

UNITED WISDOM

Inner voices: a dialogue with yourself to see different positions

Human Nature and Inner World

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Epigraph

> *affirming and denying*

Plato, Theaetetus, Socrates's statement in the selected discussion of thinking. Benjamin Jowett, Gutenberg No. 1726, displayed line 1739. A philosophical statement by a dialogue's character, rather than a universal account of personality's structure.

What this article is about

Someone receives an invitation to speak in another city. One thought urges acceptance: this opportunity has long been awaited. Another mentions money. A third returns to a promised family weekend. Trying to find the single genuine answer sounds like an argument: which of these is me, and which merely interferes? A narrower question is available. What grounds support each proposal, which facts are known, and what needs clarifying? This fictional scene lets us consider inner dialogue as a voluntary way of presenting positions while keeping the decision with the person.

Here, “voices” means different perspectives that can be formulated, rather than independent beings within us. People can record reasons, change roles in their reasoning, or think without this image altogether. We compare selected philosophical texts, limited scientific information, and a contemporary writing practice. It promises no inner harmony, diagnoses no personality, and is no treatment. What matters is an examinable outcome of a small consideration: has the question become clearer, and on what grounds is a next step possible?

I. Naming a position does not explain it

Calling one position brave and another fearful is easy. Yet the names have already distributed respect: courage looks like a virtue, fear like an obstacle. Beginning with this judgment can end the conversation before a reason is heard. In our scene, the cautious thought knows about a payment due next week. Quick acceptance is possible, but that payment does not disappear when an attractive name wins. It is better to record the proposals literally first: I want to go; I want to keep the amount needed for an obligation; I want to fulfill a promise. For now, these are three positions rather than three characters.

It helps to notice the argument's hidden subject. One reason concerns the speaking opportunity's value, another the ability to pay for travel, and the third another party to an agreement. These questions are connected but distinct. We can value an invitation and lack money for a ticket. We can find funding and still need a family conversation. Mixing the levels makes every objection look like a rejection of the entire life the journey symbolizes. Literal wording brings the argument back to the size of a specific task and allows several grounds to remain valid together.

Role names can help orientation when people choose them themselves and remain willing to revise them. An organizer might ask about time, an explorer about a new opportunity, and a keeper of agreements about an earlier promise. This is an editorial frame for one situation. It establishes no permanent personality parts and requires no fourth inner participant. Tomorrow, an expense table might describe the same task more conveniently. The form's usefulness depends on what was clarified rather than on the imaginary council's growing cast. The chosen metaphor remains a tool that can be put aside.

Two genuinely different statements are enough to begin. There is no need to create an inner drama when a ticket price needs checking. Nor should an absence of argument be treated as superficiality. Sometimes a decision is clear and involves no important unknowns. Sometimes people prefer a list, drawing, or conversation with a real listener. Our practice offers one form of involvement while preserving others. For this invitation, it matters to see three grounds and avoid declaring one false merely because it is inconvenient for the desired story about ourselves.

II. A question and answer need a shared subject

In the selected Theaetetus passage, Socrates describes thinking through conversation with oneself: questions, answers, and forming an opinion. A limited primary dialogue in Benjamin Jowett's translation was read, rather than the whole work. The statement does not prove that everyone thinks alike or that a written conversation improves decisions. For our purpose, it opens an opportunity to ask what is being asserted and challenged. Selected passage.

An inner argument can look rich while its participants answer different questions. One says the opportunity is rare, another that the return journey ends late, a third that recognition would be welcome. None has refuted another. For discussion to emerge, a shared subject can be chosen: can I accept this particular invitation on these conditions? Each position can then state what matters to the answer. Rarity remains a reason concerning value, a late return a time constraint, and a wish for recognition part of the motive. The differences become visible without needing to defeat one another immediately.

The next question concerns grounds. What do I know about the invitation, what do I assume, and what do I want? Organizers might have offered accommodation without mentioning travel. Wanting to hear a funding promise does not make it received. Written conversation becomes substantive when this boundary holds. We can give enthusiasm a strong reason and still mark the unknown amount. We can recognize the family's wish for time together without attributing a precise answer to relatives before asking them. The internal form does not replace external information.

Distinguishing an answer from a change of subject also helps. A question about travel may receive a memory of a previous unsuccessful talk. That memory deserves consideration if it matters, but establishes no ticket price. It can be recorded separately before returning to the initial subject. This does not prohibit complexity in experience. It permits successive consideration in which no question must settle all the others simultaneously. In our scene, learning the invitation's terms first, then considering cost, the promise, and our wish to participate is enough.

III. A strong objection is more useful than a caricature

In the selected Chapter II passage of On Liberty, Mill proposes understanding the other side's reasons in persuasive form, including hearing their actual defenders. This is a philosophical argument about understanding opinions, rather than research into our writing exercise. We make a limited comparison: an imagined objection can be formulated so that it challenges something substantial. It still does not replace an existing person's answer. Passage read.

Caricatured caution says: never try anything. A call to live bravely defeats it easily. A strong cautious position might say something else: I support speaking if travel leaves the amount needed for an essential obligation intact. An examinable condition appears. Enthusiasm need not be a caricature of irresponsibility either. It can recall that the event fits a chosen work direction and has limited availability. When both positions are represented fairly, the argument stops serving only a predetermined outcome. It discovers the cost and possible conditions of a decision.

We can check our record by asking whether a real supporter of the position would agree that its essential reason has been stated. If that person is absent, no certain answer is available. This makes avoiding mockery and convenient exaggeration particularly worthwhile. An objection need not become ultimately correct to deserve accurate representation. Its function is to show a boundary our favored proposal should consider. For the invitation, this might be an expense, agreement, or need to prepare. Once conditions are clarified, some objections disappear, others remain, and others prove to concern another stage.

We should avoid creating symmetry for beauty's sake. Sometimes one position rests on an established fact and another on an unconfirmed assumption. Equal numbers of lines do not make them equally strong grounds. Fair representation lets this be noticed rather than hidden. A real payment date is not balanced by dreaming that it will postpone itself. We can investigate postponement, but it is not yet confirmed. Inner dialogue remains a way to see the quality of reasons. It neither votes for a pleasant option nor owes a compromise between fact and desire merely because both appeared in the mind.

IV. A value differs from a prediction

A reason can look unified while combining different statements. I want to speak because it matters to my work and will certainly bring new commissions. The first part expresses a wish, the second an assessment of fit with work, and the third a prediction. Even if the first two make sense to the person, the third needs separate grounds. Such analysis does not weaken the wish. It helps avoid using a strong personal value as proof of any expected effect. Travel can matter without guaranteeing commissions; the decision then includes that uncertainty.

The family position can also contain different layers. A weekend was promised: an available fact of an agreement. Reliability matters to me: a personal assessment. My relatives will never understand: a prediction about their reply. The last does not follow automatically from the first two. We can acknowledge a promise and still ask whether change is possible. We may hear a refusal that must be considered. Inner conversation is useful when it turns an unchecked prediction into a question for real participants. It preserves their right to answer differently and keeps an imagined conversation from replacing an agreement.

Some values genuinely conflict. Someone may value both new work and time together. There is no need to find a hidden true value that nullifies the other forever. Priorities, conditions, and the cost of a chosen step can be discussed in this situation. Declining the invitation need not declare the wish to speak nonexistent. If travel is agreed, family time's importance does not disappear. The decision concerns the current combination of circumstances. This limitation allows different choices later, without turning every junction into an examination of permanent identity and loyalty to one inner voice.

Different sentence beginnings can be used in the record: I know, I assume, I want, this matters to me, I need to clarify. They guarantee no precision but make the claimed status visible. Then check whether the content fits its beginning. If “I know” introduces everyone's future disappointment, perhaps it is an assumption. If “I must” introduces a personal preference, the obligation's source deserves examination. For the invitation, this work can end with a short list: the cost is unknown, a promise exists, participation is wanted, and changing the date needs discussion.

V. Scientific comparison and metaphor have boundaries

Alderson-Day and colleagues compared elicited dialogic and monologic inner-speech scenarios and associated activations. The complete abstract and bibliographic record were read, rather than the entire text and methods. This is no test of life decisions' quality or the proposed writing exercise's effectiveness. Print publication was in 2016, electronic publication in 2015. PubMed.

The selected account does not establish that an inner council is always more useful than a list or that everyone should develop a particular speech form. An investigated difference does not determine a person's needed practice. Here the result is assessed at the level of the consideration itself: did precise questions appear, and was necessary information checked? We do not infer brain states from the number of written roles. A research term does not stamp every contemporary exercise using similar words as true. A measured-effect claim would require corresponding research, which is not presented here.

The word “voices” has another boundary. Voluntarily formulated written positions should not automatically be equated with experiencing audible voices. This article neither establishes a diagnosis nor teaches self-diagnosis. If someone hears voices as sounds that others do not hear, seek urgent medical advice; immediate danger to themselves or another person calls for emergency help in their country. The NHS guidance read concerns a medical question a writing exercise cannot resolve. British service numbers are not transferred to other countries.

This boundary avoids diagnosing ordinary disagreement while also avoiding disguising a difficult experience with an attractive philosophical name. Within this article, people choose the reasons they record and retain the right to stop. If the form does not suit them, they can describe the question ordinarily or talk to an appropriate professional about the task itself. For travel arrangements, that may be the event organizer; a medical question requires another kind of help. Declining one editorial form means neither failure in self-work nor a lack of inner maturity.

VI. Volume and repetition provide no additional votes

One thought may return several times: accept, accept, accept. In writing, three repetitions can look like three votes for travel. But the grounds remain the same until new information is added. Repetition may be a significant experience for someone, yet creates no two additional independent arguments. It helps to ask what changed between the thought's returns. Did a new reason or qualification appear, or only the same phrase? We provide no universal mechanism explaining repetition; we distinguish its role in present reasoning from the number of grounds available for a decision.

Emotional force does not determine truth either. A very anxious prediction about family conflict may be wrong, as may a calm assumption about expenses. A feeling deserves attention, but a statement needs checking separately. We can record how difficult considering an option feels, then name the facts needed to assess it. This does not demand eliminating emotion for correct thought. It prevents emotion from having to perform evidence's work. In our scene, anxiety before speaking can coexist with the event's real fit with work, while joy can coexist with a financial constraint.

Appointing the final decision by a majority of voices is also difficult. If someone invented the participants and their number, adding supporters may be a way to obtain the desired outcome. Four enthusiasts and one budget keeper do not form an independent assembly. The grounds' quality matters, alongside the person's right to decide while considering cost and commitments. An imaginary council can show different sides of a question. It does not remove authorship of choice, supply a collective guarantee, or distribute responsibility among characters who cannot be questioned about a real action's consequences.

A practical check can be brief. Combine repeated reasons, keep the different ones, and mark essential unknowns. If a new question appears, consideration has advanced. If the record has merely lengthened, we can stop and return to the source of missing information. There is no need to continue until the inner conversation becomes solemnly unanimous. It can end by establishing disagreement that must be considered. For the invitation, this result is sufficient: I want to participate, the cost is unknown, and the promise needs a real conversation. No item must disappear for a pleasant feeling of complete composure.

VII. Self-accusation can become an examinable condition

“You always miss everything” looks like a reason but does not say what needs deciding now. It judges a whole person and leaves little room for checking. We can ask which particular case is involved and what action would be enough today. If the invitation remains open, today's question is to learn its terms and reply deadline. If the deadline has passed, the question changes: are clarification, another option, or simply acknowledging a lost opportunity available? A sweeping judgment replaces none of these distinctions and provides no new information about the present task.

Turning it into a condition does not require inventing a benevolent meaning for every harsh phrase. Sometimes a concrete concern can be found behind it; sometimes no grounds emerge. This can be recorded honestly. We should not promise that every inner accusation has a wise protector that must be discovered. That would be another unconfirmed theory. Our practice asks a limited question: does the phrase contain examinable information or an action proposal? If not, people can decline to use it as a reason, preserving an unpleasant experience's existence without a duty to prove its fairness.

The condition must also remain proportionate. Replacing “I am hopeless” with “I must speak perfectly to deserve acceptance” transfers the same judgment into a new form. A more precise condition concerns the actual task: knowing the subject, agreeing on duration, and having time to prepare material. It can be met, changed, or recognized as unavailable. People need not prove their worth beforehand. The decision concerns participation in a specific event rather than permission to exist professionally or regard a life as fulfilled. This is an editorial ethical limit of the suggested consideration.

Sometimes, instead of arguing with an accusation, it helps to return to the external subject. Open the email, see the deadline, clarify funding. This is not declared a way to eliminate all difficult thoughts. It may supply information the conversation lacked. If the question is settled, the record can end; if a difficult experience remains, it need not end with the table. Inner dialogue does not undertake every task a person has. For the invitation, its limited work is to present essential grounds and help formulate the next question, leaving the unfinished unfinished.

VIII. An imagined reply is not another person's agreement

Someone might write the family's reply: we do not want you to go. This is a plausible possibility, rather than a received answer. Even if built on previous conversations, circumstances may have changed. It helps to name the mode in the record: I am imagining a possible objection. Then ask the participants if the decision depends on their involvement or changing an agreement. Imaginary dialogue can prepare wording. It grants no authority to approve travel in someone else's name or attribute refusal to a person who has not replied.

This also applies to a desired reply. An internal permission of “they will surely support me” does not make changing a promise accomplished. We can clearly state our wish, the invitation's terms, and a proposed option. Another person can accept, clarify, or decline. This meeting may be harder than the prepared scene because the listener need not match our construction. That is why their real participation is substantive. It brings information and a position that our own writing cannot guarantee. Inner consideration retains its usefulness as preparation when it does not declare itself a completed external conversation.

Not every choice needs someone else's approval. If travel concerns only a person's free time and resources, they can decide independently. But an agreement or shared resource changes the question: who does the action actually affect? This is no call to seek permission for an entire life. It distinguishes personal choice, a request for involvement, and changing a shared condition. In our scene, a family weekend was promised, giving the conversation a specific subject. Without that promise, the discussion might have a different status and scope.

After a real conversation, the record can be updated. What did the person say, what remains unknown, and which conditions were accepted? The answer need not be fitted to a favorite inner role. If relatives proposed another time, this is new information. If the organizer declined travel funding, that is a new condition too. The consideration has changed, and the decision can change with it. This capacity for updating distinguishes a working record from a finished psychological portrait. Participants remain people with their own circumstances, rather than characters who must stay in their previous cast for an attractive inner council's completeness.

IX. A sufficient conversation can end in disagreement

Return to the invitation. Suppose expenses are clarified, family time discussed, and preparation possible. The person decides to go and still regrets the other option. Regret's presence does not prove a mistaken choice. It can indicate the continuing value of what was relinquished. A decision can be made without demanding happiness from every represented position. This is an editorial possibility rather than an established universal law of experience. Clearly naming the accepted action and its cost matters, while leaving room for feelings that need not vanish when the reply is sent.

If conditions prevent travel, someone can decline and continue wanting to speak. The wish need not declare itself absurd for the decision to stand. Another format, date, or future invitation can be explored when actually available. Sometimes no such options exist. Then a limited result is understanding the present obstacle without turning it into a permanent verdict on one's direction. Inner conversation can retain two statements together: participation matters; this participation does not fit current conditions. Their coexistence does not require treating someone as fragmented or incapable of deciding.

It helps to choose a completion condition. We have clarified essential information, discussed the needed agreement, and know the next step. Or we have established what is missing and formulated a question for its source. Either can end the current record. Continuing until doubt disappears completely is unnecessary. Sometimes doubt merely repeats a known cost. New roles need not be created to obtain final unanimity. A short reason for the decision, a time to reconsider if circumstances change, and a right to return without restarting every day can remain.

Inner voices remain the name of a chosen form of reflection. Their usefulness depends on whether they helped reveal a position and check its reason, rather than on a dramatic experience's force. Philosophical texts offer different prompts for consideration; a scientific abstract is not declared proof of its effect. Real participants retain their own answers. People retain authorship of decisions and the right to choose another working form. Conversation with oneself can then end in an ordinary email to an organizer, clarification of a condition, or a refusal requiring no inner trial of an entire life.

What this means in practice

Choose one situation that actually needs a decision. Record a shared question and two or three different positions in ordinary sentences. Role names are optional. If used, treat them as a temporary frame for this record rather than a discovery of permanent personality parts. Avoid creating participants merely for their number.

For each statement, clarify whether it is a known fact, assumption, wish, assessment, or condition. Then formulate a strong objection to the favored option: a reason that deserves consideration rather than mockery. Combine repetitions and mark the unknown. Equal numbers of lines do not mean equally strong grounds.

Choose one question whose answer is available externally. If a real agreement is involved, ask its participants; a prepared imaginary reply does not count as agreement. If money or time is involved, check the relevant information. Update the record after the new answer, preserving the distinction between what was assumed and actually communicated.

You can finish when the next step or source of missing information is clear. Unanimity and an absence of regret are unnecessary. This is a voluntary editorial practice with no claimed therapeutic effect. Experiences of audible voices call for urgent medical advice separately from this note. In the original scene, a sufficient outcome may be a decision about a specific invitation, made with stated grounds and cost, without a verdict on someone's courage, maturity, or worth.

Key quotation

> *living truth*

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Chapter II. Walter Scott Publishing copy read, Gutenberg No. 34901, displayed line 373. A short fragment of philosophical reasoning about discussing opinions, rather than a guarantee that our decision is right.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Useful question	Boundary
Plato's selected statement ↔ written consideration	What is asserted, and what receives an answer?	A character's statement is neither universal psychology nor research into the practice.
Mill II ↔ a strong objection	Is the other reason represented fairly?	Imagination does not replace a position's real defender.
Inner-speech research ↔ an everyday choice	Which statements were actually tested?	The abstract was read; the writing offered does not establish life decisions' quality.
A role ↔ authorship	Does the name help reveal a reason?	Temporary roles are not independent personalities or a collective guarantee.
Inner conversation ↔ an external agreement	Who needs to give a real answer?	Imaginary consent is no agreement with a person.

The comparisons are editorial, rather than a unified personality theory or evidence of historical influence. The opening scene is fictional; the medical question is distinguished from the writing offered.

Primary sources

1. Plato. Theaetetus. Benjamin Jowett, Gutenberg No. 1726. Header and selected primary dialogue at 1715–1776, especially 1736–1741, were read; not the whole text. This copy's print date and pagination are unestablished. Jowett's introduction is not presented as primary dialogue.

2. John Stuart Mill. On Liberty. Walter Scott Publishing, with a separate introduction by W. L. Courtney; the copy does not establish its print date. Title metadata and selected Chapter II passage, lines 372–399, were read; not the whole book. Mill's argument is distinguished from the biographical introduction.

3. Ben Alderson-Day and colleagues. The brain's conversation with itself: neural substrates of dialogic inner speech. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience 11(1), 110–120, 2016; DOI 10.1093/scan/nsv094, Epub July 20, 2015. Complete abstract and bibliography read; full methods, sample, and text not read. No proof of the suggested exercise's effectiveness.

4. NHS. Hallucinations and hearing voices. Clinical public guidance read, page reviewed July 28, 2025. Used for the scope boundary and seeking help, rather than diagnosis or selecting treatment. Service numbers concern the United Kingdom.

International rights for the particular copies remain UNKNOWN; availability is not treated as a license. Complete sources are not imported. Direct fragments are counted across all languages and files for the shared work. Sujato/SuttaCentral and mirrors are excluded.

Tags

inner dialogue, thinking, position, reason, question, answer, decision, fact, assumption, wish, value, condition, Plato, Theaetetus, Benjamin Jowett, John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, objection, inner speech, Alderson-Day, abstract, role, authorship, agreement, consent, responsibility, disagreement, record, boundaries, UNKNOWN

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