silly (adj.)

Old English *gesælig* "happy, fortuitous, prosperous" (related to *sæl* "happiness"), from Proto-Germanic **sæligas* (source also of Old Norse *sæll* "happy," Old Saxon *salig*, Middle Dutch *salich*, Old High German *salig*, German *selig* "blessed, happy, blissful," Gothic *sels* "good, kindhearted").

> This is one of the few instances in which an original long *e* (*ee*) has become shortened to *i*. The same change occurs in *breeches*, and in the American pronunciation of *been*, with no change in spelling. [Century Dictionary]

The word's considerable sense development moved from "happy" to "blessed" to "pious," to "innocent" (c. 1200), to "harmless," to "pitiable" (late 13c.), "weak" (c. 1300), to "feeble in mind, lacking in reason, foolish" (1570s). Further tendency toward "stunned, dazed as by a blow" (1886) in *knocked silly,* etc. *Silly season* in journalism slang is from 1861 (August and September, when newspapers compensate for a lack of hard news by filling up with trivial stories). *Silly Putty* trademark claims use from July 1949.

> It is a widespread phenomenon that the words for 'innocent', apart from their legal use, develop, through 'harmless, guileless', a disparaging sense 'credulous, naive, simple, foolish.' [Buck]

nice (adj.)

late 13c., "foolish, stupid, senseless," from Old French *nice* (12c.) "careless, clumsy; weak; poor, needy; simple, stupid, silly, foolish," from Latin *nescius* "ignorant, unaware," literally "not-knowing," from *ne-* "not" (from PIE root ***ne-** "not") + stem of *scire* "to know" (see **science**). "The sense development has been extraordinary, even for an adj." [Weekley] -- from "timid" (pre-1300); to "fussy, fastidious" (late 14c.); to "dainty, delicate" (c. 1400); to "precise, careful" (1500s, preserved in such terms as *a nice distinction* and *nice and early*); to "agreeable, delightful" (1769); to "kind, thoughtful" (1830).

> In many examples from the 16th and 17th centuries it is difficult to say in what particular sense the writer intended it to be taken. [OED]

By 1926, it was pronounced "too great a favorite with the ladies, who have charmed out of it all its individuality and converted it into a mere diffuser of vague and mild agreeableness." [Fowler]

> "I am sure," cried Catherine, "I did not mean to say anything wrong; but it *is* a nice book, and why should I not call it so?" "Very true," said Henry, "and this is a very nice day, and we are taking a very nice walk; and you are two very nice young ladies. Oh! It is a very nice word indeed! It does for everything." [Jane Austen, "Northanger Abbey," 1803]

weird (adj.)

c. 1400, "having power to control fate, from *wierd* (n.), from Old English *wyrd* "fate, chance, fortune; destiny; the Fates," literally "that which comes," from Proto-Germanic **wurthiz* (source also of Old Saxon *wurd*, Old High German *wurt* "fate," Old Norse *urðr* "fate, one of the three Norns"), from PIE **wert-* "to turn, to wind," (source also of German *werden*, Old English *weorðan* "to become"), from root **wer-** (2) "to turn, bend." For sense development from "turning" to "becoming," compare phrase *turn into* "become."

The sense "uncanny, supernatural" developed from Middle English use of *weird sisters* for the three fates or Norns (in Germanic mythology), the goddesses who controlled human destiny. They were portrayed as odd or frightening in appearance, as in "Macbeth" (and especially in 18th and 19th century productions of it), which led to the adjectival meaning "odd-looking, uncanny" (1815); "odd, strange, disturbingly different" (1820). Related: *Weirdly*; *weirdness*.