



# PHILOSOPHY

department

## LISA RAPHALS

UC RIVERSIDE

### “Early Chinese and Greek Accounts of Chance and Randomness”

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**MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2024**

**2:00–4:00PM**

A&H Building, Room 0426. Snacks will be provided.

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Chance was an important concept in both early China and Greece. But what, in a contemporary context is a largely value-neutral scientific concept, arose in ethical, philosophical and political contexts in these two cultures, and took very different forms in each. I examine four examples that demonstrate important differences in philosophical, ethical and political concepts, and also in social institutions. I argue that Chinese and Greek ideas of chance did not receive extensive scientific development, but they fundamentally informed their respective cultures in ways that were important and very different from each other: namely, Greek ideas of equality under law required a means to ensure randomness, and Chinese ideas of sagacity and effective rule required a sense of timeliness. The very different ethical, social and political contexts that drew on understandings of chance and luck led to very different ideas of what chance was and how it operated in the social and natural world. One emphasized randomness, both in the material context of Athenian allotment machines and in the philosophical context of the atomist theory that atoms randomly swerved, as a necessary correlate of free will in the universe, The other emphasized timeliness, embodied in the person of a sage and ideals of sagehood, both in the practical and embodied sense of timely action and in the philosophical and cosmological understanding that made a sage able to practice it.

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