

UNITED WISDOM

Devaluing what is difficult to obtain

Human Nature and Inner World

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Epigraph

“The Grapes are sour”.

The Fox and the Grapes in Aesop’s fables, GeorgeFylerTownsend’s translation: a short English fragment. A literary scene, not psychological diagnosis.

What this article is about

Imagine an illustrative scene. An artist spent several weeks preparing an application for a creative residency. She liked its workshops, the opportunity to work with other artists, and time away from current commissions. A rejection arrives. That evening, she tells friends such programmes are only for people unable to demonstrate anything independently. The friends suggest another residency, but the conversation quickly becomes a dispute about the emptiness of the whole artistic milieu. What she herself recently wanted disappears from discussion.

This change may invite interest, but it does not automatically reveal its cause. Perhaps she learned about poor conditions after applying and truly revised her assessment. Perhaps her desire had been someone else’s expectation, easier to notice after rejection. Or perhaps sharply lowering the value helps avoid speaking about disappointment. These versions require different grounds. An external observer has no right to choose one solely from an unpleasant remark.

This article examines the moment when unavailability becomes a negative assessment. We are interested in preserving accuracy: what remains valuable, what changed, what an attempt costs, and what a person has the right to decline. Acknowledging the value of something unavailable does not mean continuing to pursue it. Abandoning a goal does not require proving it was worthless. This is an editorial exploration of choice, not a test of hidden motives.

I. Unavailability does not communicate the same thing as quality

An application’s rejection establishes a limited fact: this programme did not offer the artist a place. It does not determine the quality of all residencies, all selected works, or the applicant herself. Perhaps places were scarce; her project did not fit the theme; or selection was unfair. Until reasons are known, a general conclusion remains a supposition. Access conditions and the desired object’s properties may be related, but that does not make them identical.

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Everyday language often compresses this connection into one sentence. It did not work out, so it is unnecessary. This may signal reasonably ending an attempt. But if it implies the thing has no value at all, examining the transition helps. Which new fact changed the assessment? Only the impossibility of obtaining a place, or information that working there would be inconvenient? The question concerns grounds for judgement, not an obligation to keep wanting.

In the scene, two circumstances can be named separately: I was not given a place; I still need time for my own project. This is not equivalent to saying this particular residency is irreplaceable. Separate descriptions instead allow seeking another form of what attracted her: a week in an available workshop, a small group, or exchanging work. Rejecting all interest in collective work along with the programme removes potential alternatives before they are considered.

Sometimes unavailability itself does enter the assessment. A programme requiring unpaid relocation and prohibiting other commissions may not suit someone with family obligations. This is a specific mismatch of conditions, not the programme’s universal worthlessness. Not for me now preserves the distinction between personal suitability and general value. It provides grounds to decline without humiliating people who made a different decision.

The reverse movement exists too: difficulty obtaining something makes a goal especially attractive. Someone may treat competitive selection as proof of quality and stop asking what they actually need. The same check then helps in the other direction. High competition does not establish value for every life. Questions about conditions and substance remain necessary after success and rejection alike. Availability does not replace independent assessment.

Accuracy thus begins with several separate words: available, useful, expensive, interesting, suitable. They answer different questions. The unavailable may remain interesting; the useful may be too expensive; the available may be unsuitable. Reducing all answers to good or bad makes changing one parameter without rewriting the entire relationship difficult. More detailed language leaves room for a limited decision.

II. A fable shows a transition; it does not read a person

In The Fox and the Grapes, translated by Townsend, the fox cannot reach the grapes and then declares them sour. This is a literary depiction of changed assessment after failure. It reveals a question about moving from I cannot obtain it to it is not worth obtaining. The fable does not prove every negative assessment after rejection has this cause, nor replace information about a particular situation.

The image is convenient because it is short. In seconds, it explains a familiar conversational movement. Yet brevity can become a way to stop listening attentively. Replying that the artist simply has sour grapes means her possible information about conditions will no longer be

checked. A literary image becomes a conclusion about a person. Keeping it as a question to oneself helps more: on what grounds am I speaking differently about this object today?

The sequence can be noticed without a final explanation. Before the letter, I spoke enthusiastically about the workshops; afterward, I began calling participants lacking in independence. No new information about the workshops has yet appeared between those remarks. This record does not require calling oneself envious or dishonest. It identifies a place to stop and clarify judgement. Sometimes acknowledging that speaking evenly is difficult now suffices to avoid turning a heated remark into a permanent position.

Time matters. One sentence uttered on the evening after rejection may not match what the person decides a week later. Nobody must immediately compose an impartial competition review. Public assessment can be postponed while preserving the right to disappointment. This is especially useful if a sharp remark is about to become a publication affecting others. The pause concerns a statement for which one will be accountable, not a prohibition on feeling.

The reverse counterexample matters too. After rejection, someone studied the contract carefully and discovered previously unnoticed restrictions. Their assessment genuinely worsened on new grounds. Changing after failure does not make it false. The sequence of events alone does not establish causality. The question of new knowledge must therefore remain open even when the story looks remarkably like the fable.

One can also not know why an assessment changed. That is an honest interim answer. I am inclined to speak sharply now and unsure how stable my conclusion is. It does not finish inquiry, but it limits the assertion’s strength. It preserves the right to confirm the criticism later, soften it, or do something else altogether. Accuracy does not require flawlessly reading one’s own motive as it emerges.

III. Changed assessment requires a cautious explanation

In their 2010 paper, Chen and Risen demonstrate a methodological difficulty: in the conventional free-choice arrangement, later ratings may diverge even with stable preferences. A selected abstract fragment was read in search results from the authors’ PDF; the full text was not read. This scientific argument limits hasty causal interpretation. It neither proves preferences never change nor explains our illustrative artist.

For everyday conversation, only caution follows, not a ready-made theory. I see two different assessments but do not yet know what happened between them. Knowledge, purpose, mood, expression, or attitude toward cost may have changed. To understand what is available, return to previous statements and specific information. This is an editorial check, not replication of a scientific experiment in a notebook.

Remember how rough an initial assessment can be. I like the programme may mean liking a workshop photograph. Detailed inspection later reveals that necessary equipment is absent. The negative assessment then clarifies the initial one rather than cancelling an important value. Naming reasons for the first time sometimes reveals that a different object was assessed: an imagined programme instead of published conditions.

Value also differs from readiness to act. The artist may like a residency but no longer want to spend a week on another application. This changes the decision without requiring changed quality of the object. Asking only whether she likes it forces her to answer a question about time expenditure in words about general value. A more accurate conversation permits: I like it, but I am not choosing to repeat the attempt now.

Do not use science as a new weapon here. A conversational partner cannot be told their preferences are statistically unreal or every explanation after choosing is rationalisation. Methodological criticism concerns a particular research arrangement. It does not remove authorship from a human decision. Its role here is modest: observing a change and explaining it require different grounds.

The practical result of this caution may be simple. The artist need not apply again to prove her previous desire was sincere. But if she wants to assess the programme publicly, naming verifiable reasons helps. No place for her is one fact; no suitable equipment is another. Separating them makes criticism more accurate while preserving free choice over how much effort to spend on another attempt.

IV. An attempt’s cost may change before its value

Rejection introduces another expense: an additional application, waiting, seeking a recommendation, or possible relocation. A person has the right to find that expense unacceptable. Sometimes sharp devaluation appears precisely where language for cost is missing. Acknowledging that a goal is good prompts others to demand another attempt. Calling it empty then seems the only way to escape another obligation. This is a possible scene, not an established general mechanism.

In our story, friends tell the artist that real interest requires persistence. Yet the strength of a desire does not establish how many attempts she must pay for with time. She may have other work, limited funds, and the right not to enter another selection process. A useful answer is more definite: I still like the format, but lack resources for another application now. Value is preserved while the decision not to continue is already made.

The expense is sometimes more than material. Participation requires presenting work to a panel again, accepting uncertainty, and awaiting a letter. Someone may choose not to undertake that procedure in the coming months. This does not make them a weak artist or

remove the programme’s merits. Whether this path suits them now remains a separate question. A goal’s merit does not oblige pursuing it by every available route.

Opportunity cost can be assessed too. A week spent applying will not be spent finishing a painting, resting, or doing paid work. Understanding this need not reduce interest in the residency. It changes the arrangement of tasks. A reasonable refusal sometimes sounds less exciting than total exposure of a sham, but describes the choice better. I decided to finish my current work is sufficient grounds; proving all competitions pointless is unnecessary.

Sometimes a goal ceases to suit someone for a long time. They discover collective formats are uninteresting or main conditions conflict with their work. The revision may then be profound. They need not preserve earlier value out of loyalty to their own application. The point is not to replace new understanding with an automatic demand to devalue everything desired after failure. A goal may change for reasons one can name without attacking others.

Several options can remain together: try later, seek another form, decline permanently, or not decide yet. None requires denying that the first attempt was meaningful. Past interest does not become a debt owed to the future. A person can value what was done and change course. This freedom reduces the need to create a persuasive story about why something unavailable was always bad.

V. Disappointment does not require humiliating another’s choice

In Maxims54–55, La Rochefoucauld connects contempt for unavailable goods and favourites with wanting to possess them or gain favour. This is a sharp moral aphorism, not a universal scientific law. It asks about mixing judgement with personal desire. Here the question remains a possibility for self-examination; another’s criticism is not predeclared disguised envy.

In our scene, the artist speaks about both the programme and selected artists. Their success now appears to prove a lack of independence. Yet her rejection does not establish their motives, quality, or dependence. Selection criteria and participants’ works can be discussed substantively. Lowering their dignity to protect her own story requires entirely different grounds, which one letter does not provide.

Another’s success may recall an unfulfilled desire. That observation does not make them guilty. A friend obtained a place and wants to share her joy; the artist is not ready for details. She can set a temporary boundary: I am glad it worked for you, but discussing the trip is hard for me today. The first part need not be said if it does not match her experience now. She can simply ask to return to the conversation later while respecting the event.

A boundary differs from demanding that another diminish their success. You can refrain from discussion; your pain cannot establish that another’s joy is dishonest. This is an editorial ethical

distinction, not advice to always be friendly. Irritation and disappointment are permissible personal experiences. The question concerns statements and actions: what exactly am I saying about another, and on what grounds?

There may also be justified criticism of a winning work. Separate it from the result of one's own application to keep discussion accurate. I consider the composition weak because of these features is a specific judgement. All selected artists are empty is a generalisation requiring much more support. Failure does not remove the right to criticise. It makes distinguishing what can actually be shown from what merely ends an unpleasant conversation especially useful.

Someone offering consolation needs this caution too. They do not deserve you may offer quick support, but also reinforce a picture where acceptance or rejection distributes all value. Support can be offered differently: you worked hard on the application; rejection is unpleasant; I can help examine options if you want. Support is directed toward the person and their choice without declaring everyone who decided differently worthless.

VI. Give the object several dimensions again

Devaluation often sounds like a final word: useless, empty, ridiculous. To clarify one's attitude, restore details. What attracted you to the residency? Not prestige generally, but an equipped workshop, conversations with two artists, or a month without urgent commissions. What raised doubts? Accommodation, lack of payment, or a required exhibition. Details permit holding merits and limitations together without turning them into an obligation to participate.

In our scene, the artist finds that she still likes the workshop while a month away has become too difficult. She can acknowledge the rejection as unpleasant and also see that the trip would have required expenses she is unprepared for. There is no need to choose between two simple stories: the programme is wonderful and I lost; the programme is empty and I won. A more accurate version is possible in which interest, constraints, and disappointment coexist.

This reflection need not produce a positive assessment. It may reveal few attractive properties and excessively vague promises. Declining further applications then becomes better grounded. The point is not to decide beforehand that restoring details must revive the earlier desire. The exercise supports distinction, and its result belongs to the person. It must not secretly serve a demand to keep pursuing a socially approved goal.

Changing scale sometimes helps. I need a month free to work on my own project, but not necessarily in an international programme. The possibility of obtaining this exact format disappeared; the need for project conditions remained. The artist could arrange several days in a local workshop or reduce commissions. These are options within an illustrative scene, not guarantees of availability. Someone else may lack such opportunities; missing alternatives cannot be explained as insufficient flexibility.

Changing scale does not make the larger goal ridiculous either. A small available step may address one part of a desire while leaving another open. A few working days do not fully replace a month and a professional environment. Acknowledging the difference matters, otherwise practicality becomes another denial of loss. Someone can use what is available and honestly regret what remains unavailable.

Leaving a goal without further action is also a possible result. I like this format but am not pursuing it today. That sentence makes no promise of a future attempt. It releases the false choice between pursuit and contempt. Some valuable possibilities remain outside our plans. Their value does not require fulfilment, just as nonfulfilment does not establish worthlessness.

VII. Do not turn self-examination into suspicion of everything

There is a risk of applying devaluation too broadly. Every criticism of something unavailable then prompts doubt: perhaps I simply want to obtain it? Someone stops trusting their judgement and yields to another’s view of value. Literary and moral perspectives begin removing their voice. To avoid this, the question of motive must remain additional to examining grounds, rather than replacing them.

Criticism can be checked independently of supposed desire. Programme conditions are published, costs known, and equipment listed. If a required tool is absent, that deficiency remains regardless of the applicant’s mood. If conditions do not suit her work, declining can reasonably be discussed through them. Possible disappointment does not make all arguments false. Motive and a judgement’s substance do not automatically cancel each other.

Conversely, one valid remark does not confirm every generalisation. Missing equipment does not mean every residency is useless. Specific criticism can be preserved while its scope shrinks. This is accuracy in one’s assertion, not capitulation to the programme. A narrower formulation sometimes feels less comforting. It then becomes visible that emotional work was expected from it too, although assessing an object need not perform that work.

Self-examination can be limited to one episode. There is no need to seek devaluation in every relationship, purchase, and professional decision. Examine one recent change and discover which new grounds appeared. If the question provides no clarity, leave it. An uncertain inner motive does not prevent deciding from known conditions. A person can choose an available step without completing a full theory of their personality.

Another conversational participant must not act as a judge using this check. Absence of envy cannot be demanded before criticism is heard. A specific assertion can be clarified and its grounds requested. One can say a generalisation about all artists seems unfair. But the right to assess one’s own experience remains with the person. Joint inquiry requires allowing different answers, including one the helper dislikes.

Suspicion of oneself is replaced by more definite work: distinguishing the fact of rejection, assessment of conditions, personal desire, and decision about expenditure of effort. These parts can diverge without dishonesty. I am interested; it hurts; conditions do not suit me; I am not applying again. This complex sentence may be truer than it is all nonsense. Complexity is not obligatory in every conversation, however; avoiding presenting a hasty global verdict as checked assessment is enough.

VIII. Value need not end in possession

Goals are often assessed through outcomes: obtaining something means it was valuable; not obtaining it means the desire itself must now be declared a mistake. Between these extremes, the possibility of valuing an attempt's experience disappears. The artist prepared a project description, gathered work, and saw which conditions she lacked. These results do not cancel rejection or turn it into a gift. They exist separately and can be used further if she chooses.

Yet benefit need not be found in every failure. Perhaps the application required too much effort and she now simply wants to end this story. An object's value can be preserved without gratitude for rejection. Someone can regret spending time and still consider the workshop good. Acknowledging several sides of an event need not become a comforting formula that predeclares every loss a hidden victory.

Freedom appears when assessment stops serving as the sole permission to leave. Departing does not require proving the programme worthless. Remaining interested does not require immediate renewed action. The artist can choose another project without destroying the previous opportunity's merits. The decision then rests on available resources and priorities rather than on the need to rewrite the world around every achieved result.

Accuracy sometimes leaves an unpleasant feeling without a quick explanation. Yes, I liked it; yes, it is unavailable now. This may not soothe. Its value lies elsewhere: it assigns no unchecked properties to the object and does not require concealing desire. One can live with this combination for a while until new information, a decision, or another interest appears. Completion is not obligatory on the day of rejection.

In conversation, this position can sound simple: I regret that it did not work out; I do not want to seek another programme yet; I have mixed views about this one's quality. There is room for disappointment, boundaries, and assessment. No part appoints everyone else guilty. A person need not report all their inner work, but can choose words that do not create an unnecessary global verdict.

Devaluation becomes less necessary when declining action is already permitted. We need not love everything unavailable or justify every competition. We need the possibility of speaking more accurately about what we wanted and what we are not choosing now. The valuable can

remain valuable, the criticised have merits, and the unavailable avoid becoming life's centre. This distinction preserves authorship of choice without making possession the sole measure of meaning.

What this means in practice

Take one recent situation of moderate difficulty where your assessment changed after failure. The exercise can be postponed if you do not want to revisit it now. Write the earlier and current formulations without trying to establish motive immediately. Then name the event between them: rejection, increased cost, new conditions, another's success, or your own revised task. Preserve the possibility that the new assessment really is more accurate.

Separately list two or three attractive properties and specific limitations now known. Do not force yourself to find merits; perhaps there were few. Check which information appeared after the first assessment. If no new information exists, that is reason for caution about a global verdict, not proof of dishonesty. One word can be clarified: instead of useless, unsuitable for me under these conditions.

Record the action decision separately from assessment. I will try later; seek another form; stop now; or not decide yet. Name the next attempt's cost in units available to you: time, expense, obligations, and energy. A goal may appeal while its cost proves unacceptable. Declining then already has grounds. You need not prove the object worthless to preserve the right not to pursue it now.

When speaking about others, check the assertion's scope. What is known about a specific work or condition? Which words establish another's motive without support? Keep accurate criticism while removing an unsupported generalisation. If distance from discussion of another's success is needed, name it as your boundary. Participation before readiness is unnecessary; absence can be explained without diminishing their result's value.

Return to the notes when appropriate for your decision. See whether the assessment remained and a new choice appeared. A limited result may consist merely in distinguishing desire from obligation. This does not confirm universal effectiveness or require immediate relief. If clarity is absent, leave motive open and rely on known conditions. The decision can still be yours.

Key quotation

> *"The hate of favourites is only a love of favour".*

La Rochefoucauld, Maxim55, J.W.WillisBund and J.HainFriswell1871: an English fragment. A moral aphorism inviting a question, not a universal law.

Connections between traditions

Perspective	Comparison	Significant difference
Aesop’s fable in Townsend’s translation	Depicts changed assessment after unavailability.	A literary image does not diagnose real motives.
La Rochefoucauld’s Maxims	Ask about personal desire within contempt.	An aphorism does not establish criticism’s universal cause.
Chen and Risen’s methodological paper	Requires caution in explaining changed ratings.	A selected abstract provides neither individual conclusions nor denial of all choice effects.

Connections are editorial; forms of knowledge and grounds for claims differ.

Primary sources

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Tags

devaluation, unavailability, desire, rejection, value, choice, autonomy, disappointment, criticism, conditions, cost of trying, creativity, residency, competition, another’s success, respect, boundaries, motive, clarification, assessment, preferences, Aesop, La Rochefoucauld, fable, aphorism, methodology, caution, self-examination, meaning, United Wisdom

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