

UNITED WISDOM

Recognition That Does Not Satisfy

The Person and the Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Recognition That Does Not Satisfy

Epigraph

> *“We are pleased not only with praise, but with having done what is praise-worthy.”*

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments III.I. A complete sentence from the actually read Dublin 1777 English text.

What this article is about

Someone is praised, thanked, and noticed, yet the question of personal worth seems to remain open. This mismatch does not make the praise false or prove ingratitude. Perhaps another person’s response answered one question while the recipient awaited another. Thanks for help cannot assess an entire personality; admiration for a result does not tell us whether the effort was understood; many messages cannot replace one particular person’s reply. This article examines recognition as a relationship between an action, an observer, and the meaning of a response. An invented story distinguishes accurate feedback, deserved praise, belonging, and attempts to obtain final confirmation of personal acceptability. Adam Smith separates praise from its grounds; a modern review considers the additional goal of validating worth; Epictetus examines the direction of action. We seek a clearer question for another person’s response and our own next step.

I. Twelve Thanks and One Missing Reply

Imagine Lev helping a small voluntary group arrange a reading evening. He coordinates the time, welcomes participants, and gathers announcements. Afterwards, twelve messages thank him. People mention a warm atmosphere and good organisation. Lev enjoys the words, rereads some, and replies. Yet he returns to a blank space: someone whose opinion matters particularly has said nothing. The twelve messages now seem insufficient. They have not disappeared or become insincere. Lev’s expectation simply contained a condition their number could not fulfil: a particular reply from a particular person. The total answers a different question. More responses from the group do not supply that person’s missing response.

The story is invented, rather than a psychological type or a standard for the right quantity of thanks. Twelve is a number for making a distinction, not a satisfaction threshold. If Lev wanted to know whether several participants enjoyed the evening, the messages offer evidence of their responses. If he wanted the absent person’s opinion, they do not. If he wanted proof that he deserves respect in every sense, the messages cannot cover that entire inference. The observation “several people expressed gratitude” is sound. “Now doubt about myself should

disappear forever" adds a requirement that none of those people promised to fulfil. Their messages need not be defective because that larger question remains.

Conversely, one short message can answer a specific question precisely. A participant says the promised invitation arrived in time and enabled them to attend. Lev learns that one organisational task worked. This need not be stronger recognition than twelve warm messages; its object is different. A response can matter through its content, relationship, or timing, rather than magnitude alone. "Why is this not enough?" can become "Enough for which knowledge, relationship, or decision?" The answer may reveal something genuinely missing that can be requested. It may also reveal an expectation for which no single message can provide a final answer. These are different situations, even when both feel unfinished.

II. What Did the Person Praising Actually See?

One participant writes, "Your design was wonderful." Another group member made the poster; Lev only put it up. The praise may be sincere: the participant did see a beautiful poster. The error concerns credit. Understanding the response means distinguishing what was observed from what was attributed. The observer saw the result without knowing the division of work. Lev can accept the kind words and name the designer. He need not reject the entire event or deny his own organising contribution. Accurate recognition can accommodate several contributions. It is not reduced when each receives a name instead of the whole outcome belonging to one visible person. The correction adds information to a real appreciation.

Praise can also concern something Lev actually did. Someone thanks him for a clear schedule. Its meaning remains specific: that participant could navigate the timing. It does not establish that every organisational decision was flawless or nobody encountered difficulty. Another participant may have received the wrong address. Both reactions can be genuine. Requiring a positive message to cancel every criticism expands recognition beyond its object. Treating any criticism as disproving all the thanks expands the negative conclusion in the other direction. Specific feedback preserves differences between parts of the work and between people's experiences. Neither response has to become the final description of the whole event, much less the whole organiser.

Clarification need not turn a conversation into a report. People can speak warmly and generally. "Thank you for the evening" need not contain a list of verified facts. But if the recipient uses it to support a consequential conclusion, its limits matter. We can enjoy gratitude without treating it as proof of every presumed attribute. We can ask about a particular part when that part needs checking. Recognition then remains a human gesture; checking is a separate action. Trying to extract a comprehensive assessment from every kind remark burdens both the recipient and the person who wanted simply to express appreciation. A warm response need not carry more information than its speaker could have known.

III. Praise and Its Grounds in Smith

In the Dublin version of The Theory of Moral Sentiments actually read here, Adam Smith distinguishes receiving praise from doing what deserves it. At the opening of part III, he examines approval based on ignorance or mistake. If an observer attributes actions the person did not perform, or motives that did not guide them, the admired object differs from the actual person. This is historical philosophical reasoning about moral assessment. We do not adopt Smith's categorical claims about feelings as verified laws for every reader. The helpful distinction is between whether approval occurred and whether it had accurate grounds. More answers to one question cannot settle the other.

Consider the poster. Lev might enjoy the compliment while knowing that authorship was misunderstood. We need not declare such pleasure impossible in order to recognise the attribution error. The fact needs clarification. Collecting more compliments about someone else's design would not narrow the information gap: the count rises while the grounds remain unchanged. Here dissatisfaction has an intelligible structure within the message itself. The words address a quality Lev did not produce. Correcting the address guarantees no emotional relief, but makes the conversation more truthful. It also preserves recognition of the designer's actual work, whose name could otherwise disappear behind thanks to the organiser. Both contributions can be acknowledged without inventing either.

Deservingness is not identical to confidence in one's own rightness. A person can misjudge their conduct too. Smith discusses an imagined impartial spectator: a change of standpoint, rather than permission to make any internal verdict final. In our case, promises, divided work, and participants' experience can be checked. If Lev is certain everyone received the address, but one person reports not receiving it, that certainty needs revision. Accurate grounds for praise involve more than wanting to deserve it. They include seeing a mismatch and correcting the description. Recognition can therefore become more accurate without requiring either self-congratulation or an overall rejection of oneself. Particular facts remain open to correction.

IV. One Action and the Validation of a Whole Person

Jennifer Crocker and Lora Park's 2004 review examines the pursuit of self-esteem, distinguishing its level from goals of validating worth and discussing consequences in important domains. In the selected passages, a failure in one activity can be interpreted as evidence about overall worth. The review gives us no warrant to determine Lev's motive from one story. Its authors retain research limitations, including goals that are often inferred rather than directly specified. Here it supplies a question: is gratitude wanted as feedback about an event, or has it been assigned the additional task of certifying the entire person? Those tasks require different kinds and scopes of information.

If Lev wants to know whether he fulfilled an organisational promise, the promise can be checked. Was the time agreed, was the invitation delivered, was the participant welcomed? These questions allow definite answers and repairs. If he wants proof that he deserves respect in every way and will never be out of place, thanks for a schedule cannot meet that requirement. Even deserved praise remains limited to its object. An additional goal may turn each outcome into a temporary examination: confirmation arrives today and must be renewed tomorrow. This is editorial reasoning about a possible expectation, rather than a claim that everyone who values recognition necessarily lives under that condition.

The distinction leaves room for pleasure and connection. Lev can want a warm reply, feel proud of completion, and care about quality together. We need not calculate one pure motive and remove the rest. It is more useful to see how different aims influence the next choice. Does he correct the address because a participant needs it, or chiefly ask for the organisation to be praised again so an uncomfortable criticism loses force? One action addresses a specific need; the other assigns the conversation additional work. The goals may be mixed. Naming them does not establish full knowledge of every cause or imply that a person can relinquish them on command.

V. A Condition That Moves after the Reply

The missing message arrives the next day, thanking Lev for the invitation. He briefly feels better, then asks why it was so short. Next, the response time matters; then a particular missing word. In this continued invented scene, the condition of sufficiency moves. The original request for a reply was met, but new signs are demanded. The message may be sincere and meaningful; its length cannot disclose its author's whole position. If the test requires fresh signs of final goodwill, it may have no specified endpoint. Increasing the number of responses need not move us closer to a clear answer when the question changes after each one.

A moving condition differs from a genuinely incomplete answer. Someone may ask about an important promise and receive a general compliment; the substantive question remains open. A message can also be unclear and need explanation. Neither case necessarily demands endless recognition. Return to content: what was asked, what arrived, and which gap remains? “Is Saturday’s meeting confirmed?” differs from “Do they feel warmly enough towards me?” The first can be answered with a date and agreement. The second concerns a relationship, cannot be reduced to a counter, and may require conversation, time, or acknowledgement of uncertainty. Merging the questions makes both harder to answer accurately.

We can specify the answer needed for a next action while leaving a relationship open. Lev wants to know whether to expect the person at another evening. Confirmation of attendance lets him prepare a place. It does not settle friendship and need not do so. Without confirmation, he can plan without them or state a response deadline. That boundary concerns the event’s organisation. It need not be represented as a measure of love, dignity, or final belonging. Questions finish differently: a task has completion conditions, relationships continue, and another person’s inner state can remain unknown. Clarifying them does not force all of these matters into one test with one result.

VI. When a Task Becomes a Way to Impress

The selected review passages consider nested goals: an action may serve the broader aim of validating worth. In Enchiridion 23, Epictetus warns about redirecting life to please someone else. These genres differ; we do not present them as evidence for one mechanism. Our case asks what now organises preparation for the next evening. Does Lev choose a topic useful to participants and interesting to himself, or one intended chiefly to make a particular person admire him? Both intentions may be present. Their relationship matters because it makes the choice discussable rather than disguising one wish as the only duty. An apparently helpful plan can still contain several different aims.

Suppose Lev complicates the programme to impress and promises more than the group can prepare. Recognition now affects shared obligations, as well as his feelings. Another participant must make extra materials, guests expect a long presentation, and time is running out. This invented branch calls for assessing concrete promises and resources. There is no need first to decide whether Lev is vain. Ask whether the programme was agreed, who accepted the work, and what must be reduced. If simplification can preserve an important promise, it is a shared decision. Other participants need not become means to someone’s desired image, even when that image seems generous and attractive. Their agreement remains a separate matter.

Epictetus 25 makes an advantage’s price visible through a particular invitation acquired by praise and attendance. The reading evening has different costs: time, attention, promises, and

others' voluntary work. Recognition need not require self-abandonment, and expenditure need not be excessive. The question is whether its conditions are understood and accepted by those involved. If Lev consciously wants a beautiful evening, gives time, and agrees help, enjoying approval does not make the action wrong. If recognition requires hiding limits or taking others' contributions without consent, the problem lies in specific means that can be named and changed. A general label contributes less than identifying those actions and agreements.

VII. An Imagined Observer Cannot Read Minds

Smith considers judging one's conduct through the supposed standpoint of an impartial spectator. In the selected opening of III.II, he distinguishes the agent from that same person as examiner. This change of standpoint creates distance from immediate interest. But the supposed observer is not a discovered person who actually expressed an opinion. Lev needs to distinguish imagining how an action could look with the circumstances known from establishing what a particular recipient thinks now. The first can examine grounds for action. The second requires a message or other relevant evidence and may remain unavailable. Imagination can offer possibilities without turning the second operation into knowledge of another person's mind.

Lev might imagine that a short reply means disappointment. He might also imagine that its author is busy or dislikes long messages. These possibilities are not established explanations. They can remain possibilities without one becoming a verdict. For a practical decision, ask its specific question: will the person attend, did the information arrive, do they want to discuss the event? They need not disclose their whole private attitude. An open request leaves space for their answer; guessing assigns them a position beforehand. Clarification guarantees no desired warmth, but prevents Lev's expectation from being presented as the other person's actual intention. Evidence and a preferred story have different roles.

Internal judgement also needs correction. Smith traces its origin to social relationships; it does not arrive as an entirely independent voice untouched by learned measures. "Either listen to people or trust only yourself" is therefore too crude. We can consider external information, examine grounds, and retain judgement. If the group praises a misattributed poster, Lev knows its authorship and corrects the fact. If a real organisational error is identified, he need not reject it to preserve confidence. If he is criticised for something he did not do, he can ask for grounds. Independence here involves working with reasons, rather than becoming unaffected by any external statement. It allows both disagreement and learning.

VIII. Recognition Need Not Disappear from Life

It would be easy to advise expecting nothing more from anyone. That follows from neither our examples nor careful reading of the review. Crocker and Park discuss possible benefits and alternative aims, rather than asserting every cost for everyone in every situation. Smith distinguishes deserving esteem, grounded reputation, and noisy expressions of praise. This is no prohibition on closeness or kind words. Recognition can tell us help was noticed, a contribution named, and participation welcomed. It has human meaning even when it cannot provide final certification of an entire personality. Preserving that meaning requires neither denying its limits nor pretending those limits make appreciation worthless.

Lev can welcome thanks for an invitation and still want a closer conversation with an important person. Twelve others' messages cannot replace that conversation, but they are not useless. There are two relationships, different recipients, and different needs. Naming them can keep the group from being asked for an answer belonging to a separate connection. The other person remains free: proposed closeness may not match their wish. A clearer request does not make agreement compulsory. The importance of recognition to one participant does not make another responsible for final stability of their self-esteem or fulfilment of every expectation. Both people's choices remain relevant to the relationship's development.

If credit is repeatedly appropriated, thanks replace promised payment, or someone is humiliated, the question has an external side. It should not be translated entirely into inner work on recognition. Our voluntary case can name authorship, participation terms, and a specific breach. Other situations need information about actual duties and rules, which this article cannot supply. Clarifying one's aim does not mean accepting any treatment. A person can seek accurate credit while declining to prove overall worth through applause counts. These decisions are compatible and need not deny a real hurt. An internal question and a concrete external problem can both deserve attention without either swallowing the other.

IX. A Request Another Person Can Understand

Lev wants feedback on the next evening. Rather than asking generally whether people really liked it, he can specify timing, explanations, or a part they wished to continue. The question permits an answer tied to a participant's experience. It need not certify the organiser as an entirely good person. Someone might find the introduction long and the discussion interesting. These parts need not combine into one final score. A request for observation must leave room for an uncomfortable answer. Otherwise, an apparent question about work becomes a request to repeat an expected compliment. Calling it feedback does not determine the actual room left for a respondent's judgement.

Support can be requested directly when support is wanted. “It matters to me now to hear that you noticed my contribution” differs from checking the programme. Such a request need not be shameful or disguised as quality assessment. But it remains a request, not a demand to say something the other person does not believe. A conversation can also be requested and its time agreed. Recognition becomes clearer when the interaction’s nature is understood. Are we seeking a fact, an opinion, gratitude, support, or closeness? Different answers may suffice for different requests. This is not an instruction to control every remark; it is a way of disentangling an exchange that repeatedly misses an unnamed question.

A request can reach a limit. Someone does not reply, declines, or gives less than was hoped. Lev can decide how to proceed without a final explanation. He might send the necessary invitation once and prepare for confirmed participants. That is organisation, rather than punishment for insufficient admiration. He might postpone a personal conversation or acknowledge that desired reciprocity is unavailable now. Neither action must immediately change his feelings. They restore a difference between an available step and another person’s unavailable answer. When every action is directed towards obtaining another response, that difference becomes harder to see. The action’s own purpose disappears behind its capacity to produce fresh confirmation.

X. Enough for a Task, Open for Relationships

Twelve thanks remain twelve genuine exchanges in our story. Their significance has not been reduced, and Lev has not been required to become indifferent. We established that a message has an address, an object, and grounds, while an expectation may concern another task. A poster compliment needs accurate credit. Thanks for a schedule can support a local assessment. One person’s answer cannot be replaced by a total response count. None of these operations establishes an entire person’s worth. Recognition can then be received without requiring every kind statement to complete every unresolved question about oneself and relationships. Some questions can remain open while appreciation is still real.

The sources keep their different genres. Smith analyses moral judgement through historical categorical formulations that are critically bounded here. Crocker and Park discuss validation goals and research difficulties, without establishing each reader’s motive. Epictetus proposes a Stoic direction modern readers can partly accept or reject. The comparison gives no single recipe for satisfying recognition. It supplies questions about fact, grounds, aims, and means. Lev’s scenes are invented, rather than clinical cases, experiments, or evidence of the practice’s effects. Their purpose is to expose transitions between conclusions. The selected passages support distinctions, not a claim that these scenes explain every experience of receiving inadequate recognition.

Instead of asking why something should be enough, ask what the known information is enough for. An identified address error permits repair. Gratitude can acknowledge a contribution. Preparing a place requires attendance confirmation. Closeness needs another person's continuing response, which cannot be made compulsory. One's relationship to oneself need not be settled through admiration alone. It can include honest assessment, responsibility, chosen aims, and willingness to learn. This promises no inner tranquillity. It offers a way of asking less impossible work of one message while remaining able to enjoy recognition where it actually occurred. A meaningful response can remain meaningful even when a different need awaits its own answer.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose one kind message that did not answer everything you hoped. Prefer a modest case that requires no painful disclosure. Name the fact: who said what, and which action or quality was mentioned. Distinguish what the observer knew from what they could only suppose. If credit was mistaken, consider a calm clarification. If the message concerns your actual work, let it recognise that part without requiring an overall justification or rejection of yourself.

Write down the answer you wanted. Was it confirmation of a promise, an opinion about work, thanks, support, or a closer conversation? If several questions are involved, choose one connected to a next action. Formulate a request that allows the other person a substantive answer and freedom to decline. You can also choose not to ask now and preserve the unknown. Compare a received or possible reply with the named question rather than a growing list of signs of goodwill.

This practice does not assess dependence on approval or promise to reduce the need for it. You can stop. A sufficient result is distinguishing the recognised action, the desired relationship, and an added demand to validate the entire person. If an external breach appears, name it separately. Kind words can remain pleasant and important while another need still calls for conversation, time, or a decision.

Key quotation

> *"applauds not us, but another person."*

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments III.I, printed page 174. A labelled closing clause of the sentence about praise for actions not performed or motives that did not operate, from the actually read English text. It does not describe every kind of praise.

Connections between traditions

1. Deservingness and validation of worth. Smith III.I distinguishes approval from its actual grounds; Crocker and Park distinguish evaluation from validation goals. Together they separate a message about an action from a demand to certify the entire person. A moral distinction is not empirical evidence of an individual motive.

2. An attributed person and a governing aim. Smith III.I examines praise for actions not one's own; Epictetus 23 warns about aiming to please. We can check which image receives recognition and which action was actually chosen. This makes neither all praise mistaken nor every wish for recognition harmful.

3. A nested goal and an external result's price. Crocker and Park consider actions serving validation; Epictetus 25 describes a particular invitation's price. Their connection makes means of acquiring a response discussable. Inferred research goals and an ancient example do not form a law of all relationships; inferred goals require caution.

4. A supposed judge and an unknown motive. Smith III.II introduces an imagined spectator; the review's conclusion retains limitations in inferring goals. A considered standpoint must be distinguished from an established fact. Imagined moral examination is not mind-reading, and research interpretation is not a reader's diagnosis.

5. Grounded esteem and other aims. Smith VI.II.IV distinguishes deserved esteem from noisy praise; the review retains benefits and discusses alternatives to validation. Recognition may remain welcome without answering every question of self-relation. Suggested alternatives are not proven practices for every individual.

6. Internal judgement and useful participation. Smith's opening III.II relates inner assessment to social origins; Epictetus 24 distinguishes material help from fidelity. Actual contribution can be judged through named grounds while retaining external checks. An inner voice does not certify every action; moral intention erases neither loss nor the need for consent.

Primary sources

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, original English, Project Gutenberg 67363. The actual title page reads Dublin, J. Beatty and C. Jackson, 1777, "The Sixth Edition." That local label is not conflated with Smith's later authorial sixth edition of 1790. Complete III.I, the opening of III.II, printed pages 173–188, and selected VI.II.IV, pages 334–337, were read. Two short quotations are rendered into Russian by the article's author; other parts and the print scan were not collated. Categorical historical assessments of feelings are not adopted as universal psychological facts.

Jennifer Crocker and Lora E. Park, The Costly Pursuit of Self-Esteem, Psychological Bulletin 130(3), 392–414, 2004, DOI 10.1037/0033-2909.130.3.392. Genuine earlier reading of the opening, selected late discussion, and complete primary review conclusion is reused. Most of the middle and underlying studies were not separately read. Validation goals differ from self-esteem level; individual motives and practice efficacy are not established.

Epictetus, The Enchiridion, actually read Internet Classics Archive rendition labelled as Elizabeth Carter's translation. Sections 23–25 and neighbouring context are used. Modern wording prevents claiming a diplomatic reproduction of an eighteenth-century edition. The Stoic position is considered as a moral proposal, rather than a demonstrated emotional effect. No direct Epictetus quotation appears here.

Tags

recognition, praise, gratitude, respect, self-worth, self-esteem, approval, deservingness, authorship, contribution, attribution, feedback, expectation, relationships, belonging, goal, motive, means, responsibility, voluntary participation, boundaries, imagined spectator, internal judgement, uncertainty, Adam Smith, Crocker, Park, Epictetus, primary sources, United Wisdom

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.