

# How Luck Undermines Free Will And Moral Responsibility

Have you ever stopped to think about how much of our lives is governed by luck? From the circumstances of our birth to the opportunities we encounter, luck plays a significant role in shaping our experiences and outcomes. It is often said that we create our own luck, but can we truly take credit for our successes and failures when luck seems to be so intertwined with our lives? In this article, we will delve into the complex relationship between luck, free will, and moral responsibility, and explore how the role of luck challenges our traditional notions of these concepts.

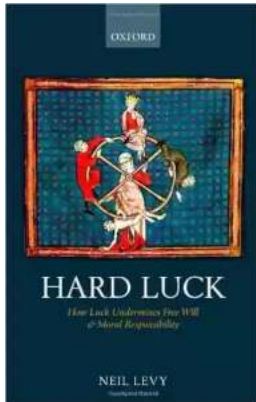
## The Nature of Luck

Luck, in essence, stems from uncontrollable external factors that influence the course of our lives. It encompasses both positive and negative outcomes that occur beyond our control, such as being born into a wealthy family, facing a life-threatening illness, or receiving a job opportunity due to a chance encounter. These strokes of luck shape our circumstances and determine the options available to us.

It is important to note that luck is not solely restricted to external factors. Even our internal traits and abilities, which we often attribute to our own choices and efforts, can be understood as products of luck. For example, the genetic and environmental factors that contribute to our intelligence or physical capabilities are largely beyond our control.

**Hard Luck: How Luck Undermines Free Will and Moral Responsibility** by Neil Levy(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5



## Are We Truly Free?

The traditional concept of free will holds that individuals possess the power to make choices independent of any external influences. It implies that our decisions are made based on rational thinking and personal agency. However, when examining the role of luck in our lives, it becomes evident that our choices are greatly influenced by factors beyond our control.

If luck shapes our circumstances and limits our available choices, how can we claim to have ultimate control over our decisions? Take, for instance, two individuals born into different socioeconomic backgrounds - one with abundant resources and opportunities, and the other with minimal access to education and healthcare. While both may possess the desire to succeed and make responsible decisions, their abilities to pursue those goals may differ significantly.

Moreover, luck can also determine the consequences of our actions. A person making a poor decision but escaping negative outcomes due to a fortunate turn of events cannot be held to the same moral responsibility as someone facing severe consequences for a similar choice. This challenges the notion that our moral character is solely a result of our own choices.

## **The Illusion of Control**

The belief in free will often gives us a sense of agency and control over our lives. We like to think that we have the power to determine our own destiny and are responsible for our actions. However, a closer examination reveals that our perception of control may be mere illusion.

Psychological research suggests that humans have a tendency to underestimate the role of luck in their lives. This bias, known as the "illusion of control," leads us to believe that we have more influence over events than we actually do. We often attribute positive outcomes to our own abilities and skills, while brushing off the role of luck as insignificant.

This illusion of control can have wide-ranging implications. It can make us more prone to taking credit for our successes, even if they were largely due to luck, and blaming others or circumstances when things go wrong. Furthermore, it can result in a lack of empathy towards those who have not been as fortunate as us, as we may believe their misfortunes to be solely a result of their own choices or actions.

## **Rethinking Moral Responsibility**

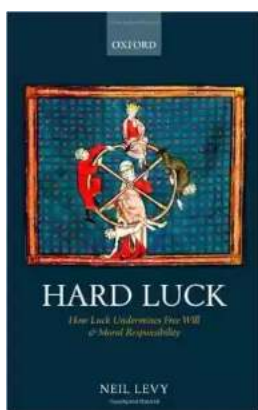
If luck undermines our free will, how does that impact our moral responsibility? Can we hold individuals accountable for their actions when those actions are influenced by factors beyond their control?

One approach to rethinking moral responsibility in the face of luck is to focus more on outcomes rather than intentions. This means evaluating the consequences of actions rather than solely judging the motives behind them. By shifting the emphasis to outcomes, we can acknowledge that luck plays a significant role in determining the moral worth of an action.

Furthermore, the concept of social responsibility becomes increasingly important when luck is taken into account. Society has a collective responsibility to minimize the impact of luck on individuals, providing equal opportunities and support to ensure that luck does not unduly hinder someone's ability to make responsible choices. This implies the need for social structures that create a level playing field, regardless of the hand one is dealt.

Although the concepts of free will and moral responsibility have long been central to our understanding of human behavior, the role of luck challenges the foundations upon which these concepts rest. Luck is an undeniable force that shapes our lives, influencing the options available to us and determining the outcome of our actions. Recognizing and accounting for the role of luck can lead to a more nuanced understanding of individual responsibility and the need for collective action to minimize its impact.

So the next time you find yourself attributing someone's success or failure solely to their actions, consider the role that luck may have played. And perhaps, with this newfound awareness, we can foster a society that truly acknowledges the interplay between luck, free will, and moral responsibility.



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The concept of luck has played an important role in debates concerning free will and moral responsibility, yet participants in these debates have relied upon an intuitive notion of what luck is. Neil Levy develops an account of luck, which is then applied to the free will debate. He argues that the standard luck objection succeeds against common accounts of libertarian free will, but that it is possible to amend libertarian accounts so that they are no more vulnerable to luck than is compatibilism. But compatibilist accounts of luck are themselves vulnerable to a powerful luck objection: historical compatibilisms cannot satisfactorily explain how agents can take responsibility for their constitutive luck; non-historical compatibilisms run into insurmountable difficulties with the epistemic condition on control over action. Levy argues that because epistemic conditions on control are so demanding that they are rarely satisfied, agents are not blameworthy for performing actions that they take to be best in a given situation. It follows that if there are any actions for which agents are responsible, they are akratic actions; but even these are unacceptably subject to luck. Levy goes on to discuss recent non-historical compatibilisms, and argues that they do not offer a viable alternative to control-based compatibilisms. He suggests that luck undermines our freedom and moral responsibility no matter whether determinism is true or not.



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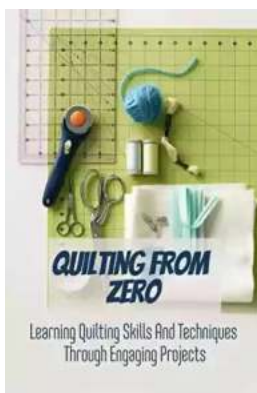
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