



## Call for papers, Terrains/Théories, issue 8: “NEUTRALITY: VALUE, POSITION, PRAXIS”

Edited by

**Joseph Cacciari** (Ph. D student in sociology, Aix-Marseille Université, LAMES)

**Ghislaine Gallenga** (Associate Professor, Aix-Marseille Université, IDEMEC)

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### Presentation of the journal

*Terrains/Théories* is a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of social sciences which articulates conceptualisation and empirical research. Its approach is cross-disciplinary, embracing sociology, anthropology and philosophy. Its basic premise is that political philosophy – in a broad sense – must go beyond a purely conceptual approach to politics by getting closer to social sciences, while it becomes increasingly important to explain the theoretical choices that guide their research practices and their field surveys.

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### Presentation of the issue

Politically, neutrality is generally associated with the refusal to take sides between opposing parties<sup>1</sup>. It also refers to the relationships maintained by States with different sections of society: the marketplace, citizens, religious communities, etc.<sup>2</sup>. These days a discourse of neutrality applies itself to a number of different contexts. Without claiming to be definitive, this discourse seems to be at the heart of activities as diverse as which medications doctors might prescribe; workplace financial audits; the attribution of spaces in an open air market; personal advice columns; the work of mediators: in a societal or a governmental context (*médiateur de la République*, etc.). There are numerous examples and they show that it is no longer the sole prerogative of the State.

The origins of the word go back to at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century and designated at the time the state of being of a person refusing to take sides<sup>3</sup>. The principal of neutrality was at first primarily

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<sup>1</sup> Auroux Sylvain (dir.), 1998 [1990], *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle. Les notions philosophiques II*, Paris, PUF, coll. « Dictionnaire ».

<sup>2</sup> Merrill Roberto, 2011, « Comment un État libéral peut-il être à la fois neutre et paternaliste ? », *Raisons politiques* 2011/4 (n° 44), p. 15-40.

<sup>3</sup> Rey Alain (dir.), *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, Paris, Dictionnaire le Robert.

applied to, at least in the West, the battlefield, and international law in order to arbitrate relations between States<sup>4</sup>.

Neutrality then came to the forefront by backing up ideas applied to decision making challenges in domestic politics, judicial and philosophical matters, notably in relation to Law. In this register, the role it plays in intellectual debate since the 17<sup>th</sup> century especially in philosophy, is centered on the possibility of withholding value judgement<sup>5</sup>. Thus, political and philosophical investigation on this subject rested on the willingness to find a method to settle disputes over differing values, allowing a possible co-existence of competing liberties, as in the works of Kant. From that time on the idea of neutrality progressively imposed itself as an important concept in the Western societies' arsenal of logic. Closer to home, we find a good example of its importance at the center of debates raised by contemporary theories of justice where the possibility of neutrality in the guiding principles of political society has been harshly debated<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the concept continues to encompass the acceptance of not taking sides, as in the case of science, education or even technical matters<sup>7</sup>. The history of neutrality is thus divided between non-interventionism and guiding principles on the state of being<sup>8</sup>.

Behind the duality and the definition there appears to be, in reality three elementary components that give body to neutrality in everyday life: it is a value, a position in social interaction, and it relates to multiple practices. A closer analysis could in effect show that neutrality is already a social value. In many cases where interest (in the sense of having an interest) arouses, for example, suspicion or wariness (family conflict, judicial affairs, administrative dealings, science etc.), neutrality seems to indicate a detachment from implied partisanship. There is nothing surprising in this given the central role that this concept occupies in the construction of modern states having adopted the principals of political liberalism and, (liberal democracy)<sup>9</sup>, and in a more limited way, to the functioning of supposedly neutral bureaucracies working for the common good, a neutrality reflecting the consequences, the goals and the justifications<sup>10</sup>. Neutrality is thus eminently positive. But it can be twisted in a negative manner. This is the case for example when a person is called upon to step out of their "neutral" position, suddenly considered a detriment, and solicited to take sides in the quarrel. In certain situations, neutrality can also confer a type of power or symbolic prestige to those who lay claim to it. It comes to interpret itself as an attempt at attaining social standing: "I'm neutral, trust me". Neutrality is thus a coordinate on the field of social relations, be it very focalized, like a personalized interaction, or on a larger scale, in the case of neutral States during a military conflict. Neutrality, ultimately, brings together several actions: ways of speaking, of handling a case, of settling an affair, of scientifically proving the results of research, etc. This triptych: value, position, praxis, allows one to anticipate that neutrality subsumes a whole series of problems:

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Auroux, 1998, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Sur ce débat : Dworkin Ronald, 1978, « Liberalism », in Hampshire, S. (éd.), *Public and Private Morality*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press et Dworkin Ronald, 1995, « Foundations of Liberal Equality », in Darwall, S., (éd.), *Equal Freedom*, Ann Arbor, MI ; Rawls John, 1988, « La priorité du juste et les conceptions du Bien » (traduction par Tchoudnowsky A. et Audard C.), *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 33 : 39-59 ; Macintyre Alasdair, 1993, *Quelle justice ? Quelle rationalité ?* (trad. par Vignaux d'Hollande M.), Paris, PUF, coll. « Léviathan » ; Taylor Charles, 2013 [1989], « Cross-Purposes : The Liberal-Communitarian Debate », in Rosenblum, N. (éd.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Cambridge, *Harvard University Press*.

<sup>7</sup> Schwartz Yves, 1995, « La technique », in Denis Kambouchner (dir), *Notions de philosophie II*, Paris, Folio, coll. Essais.

<sup>8</sup> Merrill Roberto (2007), « Neutralité politique », in V. Bourdeau et R. Merrill (dir.), *DicoPo, Dictionnaire de théorie politique* ; Baume Sandrine, 2012, « De l'usage des pouvoirs neutres », *Pouvoirs* 2012/4 (n° 143), p. 17-27.

<sup>9</sup> Larmore Charles, 1987, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Merill, 2011, *op. cit.*

trust, inequality, power, domination, the symbolic, reducing complexity. A range of dimensions that claims of neutrality can add tension to, provoke discussion on, and at times dissimulate.

The goal of this issue of **Terrain/Théories** is to examine neutrality from the time of its application, to observe the social powers that it confers, to note the effects and to reveal practical accomplishments. A few questions flesh out the thought process. How does one trace the origins of neutrality? Can one identify different types of neutrality? How is it constructed? How does neutrality come to place itself on the terrain of different components of society, for example amongst professionals and tradespeople, and to what end? How is it put in place in real time? What are its effects on social interactions?

In order to answer these questions one needs a solid empirical base. At the same time, it seems equally necessary to question the methods to concretely size up neutrality in order to avoid the pitfalls of binary categorization (neutral/non-neutral), of nominalism and of a teleological approach to the question<sup>11</sup>.

### **Four approaches to neutrality in the social sciences**

Up until today, neutrality in and of itself has rarely been studied in social sciences. When it has been, rarely has it been the principal subject. One can nevertheless identify three dominating attitudes in the sphere of research relating to neutrality.

The first attitude is descriptive. It examines the concept of neutrality as value or Professional imperative<sup>12</sup>. The second approach strives to define neutrality in its social context<sup>13</sup>. Here it is not a question of identifying neutrality as value, but of placing it in a structured field of social positions and acknowledge its social efficiency. The third attitude consists of “revealing” the manner in which deviations from the supposed neutrality of components of society reveal themselves. One finds convincing examples by observing (in a broad sense) “trade writing”<sup>14</sup>, for example. It’s possible in the end that these approaches towards neutrality intersect. A fourth approach to research exists around that object “neutrality”, but it is a minority view. It involves investigating neutrality “from the bottom”. Reversing the perspective allows for the examination of certain social uses of neutrality. This last approach is a radical break from carrying out investigations devoid of all field study. Here neutrality is examined through the lens of the “daily routine” of those claiming to embody the concept or regularly putting it to the test<sup>15</sup>. Studies carried out along these lines undeniably shed light on neutrality as value, power, and position.

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<sup>11</sup> Goody Jack, 2010, *Le vol de l'Histoire. Comment l'Europe a imposé le récit de son passé au reste du monde*, Gallimard, coll. "Nrf Essais".

<sup>12</sup> Aballéa François, Benjamin Isabelle, Ménard François, 1999, *Le métier de conseiller en économie sociale et familiale. Professionnalité et enjeux*, Paris, Syros ; Frigoli Gilles, 2001, « La construction locale de l'offre d'une prestation comme production de l'action sociale : le cas du Fonds d'urgence sociale », *Revue française des affaires sociales*, 2001/1, 1, p. 133-154 ; Ben Mrad Fathi, 2006, « Équité, neutralité, responsabilité. À propos des principes de la médiation », *Négociations*, 2006/1, 5, p. 51-65.

<sup>13</sup> Lebaron Frédéric. 1997. « Les fondements sociaux de la neutralité économique », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 116-117, pp. 69-90 ; Champagne Patrick, 2000, « Le médiateur entre deux Monde » *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 131-132, *Le journalisme et l'économie*. pp. 8-29.

<sup>14</sup> Laé Jean-François, 2008, *Les nuits de la main courante. Écritures au travail*, Paris, Stock ; Serre Delphine, 2008, « une écriture sous surveillance : les assistantes sociales et la rédaction du signalement d'enfant en danger », *Langage et société*, 2008/4, 126, p. 39-56. ; Serre Delphine, 2009, *Les Couloirs de l'État social. Enquête sur les signalements d'enfant en danger*, Paris, Raisons d'agir.

<sup>15</sup> Spire Alexis, 2008a, *Accueillir ou reconduire. Enquête sur les guichets de l'immigration*, Paris, Raisons d'agir ; Spire Alexis, 2008b, « Histoire et ethnographie d'un sens pratique », in Arborio A.-M., Cohen Y., Fournier P., Nicolas H., Lomba C., Muller S., *Observer le travail. Histoire, ethnographie, approches combinées*, Paris, La Découverte, p.61-76.

A few examples. In studying lower level civil servants, Jean-Marc Weller shows how the ethos of neutrality practiced in the public sector is often transformed into a “social magistracy”<sup>16</sup>, producing law on a daily basis. Alex Spire follows a similar path, while at the same time showing how such a professional ethos comes to be and leads to the workings of this type of magistracy<sup>17</sup>. By approaching neutrality “in practice” one also sees how it can be challenged or reinterpreted by those who are in contact with persons claiming to be neutral, this is the case with the humanitarian actions studied by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos<sup>18</sup>. In proceeding “from the bottom up” on neutrality, one may also examine how, in a single and unique professional field, neutrality may cover different realities. Geneviève Cresson highlights this dimension while in observing the carrying out of family mediation around cases of domestic violence<sup>19</sup>. She makes clear the “two concepts of neutrality”: distancing-neutrality and empathy-neutrality; that hold sway in this field.

The blind spot of this fourth approach, as with the others as well, lies with its lack of comparative vision. It is nonetheless a method that for certain authors has proved fecund. This is the case with Philip Milburn, who while investigating « *la structuration de la relation à l'usager* », compares the profession of attorney to the trade of judicial mediator<sup>20</sup>.

This incomplete re-reading of the texts traces the goals of this issue of **Terrains/Théories**: the idea of systematizing a “from the bottom up” approach to neutrality and thus allow, through these various terrains, a comparative perspective on neutrality. There are numerous stakes surrounding a project such as this. The main one might be summed up as the will to withdraw in a precisely documented manner from a sort of *neutrality fetishism* which commits to the negation of the social production of this position, be it non-interventionist or justifying itself as impartial in face of conflict, leading to believe that neutrality is the essence of a certain genre of relationship or social standing position. This project should thus allow for examining the means of its reification and recognition (or legitimation see dictionary Robert-Collins). The history of its coming to dominate a wider and more varied range of praxis could thus in itself be the object of analysis. One also wishes to question the tenable character of a position, that in the end, deals with concrete social relations and interactions. Neutrality's efficiency in interactions could also be at the heart of analysis in order to observe the cases where it “works” or those where it “doesn't work”, in different possible meanings of this success or failure. In the end, it is not so much understanding the language of neutrality that interests us, so much as its effects and concrete social powers restituted in terms (of their efficiency or impotence

### **Neutrality from the bottom up**

In order to grasp neutrality “from the bottom up” one might place themselves at the side of those who deal with it on a daily basis. This course is all the more fruitful in that it is situated at the heart of interactions or social relations that one may draw the parameters: at a civil service window; public services, like a school or a hospital; amongst trades linked in a broad sense to mediation; in short amongst relations of proximity. At the heart of civil service, non-profit

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<sup>16</sup> Weller Jean-Marc, 2000, « Une controverse au guichet : vers une magistrature sociale ? ». *Droit et société*, 44-45. pp. 91-109 ; Weller Jean-Marc, 2003, « Le travail administratif, le droit et le principe de proximité », *L'Année sociologique*, 2003/2 Vol. 53, p. 431-458. DOI : 10.3917/anso.032.0431.

<sup>17</sup> Spire Alexis, 2008b, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Pérouse de Montclos Marc-Antoine, « De l'impartialité des humanitaires et de leur perception par les bénéficiaires : les enjeux politiques de l'aide internationale au Burundi », *Autre part*, 2006/3, 39, p. 39-57.

<sup>19</sup> Cresson Geneviève, 2002, « Médiation familiale et violence conjugale », *Cahiers du Genre*, 2/2002 (n° 33), pp. 201-218.

<sup>20</sup> Milburn Philip, 2002, « La compétence relationnelle : maîtrise de l'interaction et légitimité professionnelle. Avocats et médiateurs », *Revue française de sociologie*, 43-1. pp. 47-72.

organizations or in the public domain, numerous front line occupations, *street level bureaucrats*<sup>21</sup>, may, or must, claim and deal with this neutrality in their day to day relations with the public.

This is not virgin territory. One may retain several emblematic cases studied by researchers from different backgrounds in social sciences. The field of health care is of course, one of these. One thinks automatically of the neutrality of doctors<sup>22</sup>. But in the field of health care one may also turn ones scrutiny to those professions that deal the most with the public, in the sense that their relations are characterized by physical and social proximity, such as nurse's aide<sup>23</sup> Social work is another domain where the neutrality imposes it's mark on the daily routine. From social workers, family and budget counsellors<sup>24</sup>, to cultural and athletic facilitator<sup>25</sup> and to the official at the *Caisses d'allocations familiales*<sup>26</sup> the value of neutrality is largely on display in this job sector. The same goes for occupations in the mediation field (legal, social, family, security on public transit) for which neutrality constitutes a structural component. Finally the pedagogical relationship between teachers and pupils gives a role, obviously, to neutrality (political, religious), primarily around the concept of secularism<sup>27</sup>.

These studies, as stimulating as they may be, nevertheless raise two problems, that this issue of the journal would like to take up directly. First, they bring to the forefront a series of tensions grouped around neutrality: power/persuasion; personal/professional; political commitment/apolitical attitude; axiological neutrality/value judgment, etc. Regardless of their heuristic contributions, these divisions remain too parsimonious in relation to neutrality as phenomenon and do not completely restore its three basic composing elements. Secondly, neutrality is most often taken up in the course of analysis, sometimes as an overhanging category, in the sense which by making the neutral category a fact, one acts in a prescriptive manner, opposed to any investigation of its content. It doesn't form the main subject of the research and is not taken up in its emic (? Not in dictionary) sense nor as a sociological analytic grid aiming, precisely, to restore the content.

### **For contributions to participate in the renewal of the view of neutrality in practices**

The thought running through this position paper on the treatment accorded by French social sciences to the question of neutrality leads to three conclusions, which are possible themes for submitted articles.

First, neutrality should be taken up centrally (that is the object of the article), from its three component parts simultaneously: as value, social (position? Standing?) and as praxis. Secondly, in order to shift the point of view held towards neutrality, it should be approached not as a

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<sup>21</sup> Lipsky Michael, 1980, *Street level bureaucracy: dilemma of the individual in public services*, New York, Russel Sage foundation.

<sup>22</sup> Freidson Eliot, 1984, *La profession médicale*, Paris, Payot ; Dodier Nicolas, 1993, *L'expertise médicale. Essai de sociologie sur l'exercice du jugement*, Paris, Métailié.

<sup>23</sup> Arborio Anne-Marie, 1996, « Savoir profane et expertise sociale. Les aides-soignantes dans l'institution hospitalière » *Genèses*, 22, pp. 87-106.

<sup>24</sup> Aballéa François et al., 1999, *op. cit.* ; Serre Delphine, 2009, *op. cit.* ; Perrin-Heredia Ana, 2013, « La mise en ordre de l'économie domestique. Accompagnement budgétaire et étiquetage de la déviance économique », *Gouvernement et action publique*, 2013/2, 2, pp. 303-330.

<sup>25</sup> Lebon Francis, 2007, « Devenir animateur : une entreprise d'éducation morale », *Ethnologie française*, n° 4, pp. 709-720.

<sup>26</sup> Dubois Vincent, 2010 [1999], *La vie au guichet. Relations administratives et traitement de la misère*, Paris, Economica, coll. « Études politiques ».

<sup>27</sup> Buisson-Fenet, 2005, « Les médiateurs académiques dans le système éducatif français : la force d'un « pouvoir sans autorité » », *Revue française de pédagogie*, 153, pp.81-91 ; Ruche Claude, 2001, « Les acteurs de terrain en recherche de repères laïques », *Hommes et migrations*, [En ligne], 1294.

categorical method but by using a sociological grid and with a historicized (?) and comparative approach. Finally, in continuity with the research cited throughout this position paper, it seems useful to pursue the description of the playing out of neutrality: its scenes, its players, its effects, its devices (at times technical). But by taking seriously Pierre Bourdieu's affirmation according to whom "all the problems that are raised in relation to bureaucracy, such as the subject of neutrality and selflessness, are also raised by inquisitive sociology"<sup>28</sup> at the same time these analyses will spare no effort to restore the place of the researcher in the investigative process and the production of results. The fallible possibility of knowledge freed of the prejudices within social sciences<sup>29</sup>, where "axiological neutrality"<sup>30</sup> and its commodity, imposes numerous remedies for researchers dealing with the type of problems raised by a concept such as "neutrality". One would be hard put to be convinced by an analyst working from an overhanging position in the face of problems raised by this concept, be they scientific, ethical, or political, which seeks to confer a certain exteriority in relation to the state of things. Without wishing to back or plead for one position or another on this subject, one may nonetheless state that the restitution of the role of the researcher in the course of the investigation is perhaps the basic expectation and one of the most fruitful and precise methods of restituting the impact of a line of reasoning. As Daniel Céfai<sup>31</sup> has underlined reflexivity goes hand in hand with scientific character. For example, this is what was shown by recent debates in the field of reflexive anthropology around the tensions provoked by the presence of the ethnographer on the reality under observation, debates that go far back but which have been revisited these last few years in a postmodern thinking on the commitment of the researcher and the *citizen anthropologist*<sup>32</sup>. George Marcus developed this concept in order to acknowledge this new ethical and political commitment that is now integrated into the investigative methodology. Also, it is expected authors that they reveal their investigative methodology, the modalities of the production of their results, but also that they justify their theoretical choices.

Contributions are welcome from the following fields: philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, legal studies, political science, social psychology, economics, and should principally be backed by field work.

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<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu Pierre, 1993, « Esprits d'État. Genèse et structure du champ bureaucratique », In : *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n°96-97, mars 1993, Esprits d'État, p.50.

<sup>29</sup> Weber Max, Kalinowski Isabelle, 2005, *La science, profession et vocation. Suivi de "Leçons wébériennes sur la science & la propagande"*, Paris, Agone, coll. « Banc d'essais ».

<sup>30</sup> Weber Max, 1965 (1917), « Essai sur le sens de la « neutralité axiologique » dans les sciences sociologiques et économiques », in *Essais sur la théorie de la science*, trad. de J. Freund, Paris, Plon, p. 475-526.

<sup>31</sup> Cefaï Daniel (Dir.), 2003, *L'enquête de terrain*, Paris, La Découverte/ M.A.U.S.S., 621 p. (pp.523-527).

<sup>32</sup> Marcus E. George (Ed.), 1999, *Critical Anthropology Now. Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*, Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 440 p. (pp.15-18).

## **Submission guidelines:**

The deadline for proposals submission is **June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017**. They should be sent to Joseph Cacciari ([cacciarijo@gmail.com](mailto:cacciarijo@gmail.com)), Ghislaine Gallenga ([ghislaine.gallenga@univ-amu.fr](mailto:ghislaine.gallenga@univ-amu.fr))

Proposals should present:

- A title;
- An abstract (5000 characters);
- Author(s) data such as complete name, institution, function, professional address, phone number and e-mail address.

The editorial board will proceed to selection and inform the authors of the selected proposals by **June 16<sup>th</sup> 2017**. The journal editorial guidelines, presented online (<http://teth.revues.org/501>) have to be followed strictly by authors.

The final papers will have a size between 45 000 and 60 000 characters (spaces, footnotes and bibliography included) and must be submitted no later than **November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017** for a publication number December **2018**. Papers will be evaluated in double-blind.

For further information, please contact the managing editor: