Tertium quid

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*For the American political movement, see*[*Tertium Quids*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_Quids)*.*

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gold-121700.jpg)

[Electrum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electrum), a rare [alloy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alloy) of gold and silver, was used by [Tertullian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian) as an example of a *tertium quid*, by which he meant a mixture with composite properties.

**Tertium quid** refers to an unidentified third element that is in combination with two known ones.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-etymol-1) The phrase is associated with alchemy.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-etymol-1) It is [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) for "third something" (literally, "third what"), a translation of the [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek) *triton ti* (τρίτον τί).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-etymol-1) The Greek phrase was used by [Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato) (360 BC),[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-2) and by [Irenæus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iren%C3%A6us" \o "Irenæus) (*c.* AD 196).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-3) The earliest Latin example is by [Tertullian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian) (*c.* 220), who used the phrase to describe a mixed substance with composite properties such as [electrum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electrum), a somewhat different sense than the modern meaning.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-4)



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In Christology[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=1)]

In the [Christological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christological) debates of the fourth century, it was used to refer to the followers of [Apollinaris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollinarianism) who spoke of [Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ) as something neither human nor [divine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divinity), but a mixture of the two, and therefore a "third thing".

In American political history[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=2)]

*Main article:*[*Tertium Quids*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_Quids)

In American political history, the [Tertium Quids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_Quids), or Quids, were moderate members of Jefferson's [Democratic-Republican Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic-Republican_Party). The word implies that their political position was apt to embrace true [republicanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republicanism) and the comparable [conservatism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism) of the [Federalist Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_Party), particularly on foreign policy. The Quids arose in 1804 during [Thomas Jefferson's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson) first term in office. They were led by Virginia's [John Randolph of Roanoke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Randolph_of_Roanoke). They stood by the party's original stance for [strict construction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strict_construction) of the Constitution and opposed Jefferson's pragmatic approach to governing.

In sociology[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=3)]

In sociology, it describes a category of degraded moral consideration.

In [Souls of Black Folk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souls_of_Black_Folk), [W.E.B. Du Bois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.E.B._Du_Bois) used the term "tertium quid" to refer to the identity of African Americans in a racist society, where non-white people are viewed as a devalued category between man and animal.

"The second thought streaming from the death (slave)-ship and the curving river is the thought of the older South, the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle, God created a tertium quid, and called it a Negro—a clownish, simple creature, at times even lovable within its limitations, but straitly foreordained to walk within the Veil."[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_note-5)

In American law[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=4)]

The term is used in the [Supreme Court of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States) case [*Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. v. Samara Brothers, Inc.*](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wal-Mart_Stores,_Inc._v._Samara_Brothers,_Inc.&action=edit&redlink=1) 529 U.S. 205 (2000). In this [Lanham Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanham_Act) case, the Court, when discussing product packaging vs. product design, referred to the type of trade dress in its earlier [*Two Pesos, Inc. v. Taco Cabana, Inc.*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Pesos,_Inc._v._Taco_Cabana,_Inc.) decision as "some tertium quid" that may be a mutation of product packaging and product design—a "third thing."

In literature[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=5)]

In literature, it can describe an adulterer, often in a [cuckolded](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuckold) relationship.

[Kipling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kipling) employs the term in his story "At the Pit’s Mouth" for an adulterer: *"Once upon a time there was a Man and his Wife and a Tertium Quid."*

[Talbot Mundy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talbot_Mundy), a contemporary of Kipling, makes use of the term in [*King of the Khyber Rifles*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_the_Khyber_Rifles) to describe a cuckold, *"And what kind of man must Rewa Gunga be who could lightly let go all the prejudices of the East and submit to what only the West has endured hitherto with any complacency—a "tertium quid"? "*

Also, [Robert Browning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Browning) uses the term "Tertium Quid" in his long narrative poem [*The Ring and the Book*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ring_and_the_Book) for a section presenting third, more balanced viewpoint on the 1698 Roman murder case his poem discusses, different from the opinions expressed in the sections "Half Rome" and "The Other Half Rome", which strongly sympathize with, or equally deplore, the accused.

Tertium Quid is also the title of a book of essays on various topics by [Edmund Gurney](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Gurney), published in 1887. He has chosen topics which had opposing points of view but for which he proposes a third way of considering them.

References[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tertium_quid&action=edit&section=6)]

* 1. ^ [Jump up to:***a***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-etymol_1-0) [***b***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-etymol_1-1) [***c***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-etymol_1-2) "[Tertium quid](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=tertium+quid)", *Online Etymological Dictionary*
  2. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-2) Grote, George, [*Plato, and the other companions of Sokrates*](https://books.google.com/books?id=LpBQIamgHnYC&lpg=PA418&ots=t8sHYvzQVw&dq=)*,* Volume 2, p. 418. From the dialogue [*Sophist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophist_(dialogue)): "Existence or reality must therefore be a *tertium quid*, apart from motion and rest, not the sum total of those two items."
  3. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-3) Irenæus, [*Against Heresies*](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/irenaeus/advhaer2.txt) 2.1.3. The surviving text is Latin, but the original would have been in Greek. "But if they say this, there will be a 'tertium quid,' with this immense separation between the Pleroma and what is outside it, and this 'tertium quid' will limit and contain the other two, and will be greater than both the Pleroma and what is outside it, since it contains both in its bosom." (Grant, Robert McQueen, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 108.)
  4. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-4) Tertullian, *Adv. Praxean* 27. "If, however, it was only a *tertium quid,* some composite essence formed out of the two substances, like the *electrum* (which we have mentioned), there would be no distinct proofs apparent of either nature." (That is, of the divine and human natures of Christ.)
  5. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertium_quid#cite_ref-5) Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. '"Chapter VI: Of the Training of Black Men," in [*The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*](http://www.bartleby.com/114/6.html). Chicago:A.C. McClurg.