

Potential

Potential generally refers to a currently unrealized ability. The term is used in a wide variety of fields, from physics to the social sciences to indicate things that are in a state where they are able to change in ways ranging from the simple release of energy by objects to the realization of abilities in people. Examples include:

- In linguistics, the potential mood.
- The mathematical study of potentials is known as potential theory; it is the study of harmonic functions on manifolds. This mathematical formulation arises from the fact that, in physics, the scalar potential is irrotational, and thus has a vanishing Laplacian — the very definition of a harmonic function.
- In physics, a potential may refer to the scalar potential or to the vector potential. In either case, it is a field defined in space, from which many important physical properties may be derived.
 - Leading examples are the gravitational potential and the electric potential, from which the motion of gravitating or electrically charged bodies may be obtained.
 - Specific forces have associated potentials, including the Coulomb potential, the van der Waals potential, the Lennard-Jones potential and the Yukawa potential.
 - In electrochemistry there are Galvani potential, Volta potential, electrode potential, standard electrode potential.
 - In thermodynamics potential refers to thermodynamic potential.

See also

- Potential difference
- Potential energy
- Water potential

References

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