

UNITED WISDOM

A Promise Made Without Fully Understanding Its Consequences

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *Be not rash with thy mouth*

Ecclesiastes 5:2, short excerpt, King James Version. The context concerns speech and vows before God, rather than a contemporary project-agreement procedure.

What this article is about

Olga agreed to prepare a small collection of family memories for an acquaintance. She expected a few stories to combine into a readable text. Reading the material revealed information about relatives, contested accounts, and an expectation of public release. These features existed from the beginning, but Olga did not clarify the task or understand her agreement's consequences. She now wants to say that, since she did not know, she promised nothing. Her acquaintance says that, since she promised, she must do everything. Both answers miss important differences.

In this hypothetical scene, recover the word given, each party's understanding, and the consequences of acting now. Incomplete knowledge can arise from unavoidable uncertainty, an unclarified condition, haste, or deliberately concealed information. It does not always cancel commitment or make every performance permissible. We will consider acknowledging mistaken understanding, retaining responsibility for expectations created, and avoiding expansion into an action never agreed. This supplies neither legal publication clearance nor guaranteed reconciliation. It examines an ordinary agreement accepted before its subject was understood clearly.

I. Recover What Was Accepted

The first question concerns words rather than impressions of character. Olga may have promised a collection for private reading, formatting without editing, or a finished public version. These are different tasks. Helping with memories does not alone say which was agreed. Recover the conversation, confirmation, and context known to both parties. One cannot retrospectively choose the narrowest interpretation solely to gain release, or consider the promise as broad as everything the recipient now wants.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Olga's understanding matters, but is not the only one. The acquaintance might have explicitly mentioned public release and Olga overlooked it. That differs from no such statement being made. Alternatively, the acquaintance may have assumed publicity without naming it and taken a quick answer as agreement to the whole plan. Both then need to see the discrepancy. The scene gives no grounds to assign malice to one person and innocence to the other in advance. An accurate history prevents clarification from becoming a contest over who calls deception loudest.

Actions after the words also matter. Olga requested photographs, accepted material, and supplied a deadline. These may have strengthened expectation even while publication remained unclear. Recognising this does not automatically make her agree to every public use. It shows why the episode cannot be described as no participation at all. Someone can misunderstand a significant part while creating intelligible reliance through their actions. That reliance needs attention during a pause, without necessarily requiring continuation of the initially imagined project without clarification.

Recovery is not a search for one magical word that releases or binds forever. Name the action, extent, audience, deadline, and authority insofar as they were genuinely understood. Sometimes a clear promise has an unknown consequence; sometimes the task is unclear; sometimes one conversation contains two different agreements. They need different next steps. It is better to preserve uncertainty than close it with confident claims about what nobody remembers or can confirm.

II. Incomplete Knowledge Has Different Forms

Nobody can know every future consequence of ordinary help. That does not make every agreement meaningless. Someone may understand a task while remaining uncertain about its duration or readers' response. This differs from not knowing that a family collection is to become public. The first concerns an uncertain result of a known action; the second may concern the action itself. Without this distinction, the general claim that nobody can foresee everything begins excusing failure to clarify even the audience.

Available and unavailable information also differ. Olga might have agreed before reading a short description, or failed to ask about release. Alternatively, she may have received an answer deliberately omitting a significant part. Assessment depends on that history. Not every ignorance is unavoidable, but knowledge unavailable through ordinary attention cannot be demanded. In either case, examine present capacities rather than use the error's origin as the sole answer to what should happen next.

In Nicomachean Ethics III.1, Aristotle distinguishes ignorance of particular circumstances from other errors; an agent's subsequent relation to the action also enters assessment. This is a

historical philosophical classification, rather than a modern consent test or measurement of sincere regret. The limited comparison asks what was unknown. We do not declare Olga an involuntary agent through her statement alone or derive automatic cancellation of every promise from the ancient text.

Name uncertainty at the task's level. Not knowing the audience, misjudging the extent, not reading conditions, and receiving an incomplete account are more precise than being used or being irresponsible. Large descriptions may express experience but do not specify corrective action. A particular account helps decide what needs clarification, what can continue, where separate agreement is necessary, and which expectation requires acknowledgment. It preserves distinctions among error, uncertainty, and deliberate misrepresentation without reading hidden motives.

III. Not Knowing Does Not Mean Having No Responsibility

Olga misunderstood public release. Her acquaintance has nevertheless deferred another formatting option and expects a result. Not every expectation was necessarily agreed, but an accepted deadline and requested material need acknowledgment. If Olga stops now, she can communicate, return what is available, and name the limit. That differs from claiming that incomplete initial understanding leaves all subsequent actions unrelated. An obligation to perform a definite task and responsibility for the transition created are different questions.

Responsibility must not be confused with obligatory continuation. Further action may expand harm or violate another person's consent. Acknowledging haste then does not require publishing everything for consistency's sake. One can pause an unconfirmed part while acknowledging agreement without sufficient clarification. This is stronger than choosing between doing everything and saying nothing happened. It reveals two independent errors: an initially unclear acceptance and a possible later action after the uncertainty becomes visible.

Haste also needs proportionate assessment. A small friendly collection requires no major publisher's procedures. Asking who will receive the result nevertheless concerns the task itself rather than an endless worldwide risk check. One can acknowledge not asking something necessary without accepting a duty to check every possible future risk. Precision protects against both self-justification and excessive self-accusation. The lesson concerns a particular available clarification that mattered to this agreement.

Responsibility appears in a reliable next message. Olga can say she initially understood a private collection, now sees a public-release question, and will not prepare publication before clarification. She also names what is already done and what she can provide. These words need not obtain immediate approval. They let the acquaintance decide with knowledge of the

work's present state. Acknowledging incomplete understanding contributes to correction when it is not used to disappear from a relationship already begun.

IV. Consent Is Not Created Solely by an Inner Wish

Olga may say she never inwardly intended a serious assignment. Her external answer may nevertheless have been definite enough for reasonable reliance. Inner reluctance does not always cancel what was communicated. This does not mean every word works independently of understanding. It requires distinguishing a concealed intention, intelligible expression, and actual ignorance of meaning. Otherwise, responsibility becomes inaccessible to another person who cannot know the secret reservation accompanying clear agreement.

In Treatise of Human Nature III.2.5, Hume explains promises' obligation through human conventions and social interaction. The selected passage distinguishes secretly changing intention from using an expression whose meaning is unknown and from an evidently unserious statement. This is his philosophical argument, not a universally accepted theory or contemporary law. The limited comparison preserves different states of speech, rather than letting one phrase about not wanting describe them all.

An intelligible external task matters here. If Olga clearly promised a private text, it has weight even if the work now seems harder. If she used an unfamiliar professional term, examine how it was explained and what the acquaintance could understand. Ignorance of technical vocabulary cannot automatically mean agreement to every action. Unexpected difficulty cannot prove that a simple initial task was never accepted. Meaning and workload are related but different questions.

This check restores both voices. Olga explains her first understanding without claiming to read thoughts. The acquaintance describes actual expectations and words. Their accounts may still differ afterwards. Define what is presently available without declaring agreement about the past's meaning. A new narrow task can be agreed while retaining the discrepancy. This is the authors' way of addressing uncertainty, not a procedure attributed to Hume or a proven technology for resolving conflict.

V. Another Person's Participation Cannot Be Included Without Grounds

Family memories concern people absent from the conversation. The acquaintance can speak for herself, but that does not automatically settle the use of others' details and photographs. Olga should not assume that accepting formatting gives authority to decide publication for everyone affected. The article establishes no legal requirements for particular material. Its ethical question is narrower: becoming a helper does not make another person's participation already obtained when nobody clarified it.

Agreement to a story may differ from agreement to its audience. Someone shared an event within a family and expected no public version. Accurate transcription does not make the transfer the same action. Publication is therefore not merely a technical formatting stage. It concerns what the recipient may do with the material. This feature existed from the plan's beginning but was not understood by Olga. Discovery imposes no automatic ban on the whole project, but makes earlier confidence insufficient for the next step.

Separate agreement must not become pressure to approve. A relative may be invited to respond but need not consider publicity good merely because work has begun. Olga's hours matter to assessing her participation, without authorising using another person as material without intelligible grounds. Excluding a part may change the result and deadline. Name the loss rather than blame the person who has only now gained an opportunity to say what they never accepted.

Not every conceivable reader must consent to every family proposal. Proportion concerns the actual subject: whose information is involved, what was promised, what transfer is proposed, and who can answer for that part. A significant legal issue needs an appropriate decision outside this article. The authors' distinction is no licence or legal clearance. It identifies where one's promise expanded into another person's action and restores absent participation before declaring the result ready for circulation.

VI. Pause the Unclear While Preserving the Definite

Uncertain publication need not require destroying every prepared paragraph. Private collection, disputed information, and unagreed public version may be separated. This is a possibility for discussion rather than an automatic solution. Separation alone does not make the remaining part ready for use. Its purpose and limits must also be understood. Olga might provide a draft for private reading while clearly stating that public release has not been checked or accepted by her as a completed assignment.

Separating work differs from secretly changing a result. If a finished publication was expected, an unexplained private draft leaves the same discrepancy beneath a different file. Name what is done, paused, and awaiting decision. The recipient need not consider the narrower result equivalent. They can accept, decline, or seek another contributor. Clear limits preserve choice instead of delivering an apparently complete object with invisible unreadiness inside it.

A new task requires separate agreement. Olga could offer editing several of the acquaintance's own stories without photographs or disputed details. Acceptance would create definite conditions, timing, and extent. The proposal alone does not prove agreed revision. Before a response, it remains an available possibility. Do not announce a joint decision when one party has merely named a convenient exit. Both must see the transition from an unclear beginning to a clear new task.

Pausing uncertainty should not become a habitual way of finishing nothing. Where something definite and permissible remains, decide whether to perform it, request release, or withdraw. One disputed point does not automatically cancel everything else. Particularity preserves a promise's weight without blind expansion. What matters is an honest description of several work states formerly gathered under one agreeable word, rather than a general declaration of no longer participating.

VII. Correct Haste Without a New Excessive Promise

Olga may try to make amends by promising to find every relative, verify every story, and produce a perfect free edition. Such expansive agreement sometimes arises precisely from shame about the first one. It risks repeating the same structure: a good motive again precedes understanding the extent. Correction needs to be more realistic than the original promise. Acknowledge the missing clarification and name an available part and response deadline. Sincere acknowledgment need not accept every possible future project.

Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 addresses hasty speech and vows before God, preferring no vow to an unfulfilled one. Its religious grounds, addressee, and image of judgment remain. The limited comparison encourages care before speaking, rather than automatic cancellation afterwards. A friendly collection is not declared a vow, and the text is not used as a threat to someone discovering misunderstanding. Speech and action remain related questions while the ancient context and ordinary scene remain distinct.

A particular acknowledgment matters. Agreeing without clarifying the audience is more precise than saying everything became completely different if the plan never changed. The latter may quietly attribute a later expansion that never happened. One can acknowledge an initial discrepancy while questioning how clear the description was. These facts need not identify a

single culprit. Honesty does not replace incomplete initial understanding with a later catastrophe simply because that better explains present reluctance.

The acquaintance may be disappointed. Her feeling does not prove Olga must publish everything; it may express lost time and expectation. Olga can limit participation without declaring disappointment manipulation. Both voices can remain without guaranteed agreement. Rejected proposed correction does not become completed correction. A precise outcome may consist in providing available material and clearly ending work, while recognising that the initially expected result was not secured.

VIII. Promise With the Limit of Knowledge Visible

Olga's next agreement could say she will inspect material before naming extent and timing, or format a private version while publicity requires separate consideration. These conditions need not turn friendly help into prolonged contracting. They make significant limits of knowledge visible. Conditional participation matters when genuinely identified as conditional. If trying is said initially but a deadline later confirmed definitively, the earlier reservation does not necessarily release the newly created definite expectation.

One need not guarantee the future to promise a present action. Promise reading a particular amount by a date without promising approval of the entire project. Accept formatting without accepting authority to distribute. Agree to one version and leave another for a separate response. These distinctions make a promise smaller but clearer. They guarantee no absence of conflict; they let participants see where a task ends and unaccepted expansion begins before another person's next work is built on it.

Complete knowledge is not a state to await forever. Ordinary tasks need reasonably clear purposes and significant conditions insofar as available. Persistent demands for absolute clarity can become refusal without acknowledgment. Clarification should answer a particular question capable of changing action. Audience, extent, and authority over others' information matter in this scene. Checking every conceivable future reader reaction supplies no comparable definiteness and need not become a condition of all participation.

A promise made without understanding consequences requires distinguishing the initial agreement's history from the present task. Ignorance can explain an error without erasing expectation. Acknowledgment can preserve responsibility without authorising unconfirmed performance. The next word can be narrower and more precise without promising to restore everything at once. Clarify audience and extent, communicate the work's state, and separately agree what follows. Responsibility then stops depending on two impossible extremes: knowing everything beforehand or treating uncertainty as agreement to everything.

What this means in practice

Choose an ordinary agreement whose consequences you understood incompletely. Recover its task, words, timing, and subsequent actions. Distinguish an unknown future result from an unknown significant part of the assignment itself. Identify what could have been clarified, what was not asked, and what might have been concealed, without declaring concealment a fact without grounds. In legal, dangerous, or professional situations, this practice replaces no qualified decision.

Name your initial understanding and what is known now. Do not describe an initial discrepancy as a later change if the feature already existed. Separately acknowledge expectations created through your deadline and actions. Examine what can permissibly continue and what needs consent or authority. Acknowledging haste does not grant control over others or require continuing an unconfirmed part for consistency.

Formulate one message: what is done, paused, unknown, and which limited option is proposed. Before a response, do not call the proposal agreed revision. Preserve the other party's refusal of a narrower result. If ending work, name that choice with its particular consequence and available correction without demanding immediate forgiveness.

For the next promise, state one significant limit of knowledge: inspection first, a separate audience decision, or a definite extent. Do not replace one excessive agreement with another larger one. This author-designed practice is no sincerity test and carries no research efficacy claim. It relates understanding, speech, and action more precisely so that an error becomes neither convenient disappearance nor permission to perform for another person something never clearly agreed.

Key quotation

> *the will alone is never supposed to cause the obligation*

David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature III.2.5, short excerpt, Project Gutenberg English text. The original sentence continues by requiring expression in words or signs; its context of human conventions is retained.

Connections between traditions

Source	Context	Limited comparison	Difference retained
Aristotle, III.1	Ignorance of particulars and action	What was unknown matters	No modern consent test
Hume, III.2.5	Human conventions and expressing a promise	Hidden reluctance differs from unknown meaning	A philosophical account, not universal consensus
Ecclesiastes 5:1–7	Hasty speech and vows before God	Care before speech and its relation to action	No threat or automatic cancellation
United Wisdom	Olga's hypothetical collection	Initial understanding, extent, and present agreement	The authors' sequence is not attributed to sources

Sources

• Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, Book III, W. D. Ross, MIT Classics. Continuous selected III.1 context was read, web lines 32–51, including ignorance of particulars and voluntary action; 39–48 is used. No literal quotation. The ancient classification supplies no contemporary diagnostic or legal test.

• David Hume. A Treatise of Human Nature, Project Gutenberg 4705. Selected continuous III.2.5 passages were read, web lines 3412–3453, with the opening argument 3406–3420 in displayed context; primarily 3448–3453 is used. The key quotation is a short fragment of 3448. The whole work is not claimed read; its polemic about religious sacraments is not transferred into the practice.

• Ecclesiastes, King James Version, Wikisource. Continuous selected 5:1–7 was read, web lines 288–299; the epigraph is 5:2's opening. KJV numbering and the religious addressee remain. Edition rights are not declared established worldwide; full texts are not imported.

Tags

promise, understanding, consequence, knowledge, uncertainty, condition, task, audience, consent, extent, deadline, haste, error, responsibility, expectation, publicity, memories, information, authority, clarification, pause, correction, boundary, trust, speech, Aristotle, Hume, Ecclesiastes

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a coauthor of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.