth or prosperity. To this Weberian scheme, Guenzi (2012, forthcoming) proposes a notable alternative in the context of astrological divination in India: if auspiciousness is about ‘predicting good’, fortune and luck express the ways in which people evaluate their assigned lot of destiny (*bhāgya*, lit. ‘allotted share’) and develop strategies for its management in order to ensure a well-off life.

This conception of fortune parallels the one proposed by Aristotle in the *Magna Moralia* (1958: chap. 8), whereby fortune (*tuche*) is conceived as a force dependent on agents capable of moral conduct, influencing the events in the world yet controlling and regulating the flows of the ‘external goods’ and the ‘goods of the body’: wealth, power, good children, beauty. While the goods of the soul are the most crucial, happiness would be inconceivable without external goods, reproduction, and health—and that is the realm over which fortune reigns supreme. Thus, several of the contributors to both issues maintain that Weber’s preoccupation with the problem of the distribution of fortune can be conceived as a moral dilemma through which different societies provide distinctive solutions. Several articles (da Col, Empson, Gudeman, Hamayon, this issue; see also Swancutt 2012, forthcoming) highlight how the value underlying ideas of luck and fortune—but also fate and destiny—is materialized, abstracted, and disembedded from the daily flow of human activities and becomes the foundational trope of an economic cosmology. This ‘cosmoeconomics’ is founded on the problem of distribution, obtainment, production, and consumption of the prime constituent of the domain deemed as innate or ‘natural’ in a society, namely, a principle of vitality or a source of amplification of ‘life’.

Hamayon’s article speaks directly to this argument, remarking how among Siberian hunters in pre-Soviet times luck was conceived as a value that could not be produced but only obtained. After a hunting success, luck must always be shared and redistributed since sharing magnifies the value of the lucky portion. This incremental ‘interest’ of luck generated during the act of sharing is confirmed by Gudeman’s sensitive cosmological inquiry into

la fuerza—strength—and its relation to market economies and rational choice principles in Panama and Colombia. According to Gudeman, unlike “market economies that presume unlimited growth, calculated risk, and denial of the laws of thermodynamics,” *la fuerza* is a ritual economy legitimated by a belief in divine power that is evidenced in personal material fortune. Conceived to be like a current, this vital energy is nonetheless limited by its very nature, “for unlike a currency its sources are not replaceable in the material world, and it dissipates through use.”

Several of the articles included in this issue muse on a theological approach that explores the forms and events in which the elements encompassed by notions of fortune, luck, and a prosperous future present themselves ethnographically as forces or beings dissolving the modernist paradigms that postulate contradictions between the religious and the economic, the pragmatic and the spiritual, the moral and the material, the historical and the natural. In the last decade, several scholars have been engaged in exploring social forms of aggregation that include human and non-human beings and things and elaborating on how the different distribution of cosmological properties among them provides the ground for conceptions of alternative notions of subjectivity, self, and non-self (Descola 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2004). Stengers (2005) has given the name of ‘cosmopolitics’ to the modality of relatedness that inaugurates a ‘political pluriverse’, a conviviality where we admit the non-human to assume the role of agents within our political horizons. But the focus of the cosmopolitical approach seems to be on the interactions among the powers attributed to the agents and not on the logic of the energies and flows exchanged among them, that is, their cosmo-economics (cf. also da Col 2012). Sahlins (1996: 408) elegantly shows how Western cosmological economic models relied on the concept of Providence, which stemmed from a Christian transformation of the Aristotelian teleology of nature. “The kinship between natural law ... and Divine Providence,” Sahlins remarks, “is part of the theological continuity initiated by the apparently radical changes spoken about as ‘the humanization’ of the Renaissance and the ‘secularization’ of the Enlightenment—ending in the transfer of the attributes of an omnipotent Deity to a Nature at least as worthy of reverence” (ibid.).

In economics, the idea of a self-regulating providential social order that chooses the best of all possible worlds and makes sense of every possible event inhabits Adam Smith’s invocation of ‘the invisible hand’; in politics, it dwells in the modern theory of the state as a transcendental and ‘providential’ organization. Schmitt’s (1985: 31) suggestion that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” could certainly be applied to the economic theologies of fortune and luck, which—as we have hinted—are predicated on the constitution of a teleological domain of a divine, natural, or abstract life that should be administered. A cosmo-economics of fortune shows how a world enmeshed within tourist markets, grass roots, and state politics and traversed by international currencies is crossed, too, by underlying currents of forces that follow divergent logics and originate from human and non-human agents whose power is given and fabricated by their

different access to it. This pluriverse is encompassed by inter-lapping spheres of exchange, where gods, humans, and even artifacts interchange fortune and vitality yet also are competing in the same arena, using economic strategies that include deception, trickery, and destruction and that transform the flow of forces into currents and tides of non-linear behavior (cf. da Col 2012, this issue; Gudeman, this issue; Swancutt 2012, forthcoming).

Fortune triggers the erasure of the material and mystical divide when it is transmitted with inherited property and marital gifts to increase the household's prosperity. As in the case of the Tibetan *yang* or the Mongolian *hishig*, household wealth and reproductive power are explained by and contingent on the accumulation and containment of fortunate energies and the production of appropriate moral sentiments and aesthetic modes of fortune obtainment, which could secure detachment from ownership and attachment through household alliances. As Gudeman shows (this issue), fluctuations of market currencies and financial growth are explained in Panama with cosmologies of growth and currents of vitality—*la fuerza*.

Recently, Agamben has suggested that while the politico-juridical paradigm derived from early Christian theology gave rise to the modern theory of sovereignty, a second economic paradigm has led to modern conceptions of biopolitics up to “the current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life” (2011: 1). In the second century AD, the early Christian theologians employed the Greek ontological divide between the political and the economic—the *oikos* (house) and the *polis* (city)—to solve the conundrum of the Holy Trinity (seen as a return to polytheism) and to reconcile God's unity. Whereas God's substance was preserved as unitarian and sovereign, his *oikonomia*—the way God manages His divine and earthly house and the life in it—was regarded as encompassing a multiplicity of administrators, including His son Christ and other helpers, without losing His unity or sovereign power. As in the case of the Melanesian Big Man (Strathern 1991) or the Amazonian owner-master (Fausto 2008), rather than having ‘representatives’, God was constituted as a plural singularity, a dynamic image in permanent figure-ground reversal comprising *majestas* and *praxis*—sovereign unity and economic-pragmatic plurality—within itself. But, as often happens in the encounter with concepts developed by continental theorists, such as Derrida's ‘hostipitality’ (Candea and da Col 2012) or the recent fads musing on Freud's ‘uncanny’, anthropology should be wary of relinquishing its own distinctive tradition. A close examination of Agamben's works reveals his Parisian inspirations and a keen interest in French ethnology and ethno-history. What shines through is Benveniste's *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (1969), Mauss's *The Gift* ([1950] 1990), and, peculiarly, Lévi-Strauss's *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* ([1950] 1987), with its discussion of *mana* terms. Was Agamben charmed by *mana* as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were by Bateson's plateaus or the Clastrean Amazonian chief? We cannot tell. But there can be few doubts that at the very core of anthropological inquiry is to be found the study of the ways in which humans qualify and administer life and the unfolding of its flows and events—not only in the elementary forms of religious life, but also in the elementary economies of life.

Economies of Life

In its first instance, luck comes into focus of the anthropological lens through the economic activities of Trobriand islanders. In Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1966), luck and fortune are not conceptually explicated—we never learn the corresponding Trobriandese terms—rather, they are subsumed under the most general logic of magic, an association that both Mauss (1972) and Douglas (2002) will later also recall in *A General Theory of Magic* and *Purity and Danger*, respectively. Luck appears in connection with the supernatural assistance defined by Malinowski (1966: 306) as “economic magic.” “The basic, food-providing economic activities, which in the Trobriands are mainly gardening and fishing, are also completely magic-ridden,” recounts Malinowski. “The success of these pursuits is of course largely due to luck, chance or accident” (ibid.). Garden magic—the most critical beckoning of fortune—is therefore economic magic. In Tikopia, Firth (1940) would later relate how a magnificent catch of fish was attributed to his *mana* or success. Material abundance and reproductive vitality rely on the maintenance of economic-like relationships with non-humans and ancestors that guarantee the certainties of reproductive activities. However, in his seminal monograph on Maori cosmology, Prytz-Johansen (1954: 85) later suggested that *mana* is not to be conceived as a substance but as a state, an active capacity to ‘unfold’ life and express a ‘fellowship’ with people or things (cf. Keesing 1984; Sahlins 2011). Success and fortune are dependent on the capacity to unfold this fellowship, to deploy a purely relational—albeit mercurial—capital.

One has to wait more than a decade after Malinowski's *Argonauts* before conceptions of luck and fortune return prominently in what is viewed as the anthropological masterpiece on ‘events’: Evans-Pritchard's ([1937] 1968) monograph about the Azande. Recalling the Azande's daily life, a universe of falling granaries and walkers tripping on roots, Evans-Pritchard remarks that his readers might be likely to draw an analogy “between the Zande concept of witchcraft and our own concept of luck” (ibid.: 65). Witchcraft (*mangu*) is the obverse of fortune. ‘Good luck’ (*tandu*) appears only once in the text to describe achievement and success, and, as in the case of the Trobrianders, it is brought into being only by ‘good’ magic.⁴ What is overlooked in Evans-Pritchard's text is the notion that witchcraft is substantialized in perverse vitality: *mangu*, the materiality of ‘mystical’ witchcraft, is an organic black mass, prone to be inherited through bilateral descent.⁵ Thus, the Azande subsume anti-luck to an organic substance, blurring the divide between the material and the metaphysical: *mangu* is both action and substance. If Zande witchcraft is about filling the missing logical gaps, why do the Azande subsume it as anti-vital matter? Inasmuch as he brings into view the entangled relations between luck, fortune, and kinship, Evans-Pritchard leaves us with a crucial theoretical legacy for British anthropology: witchcraft is the finest heuristic for inquiring into the constitutive elements of kinship and relatedness. Is not witchcraft the perverse and obverse management of the substance of kinship? Is not witchcraft an indigenous theory of anti-relatedness that deals with the most intimate properties of a person? Where vitality is the

source of one's fortune, orality and perverted commensality are thus key tropes of witchcraft: the witch devours the vital force of neighbors and kin (cf. da Col 2012). Thus, we may begin to ask what fortune and luck could reveal about the flows of kinship and the transaction of their 'substances'.

Uncontrolled Relatedness

Anthropology had to wait more than 10 years before a return to this correlation was made in Fortes's (1949) study of kinship among the Tallensi of West Africa, where harvests of good and bad fortune are attributed to *yin* or prenatal destiny—the Tallensi term that is closest to fate. The Tallensi conceive of *yin* as an ancestor, and good fortune is the mark of successful ritual activity performed to guarantee the lineage's continuation. Similar to other ethnographic contexts, as some contributors to this issue have found (Gow and Margiotti in Amazonia, Howell in Malaysia), for the Tallensi good fortune is predominantly produced through the work of ritual. Ten years later, Fortes came back to the question of destiny and fate in *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (1959), reflecting on how, in different societies, fate has been conceived as having a material form, like a portion allotted to each individual (cf. also Guenzi 2012, forthcoming). Thus, by emphasizing that fate requires ritual labor and by hinting that future temporality is embedded in material forms, Fortes returned involuntarily to Marx's ([1939] 1973: 187) reflection in the *Grundrisse* that ultimately all economy reduces itself to an "economy of time" and its subsumptions.

Soon after, in the 1961 Malinowski lecture, Leach employed Fortes's notion of fate when drawing his seminal distinction between relations of incorporation and alliance. Leach's (1961) argument likens the authority and influence exercised by relatives and affines to magical powers (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2009). Where relations of incorporation such as filiation and descent tend to be symbolically marked as relations of shared substance (of bone, blood, flesh, etc.), relations of alliance and affinity tend instead to be conceived as "mystical influence" (Leach 1961: 19–20). However, in formulating this argument Leach relied heavily on Fortes's notion of fate among the Tallensi. For the Tallensi, fate would be capable of coalescing the two dimensions into one, being both authoritarian and unpredictable/elusive. Fate can therefore be likened to *mana*, vitality, or grace, forces that are usually attributed to kings but that could also be seen as being either divine sources of fertility or quintessential thaumaturgic being (cf. Marc Bloch [1924] 1973; Pitt-Rivers 1974). Whereas lineages (kinship) would be internalized bonds of substance, externalized bonds—life from the outside (Sahlins 2008)—would include fate, grace, and kingship. Here, in the ritualization and circulation of reproductive vitality, lies the cosmoeconomics of fortune.⁶

Although he brilliantly expounds the relationship between kinship and magic, Viveiros de Castro (2009) leaves unexplored a further distinction drawn by Leach that divides affinal mystical influences into 'controlled supernatural

attack', denoting a potential relation of authority over the attacker and exemplified by sorcery, authority, and kingship (the power of the king's *mana*), and 'uncontrolled mystical influence', which is attributed to outsiders, witches, and potentially dangerous affines. For the Tallensi, *yin* would be capable of coalescing the two influences into one being, both authoritarian and unpredictable.⁷

As in kinship, fate's tropes are bonds, threads, and knots. The Greek Moirae spin and weave; the Norse Norns bind (Jackson 2005: 50). Herzfeld (1981: 563–564) noticed how in Rhodes fate (*mira* or *thiki*) is associated with the character of a person, whose inheritance and material prosperity are likened to the source or vein (*fl'ea*) of the village water supply. *Grusuzia* is the negation of fate denoting the *grusuzis*, individuals labeled as immoral and lazy or as those who exercise negative reciprocity. Such a person "binds their luck" by crossing their hands at the back of their neck or around their knees and lacks two critical elements of human sociality: "patriline [*sic*]" and "luck" (*thiki*) (ibid.). Fate and chance are structural opposites, dialectically related, opposing bonds to choice, doom to free-doom. Leach's partition allows us to perceive a crucial connection between kinship and fortune, one based neither on substance nor on mystical influence but on a mercurial yet substantial bond. Earlier, Leach (1967: 177–179) noted the anti-normative aspect of fortune: among the Kachin, *maraw* is a term indicating both luck and debt. *Maraw* is both the agent and the event of luck, both impersonal and personal: the Maraw are beings able to "untie" and "cancel" the gifts of the highest gods or any contracts among humans (ibid.: 178).

More generally, then, we might notice that hierarchy and motility are critical companion notions to terms denoting luck. *Mana*, grace, and luck are bestowed by gods, or gods control primordial access to them. Hence, the possession of luck allows for different forms of cosmological motility, crossing perceptual barriers (seeing invisible creatures or foreseeing events by anticipating time) or legitimizing authority. It is not surprising that Pitt-Rivers (1974) firmly associated the bestowal of grace with the possession of honor. Similarly, the circulation of objects is important, as Daniels (this issue) shows in the case of Japanese charms: circulating lucky objects parallels the circulation of vital reproductive substance and opens up channels for relating with spirits.

As mercurial entities capable of symbolizing kinship relations, fortune and luck ground neither vertical descent nor horizontal alliance, according to Leach's model; instead, they instantiate a transversal form of relatedness that is capable of taking non-Euclidean trajectories. With fortune and luck, we establish a domain of 'uncontrolled relatedness'. Thus, as a source of reproductive vitality and value, fortune is unstable in all transactions: it is prone to leak, to flee, or to be captured, stolen, parasitized upon, or eaten by witches. As several of the contributors to this issue show, it needs to be properly beckoned, intercepted, harnessed, controlled, seized, contained, and deployed through specific indigenous 'technologies'. Notably, fate and fortune may be associated with ideas of soul—as in the case of the Mongolian *sulde*, the Nuosu *yyr lup* (Swancutt 2012, forthcoming), or the Tibetan *la* (da Col, this issue)—whereby one's soul is peculiarly stored outside one's body or lineage in different forms of containers, a concept that Frazer (1894) referred to as the 'externality of souls'. This process

results in strange topologies of fortune in which vitality is protected from supernatural attack or misfortune by externalizing it. However, prophylactic strategy has its hitches and anxieties, since it requires one to guard the extension of oneself and to know where oneself is located (da Col 2012, this issue). Empson (this issue) presents a careful ethnography of the materiality of fortune and the containership of the collection of pieces, such as tail hairs, umbilical cords, and cots, in a particular household. However, she highlights the radical instance of the dissolution of these sets through the example of widespread arson among Mongolian pastoralists. Drawing on the conundrum of containing while sharing fortune (Strathern 2011), Empson suggests that burning down houses is a way to detach people from their sites of accumulation, separating or releasing their fortune, “making it mobile and available to others.” By employing a quasi-Batailllean spin, Empson describes a fortune potlatch, yet with egalitarian and not hierarchical generative properties: “What is realized through such acts of release is not wealth itself but the ability to acquire and the potential to catch fortune. In this sense, arson may be viewed as a deliberate act of redistributing and releasing fortune.”

Conclusion: Analogic Fortune

I am now in a position to deploy all the elements of our argument. Recall again that for the Zande, witchcraft—like fortune and luck—is ubiquitous as it affects all domains of their life: the growth of crops, success in hunting, and the strength of granaries, which should not normally collapse while people are resting underneath them. If witchcraft is an indigenous epistemology that explains unfortunate events, we may conclude that it may be conceived not as an anti-theory of good-relatedness but as the ‘reversal’ of a theory of fortune. As Evans-Pritchard ([1937] 1968: 63) reminds us, witchcraft is not simply an indigenous epistemology to fill the missing gap in a chain of causation; it is an organic phenomenon and the Azande’s ‘natural philosophy’. Let us take Evans-Pritchard’s statement literally and ask, which nature and, hence, which ‘kinship’?

In a seminal article entitled “Analogic Kinship,” Wagner (1977a) brilliantly highlighted how David Schneider’s greatest achievement was to reconceptualize kinship, shifting its status from an encompassing domain to an encompassed occurrence of a dialectic relationship between what a society would conceive as being the domain of the ‘innate’ (what ‘Western’ cosmology would call ‘nature’) and a domain of the artificial or ‘constructed’ (what ‘we’ would call ‘culture’). Taking his teacher’s insights further, Wagner argued that the problem of kinship is precisely that all human relationships are analogous and all beings—humans and non-humans—are connected through potentially limitless ties. Kinship would be a by-product of an original cosmological ‘cut’, a movement of ‘partitioning’ and reduction of the monadic flows of relatedness. More specifically, kinship would be the way a society controls, channels, or ‘cuts’ the substances deemed to be innate. So marriage would ‘join’ two entities—persons, households, clans—and ‘collect’, ‘pour’, or ‘absorb’ their flows of substance within a

new ‘container’. Prohibiting incest would cut and ‘deviate’ the flows, avoiding the mixing of substances thought of as incompatible; gifts and bride wealth would increase the flow of wealth and the reproductive capacity of households. The cutting and interdicting of the flows of relatedness would be particularly enacted in certain transactions, images, or ‘aesthetic events’ that would make visible the relationships encompassed within the objects of transactions and the transacting subjects. Feasting, for example, would not only involve the sharing of food or other substances but would also be a matter of display, an aesthetic conjuncture where images of past and future containments and partitioning of these flows would be made visible at once.

What, besides food, might be the substance—the materiality and flow—shared in relations with potential or actual affines? It is fortune, its material supports and non-linear flows, its uncontrolled relatedness. The contributors to this issue show how notions of luck are predicated on an *a posteriori* endowment of intelligibility of value to an event or an aesthetic ‘technology’ out of which fortunate vitality is seized or becomes an object of reflection and the production of subjectivities. Events are strange entities predicated on a self-recursive definition: an event is an *a posteriori* reduction and partition of a set of presented multiplicities affected by an element of indeterminateness in a particular society. But events are not exclusively temporal disruptions or structurally incorporated contingencies, as in Sahlins’s (1985) ‘structure of the conjuncture’. They are also ‘donations’ of intelligibility to a set of forces that perceiving subjects attempt to ‘count-as-one’ (Badiou 2005), while reassembling their own vitality in the process (da Col 2007; Humphrey 2008). Following the example set by Strathern (1990a), a few of the articles in this special issue (Empson, da Col; see also Swancutt 2012, forthcoming) explore the performative dimension of fortuitous events, wherein events are understood not by their occurrence but “in terms of what they contain, the forms they conceal or reveal” (Strathern 1990a: 28) and as images that contain within themselves both past and future. Luck and fortune entail performances of ‘extraction’ of vitality out of happenstances.

Consequently, this image of fortune necessarily entails a figure-ground reversal (Wagner 1987) between singularity and multiplicity: fortune is a plural singularity, containing other singularities and intentionalities within a ‘body’, conceived as a set or a container of life, *mana*, and grace (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1974, [1992] 2005). Fortune involves a social topology of the life of the image through which the plurality of life and its beings appears as a singularity and a figure of vital externality, through which society contains itself within a body that lies outside while being ‘inside’ it precisely because its alterity and outsidedness can be deployed as a source of regeneration, reproduction, or circulation of life. Unsurprisingly, the generation of fortune, vitality, and prosperity has been incorporated into the figure of sovereignty, imagined (in what can only be called utopian terms) as the quintessential container of life and fortune, which are harnessed and redistributed in a society through different social topologies and technologies of containment (cf. Maurice Bloch 1992; Hocart 1936; Sahlins 1985, 2011; Strathern 1998).⁸

As da Col shows (2012, this issue), the modernist view should be traced not only in the great divide between nature and culture but in dichotomies such as essence versus appearance or mind versus body, all encompassed in the greater dichotomy between interiority and exteriority, between what is considered to be the inside and the outside of something. Thus, Descola's (2005) four ontologies of nature (animism, totemism, analogism, naturalism) are permutations predicated on two paradigmatic planes of commonality or dissimilarity of human and non-human domains: physicality (form and substance, physiological, perceptual, sensory-motor, and proprioceptive processes, or even temperament as an expression of the influence of bodily humors) and interiority (intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, the capacity to dream). Resting upon a view of society as a sphere seen from the outside, Descola's model refrains from considering the relations that lie precisely in the interstices between different 'containers of vitality' or in the human preoccupation to determine where interiority and exteriority lie—that is, where the outsides and insides of a being or society begin. A topological approach to vitality and fortune can challenge the stark dichotomies between the interiority and the exteriority of what constitutes the vitality of a being by highlighting the integument created by the economies of fortune and luck.

In examining the extractive economies of events and transactions or the circulation of lucky objects out of which everyday vitality is obtained, we should also reflect on the subjectivities that they produce. Daniels (this issue) shows how in Japan people accumulate luck by circulating auspicious items, thus cultivating positive relations with deities and other people. She describes these activities, which are carried out above all by women on behalf of their families, as a "relentless 'labor of luck.'" In Japan, luck is "a mode of action": it must be 'opened out' and kept moving. As is the case in Mongolia (Empson, this issue), where it is women who are primarily responsible for the accumulation and retention of *hishig* fortune, Japanese women are in charge of the domestic circulation of material luck signs for the care of ancestors and gift exchange. Daniels ends her article by proposing luck as an analytical concept. Inasmuch as luck requires repetitive actions and ritualistic components, these do not necessarily require belief but are done as forms of self-cultivation. This shows that the spiritual world is not incompatible with a conception of modernity but, on the contrary, is integral to its production.

The contributors to this issue present the flow of fortune and luck as originating from human and non-human agents that create interlaced spheres of exchange where transactions of forces such as fortune, luck, and vitality are thought to materially inhabit economic exchange and modern conceptions of value (Graeber 2001). Inasmuch as they provide new material and insight, several of the articles in this issue revisit the ethnographic nuances of phenomena like witchcraft, shamanism, and magic in relation to neo-capitalist economic formations and unfold how native economic cosmologies constitute forms of relationality. Rather than reducing the proliferation of cosmological imagination to economic development and to the rise of neo-liberalist subjectivities, they decided to follow the choice of their informants and—to say it with Daniels (this issue)—to 'open' themselves to fortune.

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Notes

1. For some comprehensive discussions of the history and philosophy of the notions of luck and fortune, see Cioffari (1973), Raphals (2003), and Rescher (2001).
2. I am employing here a terminology borrowed from Alain Badiou (2005).
3. Hamayon’s monumental contribution to this issue touches on several of the themes discussed in this introduction.
4. Evans-Pritchard ([1937] 1968: 187) writes: “Azande ... are inclined to attribute unusual success to magic. Indeed, just as serious failure in an activity is ascribed to the influence of witches, so great success is often ascribed to magic, though the notion of success being due to magic is less emphasized because it is not expressed in action as is the belief of failure being due to witchcraft. A man without medicines may have great success. Then Azande say that he has had good luck (*tandu*).”
5. Misfortune and negative vitality are also substantialized in India (cf. Parry 1991; Raheja 1988).
6. Hocart ([1936] 1970: 3) famously defined kingship as ritual mastery over life, as “an organization to promote life, fertility, prosperity by transferring life from objects which are abounding in it to objects deficient in it.” Recently, Sahlins (2011) has explored the full magnitude of this premise by (re)turning to Lévy-Bruhl’s ‘mystical participation’ and Prytz-Johansen’s (1954) conceptualization of the immaterial source of the authority of the Maori chief, expressed by its capacity to unfold the *mana* that connects chief, land, and kinship group.
7. Leach (1961: 25) writes: “There are some societies where Fate and Implacable Deity are to be found personified in one and the same affinal personality, and in such cases the relation between religious ideas and political authority takes on a very different and very special aspect—the *mana* of the King and the *mana* of the witch coalesce in the person of the all powerful Father-in-Law.”
8. For a parallel discussion on topologies of kin(g)ship, see da Col and Graeber (2011).

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