

Impartial

To be impartial is to be fair. When you are fair you try to see both sides of a dispute, or, if appropriate, to allow for the special circumstances that may govern the behavior of one side or the other. The exemplar of impartiality is the judge, who is supposedly able to balance the rights and wrongs of two or more sides to a conflict. Many religions conceive the creator of the universe as a judge, who sees beyond all partial views. When human beings are involved, fairness and lack of bias is often hard to obtain, even from a judge. We all have instinctive likes and dislikes, as well as embedded moral values or attitudes, and we have to try to separate our judgments from much material that is deeply rooted in what we are.

Examples

1

The current social issue of gay marriage is divisive in the United States. It pits against each other sharply opposed views of the nature of marriage, of the morality of homosexuality, and of the social rights of non-mainstream partners. As many legal cases, touching on the status of gay marriage, have attracted attention, it is relevant to ask by what standards the sitting judges involved in such cases make their decisions. Given the fact on the ground, that judges have private lives and private feelings, how do they put those feelings behind them, and judge cases involving gay marriage? How do they adopt a position that is fair, when they rule? Do they simply 'rule narrowly,' as we say, and avoid anything close to a statement of position? Can they be completely unbiased?

2

The parent of more than one child is occasionally asked which of his children he likes best. This is an intolerable question: if you answer with the name of a child, you are accused of partiality; if you refuse to reply, or say 'all equally,' you are accused of indifference to the variety of human types, one more congenial, one less congenial. I am, by intention, impartial to my children, and tease God by loving all my children as he does. However we all have personal preferences among our children, rooted in the history of our personal relations. One can not imagine, though, the mindset of those who banish, disinherit, or cast out any of their offspring, for indeed the privilege of conceiving consecrates its results.