

# Neutrality (philosophy)

**Neutrality** is the tendency not to *side* in a conflict (physical or ideological),<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> which may not suggest neutral parties do not have a side or are not a side themselves. In colloquial use *neutral* can be synonymous with *unbiased*. However, bias is a favoritism for some side,<sup>[4][5]</sup> distinct of the tendency to act on that favoritism.

Neutrality is distinct (though not exclusive) from apathy, ignorance, indifference, doublethink, equality,<sup>[6]</sup> agreement, and objectivity. Apathy and indifference each imply a level of carelessness about a subject, though a person exhibiting neutrality may feel bias on a subject but choose not to act on it. A neutral person can also be well-informed on a subject and therefore need not be ignorant. Since they can be biased, a neutral person need not feature doublethink (i.e. accepting both sides as correct), equality (i.e. viewing both sides as equal), or agreement (a form of group decision-making; here it would require negotiating a solution on everyone's opinion, including one's own which may not be unbiased). Objectivity suggests siding with the more reasonable position (except journalistic objectivity), where reasonableness is judged by some common basis between the sides, such as logic (thereby avoiding the problem of incommensurability). Neutrality implies tolerance regardless of how disagreeable, deplorable, or unusual a perspective might be.<sup>[6]</sup>

In moderation and mediation, neutrality is often expected to make judgments or facilitate dialog independent of any bias, putting emphasis on the process rather than the outcome.<sup>[6]</sup> For example, a neutral party is seen as a party with no (or a fully disclosed) conflict of interest in a conflict,<sup>[7]</sup> and is expected to operate as if it has no bias. Neutral parties are often perceived as more trustworthy, reliable, and safe.<sup>[3][8]</sup>

Alternative to acting without a bias, the bias of neutrality itself is the expectation upon the Swiss government (in armed neutrality),<sup>[9]</sup> and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (in non-interventionism).<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Criticisms and views

Neutrality implies not judging the validity of an opinion. Thus, a neutral position will provide a platform for all opinions, including irrational or malicious ones.

In classical periods of enlightenment, neutrality has been looked down upon as a character vice, an escape from one's duty to think and to act, as opposed to the modern trend of esteeming neutrality as a virtue.

Other views include:

- Woodrow Wilson: "Neutrality is a negative word. It does not express what America ought to feel. We are not trying to keep out of trouble; we are trying to preserve the foundations on which peace may be rebuilt."<sup>[10]</sup>

- In the Supreme Court decision *Southworth v. The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System* based on the United States Constitution's First Amendment, the court decided some funding decisions should be made through a neutral viewpoint.<sup>[6]</sup>
- The Oxford English Dictionary documents that by at least 1897 "neutral" meant applying the rules to the facts, as in football "Neutral linesmen shall officiate in all games."<sup>[11]</sup>

## In popular culture

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- Prime Directive
- Seerow's Kindness from Animorphs

## See also

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- Tatramajjhattata
- Alternative dispute resolution
  - Moderation
  - Mediation
- Fairness
  - Toleration
- Deism
- Non-interventionism

## References

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