

Stable

To be stable is to be reliable and consistent in behavior. If Jim is stable we can count on him to turn in the same businesslike performance from one year to the next. We can count on hearing from him many of the view points and attitudes we have been used to, and on seeing his new view points and attitudes as meaningful modifications of his old ones.

Examples

1 A stable friend

I had a good friend who was a Professor of Literature at my University. For thirty years we exchanged ideas, lunches, and personal advice. His views were always in sync with what he had said to me in the past. He was stable and consistent in his behavior and ideas, even in the consistency with which he welcomed contact with new ideas. His intelligence took him both into the future—where he evolved cogent theories of the future of the novel—and into the past, where he found (say in the principles of our Founding Fathers) much that he wanted to understand better. Wherever he went in his mind, however, he was still the same probing, well spoken, meaning-seeking person. For me he personified stability, though I only knew, as is always true with our friends, the faces he allowed me to see.

2 Stable society

A stable society is one in which, though there is dissent and conflict, the structure serves the overall needs of the people. A stable society can flourish under any kind of government—from democratic through autocratic—provided it meets society's needs, although the manner in which those needs are met will vary from government to government. An unstable society is one which no longer meets the needs of the citizens, in which shortages of basic supplies, or outbreaks of revolutionary dissent, make daily life miserable for the citizen. A proliferation of stable societies makes it harder for rogue societies—ones without historical credentials or responsible goals—to put themselves in the picture. The entire cosmos can be seen as a search for stability in the midst of stupendous growth.