

A Promise is More than Words

How can we make promises in a time when the future feels more like a question full of uncertainties?

Think about the last important promise you made or the last one made to you. Promises once played a central role in how we relate to others: in love, work, social life, and even politics. Today, they seem to matter less. We begin many projects but make few real promises, and when we do, they often feel unreliable. Instead of making promises to one another, we project them onto objects, technology, or consumer choices. Today, we often choose products and activities that reflect how we see ourselves and how we want others to see us. A promise is no longer seen as a serious, sincere gesture but as something almost outdated, even awkward.

Nevertheless, a promise is more than words. It can create a bond, tying past, present, and future together. This raises a deep question: how can we promise anything if we live in a time where the future feels uncertain or impossible? And if we stop making promises altogether, how can we hope to build a future? Promises are about the future spoken in the present. They create beginnings, connect memories, and embrace risk because every promise can be unrealized or broken. Promises can intervene in destiny. To promise is to insist that not everything is fixed or determined. In a time so poor in promises, many surrendered to fatalism or nihilism. Living only for themselves within what seems possible.

The Structure of a Promise

Every promise has three elements: A recipient (who it is made to), A commitment (what is promised), and A time frame (when it will be fulfilled). To whom, what, and when. A promise is not just talk; it is a *performative act*. Even if it fails, it still changes reality by creating shared expectations and responsibilities. Promises stretch reality by opening possibilities. They can be remembered or forgotten, kept or broken, but they always carry power: they can save a life, or destroy one.

Promises hold both freedom and obligation. They can be freely spoken, yet are binding once given. Not all promises are free. Some are imposed, often as commands from authority figures, such as parents, teachers, or bosses. These can become tools of control rather than acts of trust. There are also false promises. These are not simply lies but strategies of domination, especially in politics and media. There, promises mix seduction with manipulation, teaching us to mistrust and expect disappointment. Often, the powerful rarely keep their word.

God, the State, and the Economy

Throughout history, the strongest promises have been made not between people, but by larger societal powers: The Divine Promise of God's salvation and blessing in religious tradition today shifts into a covenant: people must prove loyalty to receive salvation. What was once the

State's promise of safety and rights has become a demand for obedience. The Economy's Promise of endless growth and prosperity has turned to austerity. Its promise is seductive and deceptive: there is never enough, so the economic promise must constantly be renewed, expressed as an investment in a better tomorrow.

The Era of Accidents

Accidents are no longer uncommon; they're woven into the fabric of daily life. Whether through sudden illness or catastrophe, the fragile continuity of our lives we rely on can fracture without warning, forcing us to confront new versions of ourselves and lives. Today, our present is shaped by accidents: crises of all varieties (hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, random gun shootings, bankruptcies), economic or gov't collapses, and catastrophes. What was once rare now feels constant, almost the norm. In this reality, the old sovereign promises have weakened. God no longer guarantees salvation, the state fails to protect, and the economy cannot provide. Power now comes less from a promising future and more from control and prediction.

Control and prediction, unlike a promise, do not create new futures; they extend the past into the present. Algorithms and artificial intelligence represent this shift with predictive algorithms masquerading as intelligence, more and more controlling our lives. They don't promise us freedom; instead calculate probabilities that shape and limit our choices. To promise is to make a bond with others, a shared vision of the future. In our era of accidents, austerity, and predictive algorithms, promises have lost their place. Nevertheless, a promise remains a radical act. To promise is to exercise freedom, to resist fatalism, and to imagine a common future even in uncertain times. In a world dominated by prediction and fear, the promise remains a means of reclaiming hope.