

UNITED WISDOM

Describing an Episode Without Assuming Another Person’s Motives

The Person and the Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *“Matter of fact.” — David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, IV, Part I, a selected fragment of the English original in L.A. Selby-Bigge’s edition, with display capitalisation. The discussion of evidence and inference is used within limits rather than transferring Hume’s entire philosophy to relationships.*

What this article is about

Someone looked at the clock, answered briefly and changed the subject. In the next sentence of our account, a cause already appears: they are uninterested, want to humiliate us, or avoid closeness. The explanation might turn out to be right; circumstances might also be more complicated. An action and an explanation of its intention are not the same material. Describing an episode without treating another person’s motives as established preserves this distinction. We can name what we noticed, what we experienced and how we understood it without presenting the last part as the other person’s established inner answer.

Nina, the fictional character in this article, shows an acquaintance photographs from a recent trip over tea. He looks at the clock several times, asks one question, then begins discussing when they need to leave. Nina feels disappointed and thinks that her story did not matter to him. The episode is unpleasant for her; accuracy does not require cancelling that. Examination can nevertheless separate visible behaviour, her own expectation and the proposed cause. This description need not end with a favourable account of the other person. It leaves room for information not yet available and helps name a possible conversation’s subject more precisely.

We will examine observable material and an inference about intention, how approximate recollection can be marked, and why personal experience needs no proof of another’s hidden motive. Hume offers a philosophical perspective on evidence and inference; a selected *Analects* saying distinguishes knowledge from acknowledging ignorance; the abstract of research by Nicholas Epley and colleagues provides a limited experimental context for estimating others’ perspectives. The proposed record is neither a validated therapeutic method nor a guarantee of understanding people correctly. It is voluntary, can remain unfinished, and postpones no necessary protection, help or action addressing real consequences.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

I. Begin with one accessible episode

A general account of a person easily combines many events into one trait: always distracted, never listens, deliberately makes things uncomfortable for me. Sometimes it reflects recurring behaviour that matters. To begin examining it, however, one episode can be selected that is specific enough to describe. Where did the conversation happen, what was being discussed, and which action was noticed? There is no need to reconstruct an entire day, relationship or personal history. A small subject reveals which words concern available information and which already connect it through an explanation. The material can later be compared with other episodes while retaining differences between them.

Nina might choose the conversation over tea after opening the album. She recalls several glances at the clock and a change of subject. If she does not know the exact number of glances, it need not be invented. A roughly remembered remark can be conveyed as an approximate meaning. A description does not become more accurate merely because it includes a precise minute and verbatim speech. Their source matters. A private note can simply say: I do not remember the whole sequence, but noticed the shift towards leaving before I finished. This limit neither dismisses disappointment nor creates false documentary precision.

Her original intention is also worth naming. Nina wanted to show a few photographs and share an impression rather than give a detailed trip report. Was this agreed beforehand? Did the acquaintance know how much time she expected to spend? These questions do not mean that attention may be requested only after a formal contract. They help reveal whether expectations coincided in this meeting. Sometimes noticing the difference between a personal wish and a shared arrangement is enough. If an agreement was clear, however, its breach should not disappear into an assumption that someone merely imagined they were supposed to be heard.

II. Action, evaluation and cause have different statuses

Consider three possible sentences: the other person looked at the clock; it seemed inattentive to me; he wanted to show that my story was unimportant. The first describes a noticed action, the second evaluates it within a context, and the third proposes an intention. Each can matter, but their grounds differ. The first concerns available observation and memory; the second involves circumstances, expectations and consequences. The third requires further information about why the person acted in that way. When these parts merge, a persuasive personal explanation can appear as directly observed as a moving hand or a change of subject.

This distinction requires no colourless language. A conversation can be described as painful, an answer as seeming harsh, or continuing as becoming difficult afterwards. Such words convey the episode's experienced quality. It helps to indicate whose evaluation it is and what supports it. Nina need not replace disappointment with a neutral phrase about a communication mismatch. She can name her impression in ordinary language while keeping known details beside it. Accuracy here does not mean emotional coldness. It avoids making another's intention the sole basis for recognising that an event really affected someone.

In the selected opening of Section IV of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume examines evidence and inference beyond what is immediately available. This concerns philosophical knowledge rather than a conversation method or proof that understanding people is impossible. A limited distinction is used here: an observed circumstance does not automatically coincide with a conclusion about what lies behind it. The entire argument about causation is not adopted as a ready-made rule for relationships. Nor does the passage imply that every inference is equally unreliable, memory is infallible, or action must wait until a final cause is established.

III. Your response can be described without diagnosing someone else

Sometimes a person feels that their experience becomes legitimate only after another's bad intention is proven. If distraction was accidental, feeling hurt somehow seems impermissible. Nina's disappointment, however, concerns how a meaningful story unfolded and what she expected from the meeting. She can examine this independently of certainty about a hidden cause. Her experience does not establish someone else's motive, but an uncertain motive does not make that experience imaginary. Two independent questions remain: what was happening for me, and what do I genuinely know about the other person? Neither needs to absorb the other.

A bodily response, feeling, wish or action can be named in personal language: continuing became difficult, I wanted to close the album, or disappointment arose. There is no need to select a perfect emotion label or declare the response a symptom. A generally unpleasant impression can remain general if that is what is recalled. The entry serves a specific question rather than a complete inner classification. Nina might notice that she spoke faster after a glance at the clock. This describes her response. It neither explains why the acquaintance checked the time nor requires her to correct her reaction immediately for his convenience.

Description should not be replaced by a new verdict against oneself. Giving up certainty about blaming another sometimes produces the opposite extreme: I am too sensitive, misunderstood everything, and should have been calm. That is also a broad conclusion requiring grounds. Part

of an initial explanation can be clarified while discomfort remains recognised. If Nina later learns of a fixed departure time, her understanding of the glances may change. Her wish to be told that the meeting would be short can still be discussed. A new explanation need not erase the earlier experience or make it evidence of a personal defect.

IV. A plausible explanation remains an explanation

An intention often seems obvious because we can imagine why we ourselves would perform the action. If I would look at the clock to end a story, the other person must have wanted the same. Such a guess can sometimes help with orientation. Another person may nevertheless have different tasks, information and habits. A private note can say: I assumed he was hurrying me. This preserves the original understanding without making it the person’s established answer. The grounds and limits of the hypothesis can be named. The persuasiveness of experience and of an explanation need not be treated as a single proof.

The official abstract of Epley, Keysar, Van Boven and Gilovich’s 2004 paper describes a model of estimating another perspective by beginning with one’s own and then adjusting. Across five studies, the authors report conditions under which adjustment was insufficient. The abstract was read here, not the full paper or data. This gives limited context for a possible estimation error rather than establishing that Nina misunderstood her acquaintance. It also does not demonstrate the proposed record’s effectiveness. The experimental perspective leaves a question open without turning egocentrism into an accusatory label or diagnosis.

There is no need to fill an entry with ten favourable explanations to count as fair. The acquaintance might have been hurried, uninterested, or unaware of the story’s importance; some causes might coexist. A list makes none of them true. The practical task depends on the purpose. Nina may want to know how much time was available or say that she did not finish. This requires no final theory of her acquaintance’s personality. A significant unknown can be identified, followed by deciding whether a safe conversation is needed. Sometimes another explanation would change neither a chosen boundary nor the next action.

V. Not knowing does not mean giving up judgment

Admitting that someone’s intention is unknown can sound like a prohibition on every conclusion. Available behaviour, its recurrence and its consequences can still be evaluated. A clear refusal need not be declared uncertain until the entire motivation is disclosed. A broken agreement can be discussed. If danger arises, necessary protection does not wait for philosophical clarity. The boundary lies elsewhere: a conclusion should match its grounds. We can know that an action occurred and was unacceptable for a particular task without knowing the complete internal history that produced it.

The selected saying from Book II of the *Analects* connects knowledge with acknowledging what is unknown. It belongs to a historical ethical tradition rather than a modern test of interpersonal conclusions. This limited perspective is used here. Nearby sayings about understanding character and motives do not become promises of infallible access to people's minds. The text conveys sayings attributed to Confucius within a compiled tradition, not an established verbatim conversation record. Comparing it with Hume does not make them one teaching. They raise different questions about knowledge's boundaries while retaining distinct subjects and historical settings.

Nina can know that her story ended earlier than she wanted and that the acquaintance did not suggest returning to the photographs. She may remember other meetings ending abruptly. This is material for choosing a future format. Saying that he is generally incapable of attention has a different scale. Sometimes declining that format is enough without a complete explanation. The right to choose suitable interaction does not depend on winning an argument about hidden intention. Equally, another's refusal to hear a particular story creates no obligation to disclose every personal reason before our own choice becomes possible.

VI. Another person's account adds information without settling everything

If a conversation is possible and safe, the other person can describe how they saw the episode. Their words provide new material. They need not automatically be accepted as the whole truth, but neither must they be declared false beforehand. A reported intention can be distinguished from acknowledging an action, explaining conditions, or being willing to change something next time. Someone can genuinely be hurried and also handle an agreement inattentively. They may not remember a remark that another remembers clearly. Not every discrepancy is resolved by one sentence. Several perspectives may remain, with shared facts and different evaluations of their significance.

Suppose the acquaintance tells Nina that he expected a short tea but did not warn her about his departure time. This is another explicitly fictional development, not the established cause of the initial scene. It clarifies a possible question about agreeing time. Nina can say that without a warning she expected to finish her story. It is unnecessary to prove which person is generally a good listener. They could discuss whether a shorter meeting suits them and whether to mention it at the outset. If he declines discussion, however, the record provides no means to force the desired answer or acceptance of a proposed format.

An accepted explanation does not automatically cancel consequences either. A known cause may make behaviour more understandable without making it acceptable. A boundary can be retained even when someone else's difficulty is understood. More serious circumstances may

require protection, documentation or suitable professional help. A real threat or coercion should not become an exercise in interpreting motives more generously. A personal note has a limited role in such decisions. It may help name available circumstances, but replaces no professional work and requires no continued contact for the sake of a complete explanation.

VII. What could clarify an initial explanation?

A question about our own explanation can be specific: which available information would change it? If no account can influence a finding, we may be considering an established evaluation rather than an open inquiry into a cause. That does not establish that the evaluation is wrong. It may rest on sufficient recurring behaviour. It helps, however, to state honestly which subject remains open. Nina may not know whether her acquaintance was hurried and already know that she does not want to show photographs in that format again. One decision need not close every question about another person.

Clarification should relate to a real task and accessible material. A departure time can be asked about; an earlier arrangement can be checked in one’s own correspondence; inner indifference cannot be measured directly through one glance. Deliberately staging another unpleasant conversation, secretly testing a response, involving others in a test, or seeking private information is unnecessary. Material obtained this way can create another problem while failing to provide clarity. If no safe clarification is available, an unknown can remain unknown. Not every difficulty requires investigation, and a suitable boundary can rest on behaviour already known. A question can be prepared without embedding an accepted accusation. Clarifying time differs from demanding admission that the story was unimportant. There is no duty to find a perfect phrase guaranteed to produce a good answer: the other person retains their own choice and mood. Nina can name a particular difficulty and needed condition without proving her entire explanation. If a conversation becomes unsuitable, it can be postponed or ended without treating refusal to continue as confirmation of a hidden motive.

Willingness to hear an answer does not mean willingness to accept every explanation. Nina can recognise that her acquaintance was hurried and still ask him to mention it beforehand. She may learn that photographs do not interest him and choose another person for that story. She may receive no answer and stop examining the episode. These options differ without requiring a general verdict on both people. The next step concerns what a suitable meeting needs and whether both can arrange it. Accuracy then serves choice rather than endless collection of arguments about someone’s internal correctness.

VIII. Recurring behaviour and an overall image of a person

Several similar episodes can have practical significance. If meetings regularly end before the agreed time, this can inform later arrangements. Similarity should nevertheless be named through a particular feature rather than identical disappointment alone. One meeting had a known time constraint; another involved an unexpected task; a third had no discussed arrangement. Different responses may be appropriate. Examining details does not require restarting every evaluation from zero or forgetting experience. It reveals more precisely what recurs: an action, condition, breach or personal expectation across different circumstances. Records may be incomplete: the entries may mainly concern striking meetings, while ordinary ones were left unrecorded. The material's scale can be kept beside a noticed recurrence. A few described conversations are not a relationship's entire history. This does not mean that every decision must wait for exhaustive statistics. Significant recurring behaviour may suffice for a particular boundary while the person's overall character and exact internal cause remain unestablished.

An overall image can help with quick orientation but may stop noticing change. If a person was once inattentive, subsequent brief answers are easily read as confirmation. Sometimes they really confirm the impression; sometimes the new episode differs. A journal can retain an earlier overall view beside a specific new detail without demanding a complete immediate change of opinion. This differs from a duty to trust after any apology. Changed behaviour is assessed through available experience and significant circumstances rather than an attractive formulation. A person retains the right to decide about contact within their possibilities, needs and safety.

Not every relationship needs prolonged study. A record can be stopped when repeated description no longer helps answer a particular question. If a significant situation is difficult to understand, a chosen trusted person or suitable professional may help. Such a conversation should promise no infallible access to another's mind either. Personal experience, known behaviour and available decisions can be discussed. Help is not reserved for after another's exact motive is established. A person may seek support with an incomplete explanation and without wishing to disclose every detail. Unknown information removes no right to care.

IX. Four distinguishable parts of a description

For a brief voluntary trial, choose an ordinary safe episode requiring neither renewed dangerous contact nor reconstruction of traumatic events. Four short parts can be written: what happened according to available recollection, what I experienced, how I explained it to myself, and what genuinely remained unknown. If the other person has already described their side, mark that account separately. This is an editorial format rather than a diagnostic scale or proven conflict-resolution technique. It may be shortened, replaced with spoken consideration or left unused. The purpose is not an orderly table but a visible distinction between material and a proposed explanation.

For Nina, the first part might contain the album, several glances at the clock and the shift towards leaving. The second could name disappointment and a wish to end the story. The third records her guess about lost interest. The fourth names the unknown amount of time he had and whether he understood the story’s importance. She need not describe her acquaintance’s life in detail, collect evidence about his character, or prove her own objectivity. Approximate memory can be marked. The format itself does not guarantee greater accuracy. It shows which part of a finding needs clarification if that suits the purpose and can be done safely.

After writing, one small question can be selected, or examination can end. Nina might clarify the next meeting’s length, change the conversation’s subject, or share the trip with someone else. Testing her acquaintance’s behaviour is unnecessary to establish how much he values their interaction. A need for protection or help takes effect before the format is complete. A personal note replaces no suitable documentation of significant circumstances. It can remain private, be deleted, or be left unfinished. The right to stop applies both to analysis and to a conversation that someone does not wish, or cannot safely manage, to conduct.

X. Accuracy leaves people their own voices

An explanation of someone else’s motives can present their inner answer as known before it has been heard. Avoiding that haste leaves room for new information without transferring complete authority over our experience to the other person. Nina can acknowledge an unknown cause and still say that the meeting did not provide the conversation she needed. The acquaintance can give his side without matching her initial explanation. Between these voices, clarification, agreement, disagreement or distance are possible. None is a guaranteed consequence of a correctly written record. Examination simply preserves the subjects with which work is actually possible.

A revised explanation can be small. Instead of a general finding about indifference, a particular question about time and format remains. Alternatively, new information confirms that the format does not suit, and further clarification is unnecessary. In either case, what is

established and where its limits lie can remain visible. There is no obligation to reach exhaustive truth about another's personality. A few circumstances and a clear preference may suffice for the next action. This limitation is not a defeat of knowledge. It suits the subject: one episode, one possible arrangement, and people whose answers cannot be fully written for each other.

What this means in practice

Return to one safe episode and separate a noticed action, personal experience and a proposed cause. Mark approximate recollection and information not yet received. Experience can be recognised without proving a hidden intention; a hypothesis can remain a hypothesis rather than either final truth or meaningless error. If clarification is needed, name a question connected with a particular task and choose only a voluntary safe approach. Creating conflict, seeking another's private data or demanding complete disclosure is unnecessary for describing personal experience clearly enough.

Evaluate available behaviour and consequences at a suitable scale. Agreements, refusal, recurrence and real danger matter even when an internal cause is unknown. Necessary action, protection and help do not wait for complete analysis. Another person's account adds material while preserving the right to consider it alongside known circumstances. An entry can end with a clarified question, a suitable boundary or an unknown. It need not be continued or disclosed. The practical result is modest: the account shows where my experience speaks, where my hypothesis enters, and where the other person retains an answer that is their own and not yet established.

Key quotation

> *"When you do not know." — Analects, selected saying II.17 attributed to Confucius, a short fragment of James Legge's translation, with display capitalisation. The context distinguishes known from unknown without promising access to others' intentions.*

Connections between traditions

• **Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.I:** evidence and inference beyond it. A limited philosophical perspective rather than a prohibition on causal conclusions or action.

• **Analects, II.17:** knowledge and acknowledgement of the unknown. A historical ethical perspective; nearby judgments of motives and character are not adopted as an infallible method for understanding people.

• **Epley and colleagues, experimental psychology:** limited context for estimating others' perspectives from one's own. Neither a diagnosis of the scene's participants nor evidence of descriptive writing's effectiveness.

• **Editorial examination:** event, experience, hypothesis and unknown. Perspectives are compared without being declared a single teaching; personal boundaries and necessary protection remain.

Sources

1. David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, Part I, selected paragraphs 20–23. L.A. Selby-Bigge, editor, second edition 1902, reprinting the 1777 edition; English original. Project Gutenberg 9662. The selected passage, nearby context and metadata were read, not the whole section or book. The page distinguishes first posting on 14 October 2003, release in January 2006 and posting on 15 November 2011. Digital-edition rights UNKNOWN; source text is neither imported nor embedded.

2. *The Analects of Confucius*, selected II.17 saying about knowledge. James Legge, translator. Project Gutenberg 3330. The selected saying, nearby context and metadata were read, not the complete text or a Chinese critical edition. Released 1 July 2002; updated 8 January 2021. The page repeats XVII for the next saying; only the first, about knowledge, is used here. Digital-edition rights UNKNOWN; source text is neither imported nor embedded nor used for training.

3. Nicholas Epley; Boaz Keysar; Leaf Van Boven; Thomas Gilovich. *Perspective taking as egocentric anchoring and adjustment*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2004, 87(3):327–339. PubMed 15382983; DOI 10.1037/0022-3514.87.3.327. The complete official indexed author abstract and metadata were read, not the full paper, methods or data. The notice states © 2004 APA, all rights reserved. No direct scientific quotations are used; the source abstract is neither imported nor embedded nor used for training.

Tags

episode description, observation, intention, assumption, hypothesis, fact, evidence, inference, experience, conversation, attention, expectation, agreement, clarification, not knowing, knowledge, personal perspective, another perspective, boundary, responsibility, consequences, recurrence, safety, voluntary practice, private record, Hume, Confucius, Analects, experimental psychology, self-inquiry, interlocutor, limits of inference

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.