

Introduction: it is not the neutrals or lukewarms that make history¹

Neutrality – a formal and internationally recognised status of non-belligerency in time of war – is not a modern concept. The desire to keep out of a war is a natural response to conflict and as old as war itself, even if, as Robert Fisk so daintily puts it, ‘neutrality in war has never been regarded as an act of much honour’.² Through the ages, the desire for non-belligerency has been voiced and exercised in a variety of ways and with varying levels of success. Whenever there has been war, there have been neutrals. Scholars usually look to Ancient Greece to chart the first uses of neutrality as agreements made to keep certain city-states from becoming embroiled in the frequent wars of their neighbours.³ Of course, where there were neutrals, there was controversy. In the fifteenth century, for example, Machiavelli famously espoused that neutrality was a false policy for a Prince to undertake, for

if you do not declare yourself [in favour of one party against the other], you will invariably fall prey to the conqueror, to the pleasure and satisfaction of him who has been conquered, and you will have no reasons to offer, nor anything to protect or to shelter you. Because he who conquers does not want doubtful friends who will not aid him in the time of trial; and he who loses will not harbour you because you did not willingly, sword in hand, court his fate.⁴

With the birth of international law, neutrality became a debated topic within the European ‘just war’ canon, in which it was largely demonised as an immoral act. As the father of international law and the proponent

¹ Adolf Hitler, as quoted by N. Wylie, ‘Introduction’ in N. Wylie, ed., *European neutrals and non-belligerents during the Second World War*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 8. Cf C. Steding, *Das Reich und die Neutralen*. Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1941.

² R. Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality*. Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1983, p. ix.

³ R. A. Bauslaugh, *The concept of neutrality in Classical Greece*. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991.

⁴ N. Machiavelli, *The prince*. Chapter 21, 1515. Available at www.constitution.org/mac/prince21.htm.

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of the ‘just war’ cause, Hugo Grotius explained in 1625, ‘it is the duty of those who keep out of war to do nothing whereby he who supports a wicked cause may be rendered more powerful’.⁵ Yet neutrals were a common feature of the early modern period. With the growth of Enlightenment ideas, neutrality also lost many of its moralised overtones, which were replaced by the competing logic of scholars to define the rights and duties of states in times of war and peace.

Neutrality’s golden age in international law and international esteem came in the ‘long’ nineteenth century, which stretched from the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815) to the outbreak of the First World War (1914). In that century, which forms the topic of this book, neutrality developed into a permanent feature of the international system. It was a much lauded, used and promoted policy by great and small powers alike. It helped to sustain the balance of power that kept the great powers from going to war with one another. It helped to protect the power and growth of the British Empire. It was a tool that enabled globalisation and underpinned many free-trade liberal policies. It also became a defining feature of popular conceptions of internationalism and humanitarianism. In the ‘long’ nineteenth century, at least, neutrality was an important and active idea in international law, international politics and international idealism. On all three counts, it stood in direct contrast to the concept of neutrality that dominated the mid-to-late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Today, the word ‘neutrality’ implies passivity and inaction. It is a soft word, defined by the modern *Oxford English Dictionary* as an ‘absence of decided views, expression or strong feeling’.⁶ In ascribing the term ‘neutrality’ to certain countries, at one level at least, we taint them with the passivity of its meaning. By nature of the word, neutrals are removed from the world of action, agency and activity. It is perhaps not surprising then that they are often invisible to the writing of modern history as well – at least to the history that charts the actions of states, their wars, international posturing and *Realpolitik*. Neutrals rarely achieve prominence in the historical narratives of war written after 1945. If they appear, it is

⁵ Hugo Grotius, extracts from *On the law of war and peace* (1625), as quoted by R. Ogley, *The theory and practice of neutrality in the twentieth century*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 34.

⁶ Oxford Dictionaries online, oxforddictionaries.com/definition/neutrality. Also: R. Lettevall, G. Somsen, S. Widmalm, ‘Introduction’ in R. Lettevall, G. Somsen, S. Widmalm, eds, *Neutrality in twentieth-century Europe. Intersections of science, culture, and politics after the First World War*. New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 6–7; F. W. Dame, ‘Continuity and change in Swiss neutrality from 1815 to 1890. An analysis’. PhD, Saarbrücken, 1981, p. 148; D. Tswettcoff, *De la situation juridique des états neutralisés en temps de paix*. Geneva, W. Kündig & Fils, 1895, p. 3.

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usually not until the moment when they become a belligerent or when their non-belligerency is seriously compromised.

This is not to say neutrals and neutrality do not feature in the writing of history. In the history of international law, for example, neutrality holds a prominent place. The historian Stephen Neff charts developments in the adoption of the rights and duties attached to neutrality over the centuries since Grotius's time.⁷ H. J. Morgenthau, furthermore, argues that the nineteenth century witnessed a 'golden age' of neutrality, an age in which neutrals were protected and the laws of neutrality were stipulated and universally implemented.⁸ Morgenthau's work sits within a wider historiographical genre that argues that the 1800s were a 'golden age' for international law.⁹ Such narratives tend to culminate in the 1907 Hague Conventions on neutrality, which remain in force today and are the basis of our modern understanding of neutral rights and duties. The conventions recognised that neutrality was, first and foremost, a status in international law – a status that a country maintained by behaving in a certain manner when others were at war.¹⁰ They highlighted that a country's neutrality ended as soon as it was invaded, failed to act according to the requirements of international law or had its rights seriously violated. The conventions also outlined the basic requirements of a neutral state, namely that it act impartially towards belligerents, refrain from favouring one or another side with military support and protect its sovereign territory from foreign military incursions. In return, it obtained the right to trade unhindered with belligerents and other neutrals, except in contraband (goods of war) or when breaching a blockade.

The writing of the history of neutrality in international law is also connected to the economic history of warfare, where it deals mainly with issues of maritime warfare. Obviously, belligerents concerned themselves with the trade and supply of their enemies, including that obtained from neutrals. Issues of trade and exchange in time of war were particularly contentious on the open seas, outside the limits of sovereign territory. From the early modern period on, the commercial success of states relied in large part on their maintaining successful trade relationships

⁷ S. C. Neff, *The rights and duties of neutrals. A general history*. Manchester University Press, 2000.

⁸ H. J. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of politics*. University of Chicago Press, 1958, in C. Agius, *The social construction of Swedish neutrality. Challenges to Swedish identity and sovereignty*. Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 16; Neff, *Rights and duties*, p. 86.

⁹ For example: P. Lyon, 'The great globe itself: continuity and change' in E. F. Penrose, P. Lyon, E. Penrose, eds, *New orientations. Essays in international relations*. London, Routledge, 1970, p. 15.

¹⁰ J. W. Coogan, 'Wilsonian diplomacy in war and peace' in G. Martel, ed., *American foreign relations reconsidered 1890–1993*. London, Routledge, 1994, p. 78.

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across those seas.¹¹ As a result, the rules that applied to piracy, privateering and prize law preoccupied belligerents and non-belligerents alike. Neutrality also features in the history of economic warfare in more recent times: the history of British neutrality violations in the United States Civil War is well known, for example, as are the ramifications for neutrals of Germany's declaration of unrestricted U-boat warfare in 1917.

The other major foci for the writing of neutrality history are the national histories of countries that have become defined in some way by their historical status of neutrality. The Netherlands, Sweden and the Italian states feature as important early modern examples of prominent neutrals, while Switzerland, Sweden and Belgium are probably the most familiar modern representatives.¹² Of course, the United States should be included on both of these lists. Significantly, and quite in contrast to the history of the early modern neutrals, the national histories of the modern neutrals are often endowed with twentieth- and early twenty-first-century understandings of neutrality. Their depictions tend to foreground passivity and morality rather than international agency. Where the histories of neutrals in the early modern era look to the centrality of these states in the international environment, the histories of the modern neutrals tend to highlight their peripheral status and their uniqueness as outliers in the international system. We tend to identify these countries as small or weak states.

Neutral Switzerland epitomises present-day conceptions of neutrality best. In 1815, the great powers neutralised the Swiss cantons at the Congress of Vienna. Since 1848, when its permanent neutrality became embedded in the Swiss political constitution, neutrality has become a defining feature of Switzerland's international position.¹³ Unlike other long-term neutrals of the same era, including Belgium and the United States, Switzerland's neutrality endured both the world wars of the twentieth century and was sustained throughout the Cold War and into the

¹¹ For three very good histories of neutrality and sea power: N. Tracy, ed., *Sea power and the control of trade. Belligerent rights from the Russian War to the Beira Patrol, 1854–1970*. Aldershot, Ashgate and Navy Records Society, 2005; L. E. Davis, S. E. Engerman, *Naval blockades in peace and war. An economic history since 1750*. Cambridge University Press, 2006; A. Alimento, ed., *War, trade and neutrality. Europe and the Mediterranean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011.

¹² F. Angeolini, 'From the neutrality of the port to the neutrality of the state: projects, debates and laws in Habsburg-Lorraine Tuscany', and K. Stapelbroek, 'The emergence of Dutch neutrality. Trade, treaty politics and the peace of the Republic', both in Alimento, *War, trade*; G. M. Welling, *The prize of neutrality. Trade relations between Amsterdam and North America 1771–1817*. Historisch Seminarium van de Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1998; Agius, *Swedish neutrality*.

¹³ O. Zimmer, *A contested nation. History, memory and nationalism in Switzerland 1761–1891*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 144.

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post–Cold War era. Today, Switzerland comes across to outsiders as a small, relatively weak country that survived the ages by dint of its historic neutrality, its geographic isolation amidst the mountainous Alps and its function as the banking centre of Europe. In popular depictions, Switzerland is often represented as a placid nation lacking agency, heroism or heart. In Graham Greene's 1949 film *The Third Man*, for example, the character Harry Lime (played by Orson Welles) describes the land-locked country as follows:

In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed – but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.¹⁴

There is very little historical accuracy in the quote – the cuckoo clock is not Swiss, for one – but it depicts the implied permanence of the idea of Swiss neutrality very well alongside its supposed stifled creativity. Likewise, in an episode of the popular 1990s television series *Ally McBeal*, Calista Flockhart's character entertains the idea that she might move to Switzerland in order to avoid the 'real' world 'because' as she sees it:

everything is neutral in Switzerland. People are even emotionally neutral in Switzerland. All they do is drink hot chocolate, work in banks, nobody gets hurt and they get to lead nice lives right up until the point where they shoot themselves.¹⁵

Even the shipwrecked Swiss Family Robinson espouses, in the glorious 1960 Disney adaptation of Johann David Wyss's 1812 book, that 'we are ready to fight but we're not too proud to hide'.¹⁶ More recently, Rowan Atkinson's secret-agent character in the spoof film *Johnny English Reborn* (2011), when faced with the possibility of being shot by Swiss guards, pleads 'dear God, please don't let me die at the hands of the Swiss!' By implication, death at the hands of any other adversary would be more worthy than this ignoble and neutral end.¹⁷

Contrary to these popular and 'foreign' constructions of Switzerland, many Swiss have come to embrace their neutrality as a sacred part of their national identity: that which protects them in the world but also sets them apart from that world. In doing so, they stress the longevity of their neutrality, implying that it has been a constant feature of Switzerland's

¹⁴ C. Reed (dir.), G. Greene (writer), *The Third Man*. Carol Reed's Productions, London Film Productions, 1949.

¹⁵ S. Smolan (dir.), David E. Kelley (writer), 'The blame game', Season 1, Episode 13, *Ally McBeal*. 20th Century Fox Television, David E. Kelley Productions, 1998.

¹⁶ K. Annakin (dir.), *Swiss Family Robinson*. Walt Disney Productions, 1960.

¹⁷ O. Parker (dir.), *Johnny English Reborn*. Universal Pictures, 2011.

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identity since early-modern times.¹⁸ When Switzerland appears in the writing of the political history of the world, however, historians usually only introduce it at the point where its national history became tainted and its neutrality corrupted. Obviously, Switzerland's conduct during the Second World War features prominently in such accounts. The story of Swiss behaviour in and before the First World War is now also under historical scrutiny using a similar moral compass, as attested to by Max Mittler's 982-page volume, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg. Wie neutral war die Schweiz?* (*The way to the First World War. How neutral were the Swiss?*), which was published in 2003.¹⁹

Another small country whose citizens have grappled with the implications of their neutrality is the Netherlands. Until the end of the twentieth century at least, historians of the Netherlands tended to ignore its 'neutral' past, and when they did analyse it, it was often to explain how short-sighted and naïve was the country's return to neutrality in the late 1930s. The experiences of the Second World War and Nazi occupation overshadowed any genuine understanding of the viability of neutrality in the First World War, let alone during the hundred years or so before 1914 when neutrality was an established (and celebrated) part of the Dutch national psyche.²⁰ Johan den Hertog recently published an important analysis of Dutch foreign policy in the 1900–40 period, in which he argues that the traditional historiographical take on Dutch foreign policy in the inter-bellum period, which fixates on the idea of *zelfstandigheidspolitiek* (policy of independence), attempts to differentiate Dutch neutrality (often read as passive by other historians) during the war from its League of Nations-era equivalent.²¹ Den Hertog shows that even before 1914, the Dutch were active neutrals and used neutrality as a means of promoting their sovereign independence in a tense world. He successfully takes neutrality out of its presentist compass – linked to defeat, inaction and

¹⁸ For the early-modern roots of Swiss neutrality: T. Maissen, A. Holenstein and A. Dafflon's chapters in J.-F. Chanut, C. Windler, eds, *Les ressources des faibles. Neutralités, sauvegardes, accommodements en temps de guerre (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009.

¹⁹ M. Mittler, *Der Weg zum Ersten Weltkrieg. Wie neutral war die Schweiz?* Zürich, Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2003.

²⁰ Exceptions include: C. A. Tamse, *Nederland en België in Europa (1859–1871). De zelfstandigheidspolitiek van twee kleine staten*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973; C. B. Wels, *Aloofness and neutrality. Studies on Dutch foreign relations and policy-making institutions*. Utrecht, Hes Publishers, 1982. For more: A. J. van der Peet, *Belangen en prestige. Nederlandse gunboat diplomacy omstreeks 1900*. Amsterdam, De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1999, pp. 11–12.

²¹ For example: D. Hellema, *Neutraliteit en vrijhandel. De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse buitenlandse betrekkingen*. Utrecht, Het Spectrum, 2001, pp. 78–80.

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immorality – and returns it to its rightful historical place, namely the context of its time.²²

Of course, not all national histories of neutrals fixate on the small and weak. For nearly a century and a half after its birth as an independent nation, the United States was an avowed neutral in world affairs. Historians credit the United States with the honour of developing the modern concept of impartial neutrality.²³ Yet, at the same time, most international historians treat the neutrality of the United States as an isolated development, as something uniquely American and, therefore, as something mainly of concern to historians of the United States. Importantly, in isolating the United States from the world, these international historians acknowledge that it was not a genuine world power while it remained a neutral and avoided involvement in European great power affairs. As such, the United States rarely appears in general histories of the First World War until the Zimmermann telegram and the sinking of the *Lusitania*.²⁴ In the history of the following global conflagration, it tends to feature only after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Such depictions imply that the United States had the potential to become a great power at the end of the First World War because of its belligerency in that conflict but that it failed to live up to this promise by returning to its traditional isolationist position. If one argues along the same trajectory, the United States only became a super power when it finally accepted its responsibility to defeat both Nazi Germany and Japan in 1941.

Another national history that is imbued with the morality and passivity of our modern understanding of neutrality is that of ‘poor’ but ‘brave’ little Belgium, facing the German hordes in 1914. Here, the supposed naïveté and powerlessness of the Belgians stood both as a useful propaganda message for the Entente partners and their empires during the war and as a historical example of the weakness of neutrality after its

²² J. den Hertog, ‘Zelfstandigheidspolitiek: de achtergrond van een cruciale term in het buitenlands beleid van Nederland 1900–1940’, *Low Countries Historical Review* 124, 2, 2009, pp. 163–85.

²³ E. Chadwick, *Traditional neutrality revisited. Law, theory and case studies*. The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 2002, p. 7; N. Ørvik, *The decline of neutrality 1914–1941. With special reference to the United States and the northern neutrals*. Oslo, Johan Grundt Tanum Forlag, 1953, pp. 27–8; C. S. Hyneman, *The first American neutrality. A study of the American understanding of neutral obligation during the years 1792–1815*. Chicago, University of Illinois, 1934.

²⁴ For a lovely discussion of American neutrality in the context of the *Lusitania* sinking in 1915: D. Reynolds, ‘Too proud to fight’, *London Review of Books* 24, 23, 28 November 2002, pp. 29–31.

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conclusion.²⁵ Heightened by a sense of emasculation, because its neutrality was not of its own making but imposed by others in 1831, Belgian nation-building myths focus on the many impediments the country faced in attaining a genuine sense of nationhood. Today, Belgium is deemed a failed nation on the road to ‘national disintegration’,²⁶ and its historical neutrality plays a part in explaining why it failed. In this depiction, Ernst Renan’s nineteenth-century dictum – the essential condition for a successful nation is to ‘have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more’ – forms an essential thread.²⁷ Belgium could not become a true nation for, as a permanent neutral, it could not go to war and thereby missed out on undertaking any of Renan’s great nation-building deeds.

Such passive renderings of neutrality are furthered by the general histories of twentieth-century neutrality that focus on its ‘decline’ or ‘death’ through the course of two global and total wars.²⁸ The First and Second World Wars changed the international environment and ensured that neutrality became ‘illegal’ in 1945, as per Article 2 (4) of the United Nations Charter, a feat that the League of Nations had previously attempted but failed to enact in 1919.²⁹ During the Cold War, the countries that were allowed to remain neutralised in a world that was split between the might of the United States and the Soviet Union – namely

²⁵ Wylie, ‘Introduction’, p. 2. Cf S. de Schaepdrijver, ‘Champion or stillbirth? The symbolic uses of Belgium in the Great War’ in *How can one not be interested in Belgian history. War, language and consensus in Belgium since 1830*. Gent, Academia Press, 2005, pp. 55–81; S. de Schaepdrijver, ‘A signal service: neutrality and the limits of sacrifice in World War One Belgium’ in M. de Keizer, I. Tames, eds, *Small nations. Crisis and confrontation in the 20th century*. Zutphen, Netherlands Institute of War Documentation and Walburg Pers, 2007, pp. 64–9.

²⁶ H. van Goethem, *Belgium and the monarchy. From national independence to national disintegration*. University Press Antwerp, 2010, p. 11; M. Conway, *The sorrows of Belgium. Liberation and political reconstruction 1944–1947*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁷ E. Renan, ‘What is a nation?’, Sorbonne lecture, 1882. Available at www.nationalismproject.org/what/renan.htm.

²⁸ The best accounts of the ‘decline’ of neutrality are P. C. Jessup, ‘The birth, death and reincarnation of neutrality’, *American Journal of International Law* 26, 4, October 1932, pp. 789–93; Ørvik, *Decline of neutrality*; O. Riste, *The neutral ally. Norway’s relations with belligerent powers in the First World War*. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1965; J. W. Coogan, *The end of neutrality. The United States, Britain, and maritime rights, 1899–1915*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1981; L. Goetschel, ‘Neutrality, a really dead concept?’ *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, 2, 1999, pp. 115–39.

²⁹ P. M. Norton, ‘Between the ideology and the reality: the shadow of the law of neutrality’, *Harvard International Law Journal* 17, 2, Spring 1976, p. 250; Chadwick, *Traditional neutrality*, pp. 4, 59; Ogley, *Theory and practice*, pp. 97–8; J. L. Kunz, ‘Neutrality and the European War 1939–1940’, *Michigan Law Review* 39, 1940–1, p. 720. Also: J. M. Gabriel, *The American conception of neutrality after 1941*. Second edition. Houndsmills, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.

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Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Ireland and Austria – did so as anomalies.³⁰ Against the backdrop of total war and genocide, in an era of collective security and internationalism, and facing the prospect of global nuclear annihilation, no state could be genuinely neutral or impartial. As the international lawyer Hersch Lauterpacht astutely observed in 1936, ‘it is true to say that collective security and neutrality are mutually exclusive. The more there is of one the less there is of the other’.³¹ In other words, in the mid-to-late-twentieth-century world, neutrality became largely irrelevant in the stakes for international power.

As a result, our contemporary image of ‘the neutral’ is of passivity and inaction. It is also a decidedly vexed one. As an example, consider the moral indignation surrounding Switzerland’s conduct in the Second World War, a war in which this neutral country’s banks were actively involved in laundering Nazi loot and gold, much of which originated from the victims of the Holocaust.³² In the same vein, in 1991, the historian M. P. Böethius questioned Sweden’s neutrality by asking ‘whether the moral price for amoral self-interest [in the Second World War] was too high’.³³ That Switzerland and Sweden complied with the international legal obligations of neutrality in the war – which, on the whole, they did – has become a secondary matter to their humanitarian conduct.³⁴ Similarly, historians and other commentators often write about Ireland’s neutrality during and after this same war and present it in ethical terms.³⁵ In other words, what stands out most prominently in late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century discussions around neutrality is the moral overtones ascribed to neutrals and their neutrality.

³⁰ Cold War neutralism and non-alignment were not the same as classical neutrality: Ogley, *Theory and practice*, p. 22; G. Ginsburgs, ‘The Soviet Union as a neutral, 1939–1941’, *Soviet Studies* 10, 1, July 1958, p. 12.

³¹ In Q. Wright, ‘The present status of neutrality’, *American Journal of International Law* 34, 3, July 1940, p. 391, fn 4.

³² H. R. Regembogin offers a useful overview of the historiography on Switzerland’s ‘immoral’ neutrality in the Second World War: H. R. Regembogin, *Faces of neutrality. A comparative analysis of the neutrality of Switzerland and other neutral nations during WWII*. Berlin, Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2009, esp. pp. 11–22.

³³ In N. Andrén, ‘On the meaning and uses of neutrality’, *Cooperation and Conflict. Nordic Journal of International Studies* 26, 2, 1991, p. 76. Also: S. J. Rubin, ‘The Washington Accord fifty years later: neutrality, morality, and international law’, *American University International Law Review* 61, 1998–9, pp. 61–82.

³⁴ Cf D. F. Vagts, ‘Editorial comment: Switzerland, international law and World War II’, *American Journal of International Law* 91, 3, July 1997, pp. 466–75.

³⁵ R. M. Smyllie, ‘Unneutral neutral Eire’, *Foreign Affairs* 24, 317, 1945–6, pp. 317–26; Fisk, *In time of war*; T. C. Salmon, *Unneutral Ireland: an ambivalent and unique security policy*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989. Also: C. Wills, *That neutral island. A cultural history of Ireland during the Second World War*. Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press, 2007.

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Quite understandably, in the context of total war and genocide, impartiality is not laudable but rather despicable. How can a modern state and its citizens remain neutral in the face of a humanitarian crisis, like the Dutch peacekeepers at Srebrenica in 1995, who watched on helplessly as thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys were massacred by Serbian militants and their supporters for fear of overstepping their brief as impartial observers and peacekeepers? As the United Nations Ambassador at Large for War Crimes, David J. Scheffer, explained in 1998, “‘Neutrality’ in the face of genocide is unacceptable and must never be used to cripple or delay our collective response”.³⁶ Not surprisingly, in public perception, there could be no place for neutrals in or after the Manichean struggle that was the Second World War. At any rate, given that all the belligerents neglected or rejected the international laws that applied to neutrality, it was by principles rather than laws that the conduct of neutrals came to be judged. And, according to the standards of international morality after 1945, a neutral could only be classified as ‘truly neutral’ if it behaved according to a code of conduct that rejected militarism, profiteering and self-preservation in favour of humanitarianism and universal aid. In other words, the legal parameters that defined the status of neutrals and the available parameters for their conduct were, after 1945, largely overshadowed by generic perceptions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

In their excellent edited collection, *Neutrality in twentieth-century Europe* (2012), Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen and Sven Widmalm posit that through the course of the First World War, two almost oppositional ideas of neutrality developed: one promoted by the great powers, the other by the neutrals. Both depictions revolved around the ethics of neutrality in a new age of great-power politics. Where one was positive, however, the other was entirely negative.³⁷ The Dutch, Danes and Swedes promoted models of international existence and co-operation that focussed on peace, rationality and fairness, in which they could take on the role of moral great powers in a world gone awry.³⁸ In contrast, the great powers’ depiction focussed on the declining relevance of neutrality

³⁶ In E. Guttman, ‘The concept of neutrality since the adoption and ratification of The Hague Neutrality Convention of 1907’, *American University International Law Review* 14, 1998–9, p. 57.

³⁷ Lettevall et al., ‘Introduction’.

³⁸ G. Somsen, “‘Holland’s calling.’ Dutch scientists’ self-fashioning as international mediators”; S. Widmalm, “‘A superior type of universal civilization.’ Science as politics in Sweden 1917–1926”; H. Knudsen, H. Nielsen, ‘Pursuing common cultural ideals. Niels Bohr, neutrality, and international scientific collaboration during the interwar period’; and P. Lundell, ‘Legitimacy through neutrality. Resources of journalism in the international press visit to Sweden in 1923’, all in Lettevall et al., *Neutrality*.