

The Philosophy of Neutrality

The 2025 Symposium of the Swiss Philosophical Society

Neuchâtel, August 27–29, 2025

Call for Paper

Neutrality

The concept of neutrality arises in numerous philosophical, scientific, and everyday contexts. The most immediate association is state neutrality, which is understood in two primary ways. In international relations, it refers to a country's abstention from participation in conflicts. Within a nation, liberal neutrality dictates that the state must not privilege certain conceptions of the good over others.

Neutrality, however, is not only a property of states, and its relevance is not limited to *political philosophy*. In the *philosophy of social sciences*, value neutrality has often been regarded as a central norm since Weber; more generally, neutrality and objectivity are often regarded as closely related. In the *philosophy of emotions*, the question of whether some emotions, such as surprise, are neutral—neither positive nor negative—raises perplexing questions. In *value theory*, the question often arises as to whether indifference should be understood as a sui generis mental state or as the absence of pro- and con-mental states. In the *philosophy of mind* and *metaphysics*, neutral monism—the view that the ultimate constituents of the world are neither physical nor mental—has gained renewed attention. *Epistemologists* study the suspension of judgment, conceived as a neutral state beyond belief and disbelief. In the *philosophy of physics*, the question of the nature of zero values raises tricky issues: do zero-valued magnitudes correspond only to the absence of other properties, or are there real zero properties? In the *philosophy of sciences*, philosophers ask whether scientific explanations should be neutral with respect to metaphysical assumptions. In the *philosophy of logic*, a key discussion arises as to the ontological neutrality of logic. In *phenomenology* and *descriptive metaphysics*, philosophers often claim that descriptions should be neutral with respect to other disputes (e.g., psychological descriptions should be topic-neutral). In *normative ethics*, philosophers discuss morally neutral actions and agent-neutral reasons. *Metaethicists* wonder whether metaethics is normatively neutral. The intuition of neutrality has raised important discussions in *population ethics*. In the *philosophy of time*, neutrality—understood as the idea that no time, such as the present, should be privileged—is heavily discussed. *Economists* have long debated the neutrality of money. Likewise, in *public debates*, institutions such as universities, schools, or public media are often criticized for not being neutral enough: some object to their lack of ideological diversity, others to their lack of gender or racial neutrality.

In sum, neutrality is ubiquitous in philosophy and beyond. However, neutrality is used much more than it is studied. Many key questions remain unanswered about its nature, role, and value: is there a common core concept of neutrality that cuts across ethics, logic, philosophy of mind, politics, economics, science, etc., or are there only fragmented, loosely related uses of a single term? Should neutrality be understood as an absence or rather as a balance between opposing forces, ideas, or actions? If neutrality is an absence, what is it an absence of? If neutrality is a balance, what is it a balance between, and how is the opposition to be understood? What kinds of entities can be said to be neutral? Is neutrality a good thing (perhaps on a par with impartiality) or a bad thing (perhaps on a par with compromise, in the negative sense)? Is neutrality achievable? Is a form of neutrality (e.g., political neutrality) desirable in some contexts (e.g., schools) and not in others (e.g., the political arena)? What is the opposite of neutral: biased, subjective, unbalanced, one-sided, opinionated, prejudiced, committed, engaged, value-laden, passionate...? What is the relationship between neutrality and cognate ideas such as impartiality, compromise, pluralism, agnosticism, balance or moderation?

The 2025 symposium of the Swiss Philosophical Society aims to shed light on this central but overlooked concept by addressing the various questions it raises in all areas of philosophy.

Submissions

In addition to five keynote presentations, up to 50–60 papers will be selected for presentation. We welcome submissions on the conference theme from all areas of philosophy and the history of philosophy. Beyond scholarly quality, the primary selection criterion is relevance to the overarching theme of the conference. The questions mentioned above serve only as suggestions; submissions need not focus on them, provided they engage with the conference topic in some way. Each talk will be allocated 40 minutes, with a maximum of 25 minutes for the presentation and at least 15 minutes for Q&A.

Submissions should be sent via email to neuchtrality@gmail.com by **March 15, 2025**. Please submit an anonymized PDF file containing an extended abstract of approximately 650–850 words (excluding references), a short abstract (100–150 words), and at least three keywords. Your full name, title, and affiliation must be included in the body of the email. Decisions will be communicated by May 31.

Submissions may be in English, German, French, or Italian, though English contributions are expected to attract the largest audience. We particularly encourage submissions from postdoctoral researchers and advanced Ph.D. students.

A participation fee of CHF 60 applies, with a 50% reduction for students, including Ph.D. candidates. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide travel grants or accommodation stipends.