

UNITED WISDOM

Self-Respect and Dignity: What Remains after Failure?

The Person and the Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

I06 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *“Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add nor take away anything from this value.”*

Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, section I, 1785 work, translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. “This value” refers to good will in the surrounding passage, rather than any intention or outcome. The Russian version is this article's own translation of the English sentence.

What this article is about

After failure, a person faces several tasks at once. They need to understand what happened, acknowledge consequences, perhaps correct their work, and explain themselves to others. Another question arises alongside these: how should they regard themselves now? Its answer can easily merge with the assessment of an outcome. If a meeting falls through, does its organizer cease to deserve respectful treatment? If he retains self-respect, is he refusing to admit a mistake? These transitions warrant separate examination. Kant distinguishes the value of good will from its successful realization and gives dignity a particular moral foundation. Epictetus separates one's action from external conditions. Crocker and Park examine goals through which an outcome becomes validation of the whole person. These accounts do not form one theory or cancel disappointment. They help us hold specific responsibility alongside a relationship to someone who cannot be exhausted by one attempt, and ask what requires correction and what need not be earned anew with every success.

I. Two Questions after a Closed Door

In an invented case, Alexei organizes a reading-group meeting. He sends an announcement before final confirmation of the room, mistaking a preliminary agreement for a booking. At the appointed time, several participants arrive at a closed door. The meeting does not take place. Alexei wanted to bring people together to discuss a book, but a good plan does not establish whether the necessary actions were taken. Checking confirmation was possible, and its omission matters when evaluating the failure. An initial explanation should preserve those facts: the announcement was premature, people spent time coming, and he now needs to contact them and propose an understandable next step.

Another participant says, “After this, you are good for nothing.” The remark adds no information about the booking. It extends one case to every possible action Alexei might take. We can understand the frustration of someone who came unnecessarily while examining the grounds of that wider conclusion. Alexei can make the same substitution himself: “Because I let people down, nobody can deal with me.” The claim about trust needs qualification. Trust in the next meeting's organization may reasonably depend on a changed preparation process. A comprehensive assessment of all his relationships and qualities needs different grounds. The strength of disappointment does not supply those grounds by itself.

Self-respect and respectful conversation do not establish that Alexei organized everything correctly. They concern how to address the mistake and its author. People can identify an omission, require an answer, and decline the next event without treating this as permission to humiliate him. Conversely, admitting the error need not take the form of declaring himself worthless. We can distinguish two questions: what can now be trusted in this particular activity, and how should the person be addressed? Merging them creates a narrow choice between denying what happened to preserve oneself and accepting every label to acknowledge the facts. There remains room for a precise answer for an action.

II. Respect, Praise, and Trust

“Respect” names different relationships. We can admire a skill, praise an action, recognize someone's claim to be heard, or maintain a particular way of speaking to them. These uses do not require identical grounds. Praise for a well-organized meeting depends on its preparation. Trust in future organization depends on what is known about reliable action. Attending to an explanation does not require proof of excellent skill first. Without the distinctions, withholding praise can feel like withholding every kind of respect, while asking for respectful treatment can sound like asking others to praise a failure. Naming the object makes the disagreement more specific.

In Kant's argument, dignity contrasts with relative value, for which an equivalent can be found. In the selected part of section II, morality and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality have a distinctive foundation of value. This belongs to his philosophy of reason, autonomy, and moral legislation. It is not derived from counting successful events. At the same time, skills and usefulness can have relative value in that context. The distinction therefore does not make all work equally good. It asks whether a person can be measured entirely by the measure used to evaluate a skill's suitability for a task.

For Alexei, this distinguishes subjects for discussion rather than giving a ready-made legal answer. His current booking procedure may be unreliable. Participants can require room confirmation before the next announcement and need not admire his intention or trust him immediately. This does not establish that he must first organize a flawless event to be

addressed without humiliation. Respectful treatment here is not a reward for service quality. This is a moral position to consider, not an entitlement to a particular job, approval, or renewed attendance. Those claims require their own grounds.

Responsibility also needs role information: who was meant to obtain confirmation, what Alexei knew, and how the preliminary agreement was described. Clarifying roles avoids both placing the whole result on one person and dissolving identifiable actions into “it just happened.”

III. What Kant Says about Good Will

The epigraph might seem to justify any unsuccessful intention: I meant well, so the result changes nothing. The passage read in Kant is more demanding. He considers good will whose value does not simply come from its useful effect. Crucially, unsuccessful effort is distinguished from a bare wish: the discussion includes summoning all the means within one's power. This qualification matters. It does not permit an appealing account of intention to serve as sufficient evidence that someone took the reasonably necessary steps. Calling an intention good cannot replace inquiry into what was actually done.

In our fictional case, the question about means is concrete. Was there a way to check the booking? Who should have received confirmation? What did Alexei mistake for final agreement? If available actions were omitted, “I wanted a meeting” does not end the discussion. A second invented version might involve a confirmed room and accurate information, followed by the building's unexpected closure on the day. The organizer could not have foreseen it. No meeting takes place in either version, but identical outcomes do not establish identical preparation. Such a conclusion requires knowledge of actions and conditions, not merely whether the event appeared in the calendar.

This difference does not give us a complete moral assessment of Alexei's will. We consider available means and a described act; the scene does not exhaust his motives or character. Kant's valuation of good will also does not erase consequences for participants. Their lost time remains part of the event even if preparation was careful. Moral assessment, usefulness of an outcome, and the need for a subsequent response can diverge. Preserving the distinctions means neither turning a good plan into absolution nor treating every external failure as conclusive evidence of bad will. In each direction, specificity helps: which means were available, which were used, and what happened nevertheless? These questions keep both the attempted action and its effects in view.

IV. Epictetus and the Boundary of Action

At the beginning of the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus distinguishes what is in our control from what is not. This is part of Stoic instruction concerning judgment and action. Its categorical language expresses the source's position rather than contemporary experimental proof of complete control over inner responses. For a present discussion, we can first notice the distinction's structure: intention and chosen action are not identical to every condition and consequence encountered in carrying them out. We can then consider how persuasive the Stoic position itself is. Using a distinction need not require adopting an entire school.

In section 4, Epictetus uses the example of visiting a bath. Alongside accomplishing the external purpose, he proposes maintaining another aim: a particular manner of acting. This makes it possible to discuss an interrupted activity without claiming the external objective was achieved. Applied to the invented meeting, the distinction yields two questions: what did Alexei intend to organize, and how did he choose to treat people when organization failed? The second becomes visible after the failure. He might disappear, accuse participants of expecting too much, or give an accurate explanation and begin repair. These concern subsequent action, although circumstances can limit available choices here as well.

We should not infer that premises, health, coercion, grief, or an insult cannot harm someone. A reader may reject or qualify the Stoic demand for independence from external things. Nor can the distinction establish, without knowing circumstances, “you could always have acted otherwise.” Actual constraints need investigation rather than replacement with a philosophical diagram. Its limited use here is to recall several objects of assessment: an external aim, available actions, chosen treatment of others, and conditions not determined by one person alone. Failure of an aim leaves action open to discussion. It does not promise command of every feeling or every consequence, or require pretending that the failed meeting was unimportant.

V. Responsibility without Total Condemnation

Responsibility begins by acknowledging a connection between action and consequences. Alexei might say, “I sent the announcement without final confirmation, so you came to a meeting that could not take place.” This names an action, omission, and effect. “I am a terrible person” sounds harsher but tells people less about what needs correction. Others might even have to comfort him instead of receiving information about what happens next. This is a possible feature of a fictional conversation, not proof of a hidden attempt to manipulate sympathy. A broad confession should not be treated as evidence of either motive without further grounds.

An answer may include acknowledgment of inconvenience, clarification of commitments, and a change in preparation. His relationship to himself does not replace any of these. Preserving a claim to be heard does not compel participants to forgive him immediately or attend again. He can propose a response; each person may accept or refuse it. Self-respect is compatible with diminished trust in a specific activity. The promise “everything will be perfect now” may again detach the discussion from checkable conditions. Confirming the room before announcing is less sweeping but more informative. It addresses the particular missing step instead of trying to repair the whole image of the organizer in one sentence.

Kant's distinction between dignity and a skill's relative usefulness helps us ask why correction would require total condemnation. The Stoic distinction between an external aim and one's action draws attention to available continuation. Their grounds differ, and neither proves that a calm conversation will restore a relationship. Refusal, disappointment, and loss of a role remain possible. Yet these consequences can be discussed at their actual scale. Alexei can acknowledge that he is not presently ready to organize alone without making the absence of that skill his complete self-description. An evidence-based restriction of a role can itself be respectful. Respect does not require assigning a task despite what is known about its preparation.

VI. A Condition for Personal Acceptability

Crocker and Park consider goals through which success in a valued domain validates personal worth. Here the added meaning might be, “If I did not organize the meeting, I am no longer acceptable as a person.” This differs from regretting the participants' lost time. One concerns an action's consequences; the other establishes a condition for regarding oneself. We can distinguish them without claiming to know all Alexei's motives. The review acknowledges that proposed goals were often inferred from behaviour, and its conclusion calls for more direct tests. A possible interpretation is therefore not a finding about this fictional individual, much less about a reader.

Kantian dignity and felt worth in the psychological review answer different questions. The former concerns a moral foundation for treating people; the latter concerns possible motivation and experience. A painful feeling does not refute a moral principle, while a moral principle does not establish that the feeling will immediately disappear. “You must respect yourself; Kant has explained it” can add a new demand to existing disappointment. Someone may understand an argument and still experience failure painfully. Understanding is not a measurement of their state and does not replace time, companionship, or assistance that they may need. Philosophical agreement does not require an immediate emotional performance.

The review's authors also do not expect identical costs in every pursuit of self-validation. They acknowledge advantages of self-esteem and leave research questions open. Wanting to

organize something well cannot by itself diagnose dependence on approval. A more useful question is what a successful meeting is supposed to demonstrate. It may show that a preparation process works or bring pleasure in shared discussion. Proving the whole person's worth is an additional demand. When someone identifies that demand in their own wording, it can be examined as a question rather than made into further evidence that they are wrong. Even the wish to become entirely independent of evaluation can become another condition for being acceptable.

VII. Other People Remain Ends Too

Self-respect after failure can be discussed exclusively from the perspective of the person who made the mistake. In the meeting case, other people's plans have been disrupted. In the selected part of section II, Kant asks that humanity be treated as an end rather than merely used as a means. The selected continuation gives others' ends a positive place in our actions as well. Applied to the scene, this asks whether participants are recognized as people with purposes of their own rather than an audience required to restore the organizer's favourable opinion of himself. Their experience matters alongside his explanation.

Alexei may ask to have his explanation heard. His disappointment cannot establish a duty for others to comfort him at once. A participant who will no longer give an evening to the group is not necessarily denying Alexei's dignity; they may be revising a particular commitment. Refusing humiliation differs from being willing to hear a grounded complaint. Sometimes someone can request a conversation about actions and consequences while avoiding an insulting reply. This is a proposed conversational boundary, not a guarantee that the other person will accept it. An explanation can be offered respectfully without obtaining the response the speaker wants.

In section 24, Epictetus discusses helping friends and maintaining fidelity when material resources are unavailable. Compared with Kant's attention to others' ends, this permits a distinction between lacking a resource and disregarding a person. The traditions do not provide one theory of obligation. A concrete commitment may require a concrete act, and language about fidelity does not substitute for it. Alexei has no confirmed room but can say so in time. The absence of one possibility leaves questions about others. Respect for himself and the participants meets in accurate information, clear promises, and recognition that their participation does not belong to him unconditionally. Preserving his own voice should not remove theirs.

VIII. What Can Be Restored?

After failure, someone may want everything restored at once: the event, trust, the mood, and their previous self-image. These aims have different conditions. A meeting can be moved if a room and willing participants are available. Trust may depend on several later actions rather than one persuasive speech. People's mood may not improve alongside organizational quality. The lost evening cannot literally be returned. These distinctions do not prohibit repair; they make it possible to promise an action that can be undertaken instead of demanding that everything return to its previous state. Repair can be worthwhile even when it cannot reverse the past.

Alexei could send a message with verified information and the proposal's limits. A new date may still be under discussion, the room unconfirmed, and participation voluntary. If he knows only part of the situation, he can identify it as part. Participants do not necessarily need his complete inner account of dignity. Their decision principally concerns whether another meeting can take place and whether they want to attend. Here self-respect is connected to avoiding promises made for immediate relief. This connection is editorial moral reasoning: these sources do not test its efficacy in restoring relationships. Accurate information remains worthwhile without that extra promise.

There is also a boundary to restoring a role. Alexei might organize jointly with a more experienced member or step back from the duty for a while. This can be a responsible adjustment rather than surrender of his identity. Help requires agreement about who does what.

A revised procedure can also be checkable: announce only after an answer identifies the date and room; let another organizer see that answer; describe preliminary consent as preliminary. Such a procedure cannot guarantee the event in every circumstance. It addresses the particular gap between an assumption and a message. Having a record does not certify good will, but it can help people understand the same working condition. Continuation remains a practical undertaking rather than a ceremony to restore a flawless image.

IX. A Principle Need Not Feel Perfect

Dignity as a moral principle and self-respect as a relationship someone tries to maintain need not come with a stable pleasant feeling. Alexei can recognize a claim to respectful conversation while experiencing shame or frustration. This article cannot establish what he should feel or how long that experience should last. The demand to stop feeling ashamed immediately can become another assessment of correctness. Organizational failure would then acquire an added “failure” to remain calm. To avoid that step in our argument, we separate the basis of treatment from a requirement to produce a particular inner state. The distinction leaves room for a feeling without treating it as the whole moral case.

Kant does not offer an emotional relief technique in the selected passages. Epictetus gives instruction within his school. The psychological review discusses possible goals and limitations on research conclusions. Combining them should therefore not look like an established recovery programme. A reader can use their distinctions while questioning Stoic categorical claims or Kant's foundation of dignity. Wholesale agreement is unnecessary. It is enough to understand which thought is being considered and why it seems relevant to a particular question. A source can contribute to inquiry without becoming an instruction to adopt every aspect of its view.

This leaves room for gradual clarification. Today Alexei might manage only to report that the meeting failed. Later he examines the booking procedure, then decides which role to retain. These actions need not follow this order; it is one possible fictional sequence. Its point is that he need not present a fully repaired self-image before making the first accurate statement. Asking for help can also be part of responsibility. It does not cancel another person's contribution or demonstrate weakness of the entire personality. A person's treatment matters while correction remains unfinished and the outcome still gives no reason for praise. Respect need not wait for the story to acquire a successful ending.

X. What Remains after Failure?

The fact remains: the meeting did not happen. So do consequences for those who came, questions about preparation, and questions about available action. Neither dignity nor self-respect erases this information. But it does not exhaust everything that can be said about Alexei. People can evaluate the booking process, limit a future role, and check a new promise. Each judgment has an object and grounds. A verdict about the entire person does not gain grounds merely because it is spoken loudly or because the person is willing to accept it. The reach of the conclusion still needs examination.

Kant offers a moral basis for distinguishing dignity from the relative value of a result or skill. Epictetus separates an external aim from one's action, although his demand for independence

from external things remains open to a modern reader's disagreement. Crocker and Park let us consider when a task acquires the additional purpose of validating the whole person, without presenting that model as an account of every case. The sources have connections and differences. Keeping both visible helps us discuss actual responsibility alongside the limits of what a failure establishes. The distinct questions do not have to disappear into a new all-purpose measure.

Self-respect here is not a prize for a perfect attempt. It can be expressed in naming an error without a totalizing label, listening without requiring admiration, and promising a checkable continuation. This is a proposed understanding rather than a measured psychological outcome. A reader may refine or reject it. The practical question remains: how should those involved be treated, and what precisely needs correction? Its answer need not wait until the person becomes successful again. Respect can accompany work on an error, including restrictions and unwelcome consequences. After failure, there remains both something to do and the possibility of doing it as a person who is not reducible to the closed door.

What this means in practice

For a manageable reflection, choose a small everyday failure that you feel able to discuss now. If you do not want to revisit one, the article's invented case is enough. First describe what happened and whom it affected. Separate observed information from guesses about another person's attitude: “they arrived and left” reports an event; “they will never respect me again” requires further grounds. There is no need to replace an unpleasant fact with a pleasing version.

Next name available means and actions. What was known beforehand, what could have been checked, and which possibilities were genuinely unavailable? A point can remain unknown and be investigated later. You need neither a complete defence nor proof of total fault. A specific question about an omission, constraint, or mistaken assumption is more useful here. If someone else was affected, their description of the consequences may matter too.

A third note concerns continuation. What will you undertake, and what can you not yet promise? Possibilities include a short explanation, corrected information, a request for help, or discussion of a new commitment. Separately identify treatment you regard as acceptable during that conversation. It can include both accurate criticism and refusal of an insulting label. The other person remains free to decline your proposal.

This optional sequence was devised for the article. It is neither a test of good will nor a measure of dignity or a treatment, and it promises no emotional relief. You may stop after one note, discuss the case with a suitable person, or leave the exercise aside. Its purpose is to hold

specific responsibility alongside limits on generalization without demanding an already improved emotional state.

Key quotation

> *“Some things are in our control and others not.”*

Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, section 1. Complete opening sentence from the MIT Internet Classics Archive text, attributed there to Elizabeth Carter. This archive rendition uses modern-looking language; correspondence with a specific printed Carter edition has not been established here. The Russian wording is this article's own translation.

Connections between traditions

1. External outcome — manner of acting. Kant's section I considers good will without success and the means available; Epictetus's section 4 distinguishes visiting the bath from maintaining one's conduct. The connection permits outcome and attempted action to be assessed separately. Moral will and Stoic accordance with nature have different foundations, and neither passage automatically excuses omitted reasonable actions.

2. Dignity — contingent self-validation. Kant's section II distinguishes dignity from relative value; Crocker and Park, pages 392–393, describe staking self-validation on a domain of success. The connection separates a moral basis of treatment from psychologically considered dependence on outcomes. A painful feeling does not refute a principle, and the review does not experimentally prove Kant's philosophy.

3. A person as an end — limits of control. Kant's section II formulates treatment of humanity as an end; Epictetus's section 1 distinguishes one's action from external things. The comparison asks how a person should be treated and what was actually available to their action. Respect guarantees neither success, praise, nor unrestricted authority; a Stoic distinction cannot replace inquiry into present circumstances.

4. Assistance — attention to another person's end. Epictetus's section 24 considers fidelity without material resources; Kant's selected continuation of section II gives others' ends positive significance. The connection distinguishes lack of a resource from disregard for someone and asks about available action. The accounts of obligation differ; actual commitments can require repair that language about fidelity cannot replace.

5. Audience approval — a self-validation goal. Epictetus's section 23 challenges pleasing others as a governing aim; Crocker and Park's conclusion on page 407 calls for testing inferred goals and qualifies the universality of costs. The connection allows us to ask what approval has come to mean without claiming to have established a hidden motive.

Appreciation, feedback, and concern for relationships do not thereby become a diagnosis of dependency.

6. A skill's value — a verdict on the whole person. Kant's section II distinguishes a skill's relative value from the foundation of dignity; Crocker and Park, pages 392–393, consider the significance of domain success for general self-evaluation. The connection offers different grounds for examining an extended verdict after a skill failure. It does not equalize performances, certify character, or establish entitlement to a particular role or job.

Primary sources

1. Immanuel Kant. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 1785 work, translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. Reading used Project Gutenberg 5682: translator metadata, selected preface, the opening of section I on good will, and a selected continuous passage in section II on ends, autonomy, and dignity. “Edition 10” identifies an electronic version rather than a verified print edition. The epigraph is a complete sentence in section I; its Russian translation was made from the English read here. The whole work and German original were not separately read. The argument is used as moral philosophy rather than a psychological scale or modern legal conclusion.

2. Epictetus. *The Enchiridion*, MIT Internet Classics Archive, with Elizabeth Carter named as translator. Displayed sections 1–29 up to the opening of 29 were read, especially sections 1, 4, 6, and 23–25. The key quotation is the complete first sentence of section 1, with an own Russian translation. A specific print edition and the textual history of this modern-looking archive rendition have not been established; full collation with Carter's translation or Greek is not claimed. Stoic instruction is not presented as demonstrated therapy or proof that external circumstances cannot cause harm.

3. Jennifer Crocker and Lora E. Park. *The Costly Pursuit of Self-Esteem*, *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(3), 2004, 392–414. Genuine primary reading from this same working session is explicitly reused: the opening on pages 392–394, selected passages on contingencies and alternative goals, and the complete conclusion on page 407. Most middle sections and cited original studies were not separately read. The goal account and its limits are considered separately from the moral concept of dignity. No direct quotation or questionnaire reproduction is used.

Tags

self-respect, dignity, failure, respect, responsibility, Immanuel Kant, Epictetus, good will, autonomy, moral philosophy, Stoicism, goals, outcome of action, available means, error, repair, trust, praise, recognition, relationship to oneself, contingent self-esteem, Jennifer Crocker, Lora Park, limits of control, others' ends, commitments, respectful conversation, personal role, limits of generalization, everyday choice

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 co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.