Civilization's Common Principles

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Common Principles

We come into this world naked. Beneath us stands reality. Anything we build is technology. A stable life, a stable farm, a stable house, and tools are technology. Continuing life from generation to generation, and the ability to build and keep, is civilization.

A civilization includes its mechanical tools, and also the social customs and individual values of the people within it.

All civilizations exist within the bounds and consequences of reality. Here is what is asserted:

Reality

1. Reality is real, knowable, and consequential. Truth is what corresponds to reality.
2. Humans are self-interested, limited, and particular.
3. Goodness must include human life continuing, and that life kept and built.
4. What you keep and build is self-anchored, tiered, and outward. Enemies are real.
5. Justice is scoped procedural symmetry.

What building requires

These five are the ground any builder stands on. Reality answers false claims with failure. Limited people cannot carry unlimited duties. A life

that is not kept does not continue. What is kept begins with the keeper and moves outward, or it is not kept. People build where the rule is known beforehand, bounded, and applied alike.

So technology requires something from us. It requires a will and a method that answer those constraints in conduct. That answer, in a person, is virtue. That answer, held across people and generations, is civilization. Civilization is not an entity and not a collective. It is the technology that lets other technologies stand.

Framing of building

Civilization enables survival, and life kept and built. It keeps enemies away and its people fed. It keeps individuals alive and building. Every other technology rests on it.

Virtue is that technology in a person. The individual's virtues of civilization are:

1. Align with truth
2. Take ownership, which is responsibility
3. Seek excellence
4. Admire beauty
5. Be humble
6. Have children
7. Form and listen

Explaining the Common Principles

1. Reality is real, knowable, and consequential. Truth is what corresponds to reality.

Reality is real

Why it is important: Reality is what exists. There is one reality, and it is not an illusion. It operates independently of human wishes, opinions, or

votes, so a tool, a law, or a plan can be relied on. A book or a story does not create a new reality; it creates a narrative.

Range of views: People may include different things within the total scope of reality. Some hold that reality consists strictly of the physical universe of matter and energy, and that natural laws describe how matter and energy behave. Others hold that God and spiritual laws are also real and act within the world. Both views remain within this principle so long as they agree that we inhabit a single, shared physical world in which things have objective properties of their own and act by them, and those properties do not change when our descriptions change.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept solipsism. It cannot accept the claim that the external world is an illusion, or that each person possesses a separate "personal reality." It cannot accept the belief that social consensus or political authority creates reality.

Knowable

Why it is important: Humans can obtain an accurate, working understanding of the world. What a man knows of the shared world is what has survived contact with it. His senses are proxies: the eye turns bands of light into nerve signals, and the ear does the same with variations in air pressure. Instruments are proxies he builds, and he learns how far to trust each one by testing it in different ways. Logic and reason are shortcuts to a test. They tell him what a test should show if a theory is right, and they tell him when a theory contradicts itself. By themselves they do not confirm a claim about the shared world. The world does that, by pushing back. Knowledge grows as models are tested against reality again and again, until they converge. People fly in airplanes and use telephones because engineers have learned the properties of materials and built processes that work.

Range of views: People differ on the precision of human knowledge and the tools required to reach it. Direct observation suffices for simple tasks, while instruments, mathematics, and controlled testing are required to know things beyond immediate perception, such as radio waves or the crystal structure of a metal. Some also accept religious revelation about what the senses do not reach. Revelation is a separate category from

knowledge, and each person may believe it or not. Revelation may add a claim. It may not cancel a measurement. The obligation to test it remains.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept radical skepticism, which claims that we cannot know anything with enough certainty to act and build, because we do not know everything perfectly. It also cannot accept intuition or emotional certainty as a substitute for sensory and empirical verification where the claim is about the shared physical world. A feeling that a beam will hold is not a test of the beam. Intuition may suggest a hypothesis. It does not confirm one. A calculation of the beam is not a test of it either. In a load test, reality acts on the beam itself. A calculation is the logic that carries what tested beams did under load over to this one, without testing each beam.

Consequential

Why it is important: Reality pushes back. A man who runs into a wall breaks his nose. Pushing back is more than having effects: a story can affect its reader, but nothing in the story pushes back on him. An author can bring a dead character back to life; a dead animal stays dead. Reality pushes back even when no one acts. A man who does nothing still starves or dies of exposure. Reality is never at rest; air and the molecules of every substance are always moving. Reality is consequential because there is no way to escape the activity of the physical. Dry cotton burns when a flame reaches it, because of what cotton and flame are, whatever the person holding the flame intended. Because reality is consequential, errors in judgment or action carry real costs, and so does doing nothing.

Range of views: Reasonable people will debate which consequences matter most over different spans of time. An action may produce an immediate physical benefit while causing a long-term financial or demographic loss. Judging the full chain of consequences requires study and debate.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept the belief that good intentions excuse or erase destructive outcomes. It cannot accept the belief that renaming a failure changes the physical or social result of that failure. It cannot accept the belief that doing nothing escapes consequence.

Truth is what corresponds to reality

Why it is important: This sentence states the direction of fit between the mind and the world. Reality comes first; our statements, models, and beliefs are true only to the extent that they accurately match reality. What corresponds only to a narrative is not truth. When men debate, they must not merely adjudicate differing personal opinions. They must point to something outside of themselves, make predictions about common observations, and verify the results in the external world. Correspondence is what makes a belief true. Justification is having grounds to think it corresponds. A belief is justified in so much as it has been tested against reality and holds up, and the more independent tests converge, the stronger the justification. A claim about the shared world that no possible observation could prove false cannot be trusted. It fits every state of reality, so it corresponds to none in particular. A claim about what lies outside the shared world belongs with revelation, not with knowledge. This principle leaves it open.

Range of views: Correspondence may be exact or approximate depending on the task. A machinist cutting a steel cylinder requires correspondence within thousandths of an inch; a historian describing a war requires correspondence to the surviving records and physical evidence. Scientific models, such as Newtonian mechanics, remain true and useful within the specific range of conditions where their predictions match reality, even if a broader model is required for extreme conditions.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept redefining truth as whatever is politically useful, whatever a majority agrees upon, or whatever an authority decrees. It cannot accept truth relative to a person, a class, a culture, or an epoch. Truth does not have different frames, just one: reality. It cannot accept coherence alone: a theory that is internally consistent on paper but fails when tested against the physical world. Logic can tell what is congruent inside a model or a story; it cannot tell whether the story is real. It cannot accept altering a hypothesis after the fact to claim a failed prediction was actually correct.

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2. Humans are self-interested, limited, and particular.

Humans

Why it is important: These principles describe the actual biological creatures, men and women, who must live and build in the world. Rules and technologies must be designed for humans as they are, rather than for theoretical beings. Virtue is cultivated in each person by formation and practice, and it is lost when the cultivation stops.

Range of views: One may analyze human nature primarily through biology, through psychology, or through history and religion. All are compatible here so long as they recognize the stable traits of the species.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept the belief that humans are born naturally good, or that they are blank slates that can be reshaped into a new kind of creature by state conditioning. Nor can it accept treating men and women as interchangeable administrative units without distinct biological realities.

Self-interested

Why it is important: A human being is naturally concerned with his own survival and well-being. Valuing his own life is what makes ownership possible. He answers for the life he values. Ownership is responsibility. Being self-interested is not a moral defect. It is the ordinary condition from which he takes that responsibility and ceases to be a burden on the people who are doing their own work.

Range of views: There is legitimate debate over where the boundary of self-interest ends and obligation to others begins. None of the views inside this perimeter treats a person as having a generic responsibility to Humanity, and none treats ordinary self-preservation as a moral defect. All of them value human life both broadly and in particular.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept moral systems that condemn basic self-preservation and personal ambition as evil. Conversely, it cannot accept defining self-interest as the pursuit of short-term whims, hedonism, or the right to harm and defraud others for personal gain.

Limited

Why it is important: Humans are finite in lifespan, time, energy, attention, knowledge, and intelligence. Because a person only has so many hours in a day and so much wealth and attention to spend, he cannot care for everyone equally or solve every problem in the world. Limited knowledge and time also mean that we can be wrong. Humility follows from acknowledging these limits. The world is knowable, and humility is the practice of checking our understanding against reality and looking for conflicting evidence.

Range of views: People differ in their individual capacities, and societies can extend human reach through tools, records, and division of labor. However, extending human reach does not remove the fundamental condition of being finite.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept utopian doctrines that demand unlimited global responsibility from finite individuals. It also cannot accept using human limitation as an excuse for laziness or refusing to handle the duties that lie within one's actual reach.

Particular

Why it is important: No human being is a generic specimen. Every man has a particular genetic makeup, a particular sex, a particular family lineage, a particular native language, and a particular culture and society in which he was raised. These specific traits and ties form the actual person and determine his concrete abilities and obligations.

Range of views: Serious people debate the relative weight of genetics, family upbringing, and broader culture in shaping a person's character and capability. Recognizing that all three exist and matter is sufficient for this principle.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept egalitarian theories that treat all human beings as identical, swappable tokens with no attachment to heritage, biology, or place. Recognizing particularity establishes that people are distinct and have specific roots. It does not by itself establish a moral hierarchy of human worth.

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3. Goodness must include human life continuing, and that life kept and built.

Goodness must include

Why it is important: Goodness is the standard of what humans ought to do and aim for. By stating what goodness *must include*, this principle establishes a mandatory minimum requirement for any moral system. If a moral or political code itself brings about the death of the people who practice it, or ruins their ability to sustain themselves and to raise the next generation, that code fails the test of reality. Death at an enemy's hands is a different fact, and it belongs under Point 4. A people can keep a sound code and still be destroyed by someone who has set out to destroy them. The code fails when its own commands produce the death or the ruin.

Range of views: This phrase establishes a floor, not a ceiling. Religious faiths and philosophical traditions may include higher goods above this floor, such as holiness, salvation, or philosophical contemplation, provided those aims do not destroy the floor of human continuance and maintenance.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept anti-human ideologies (such as voluntary human extinction), nor can it accept moral systems that define goodness merely as the absence of pain, as pleasant feelings, as whatever adults consent to, or as adherence to abstract rules that cause the society practicing them to die out.

Human life continuing

Why it is important: Survival across generations is the precondition for all other human goods. A dead person cannot practice virtue, and an extinct people leaves no civilization behind. Continuing means both staying alive in the present and producing and raising the next generation so that the population and its knowledge do not die out. This principle values life itself, and having children continues that life through new individuals.

Range of views: Communities will weigh immediate survival against long-term demographic health in different ways depending on their circumstances, such as during a famine or a war. Affirming that human life

should continue does not make every culture equally worthy of continuance.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept substituting animal or plant life for human life. It cannot accept a society that measures success solely by the material comfort of the currently living generation while failing to have enough children to replace itself.

Kept and built

Why it is important: Human life requires more than bare biological survival; it requires material and social order. *Kept* means maintaining what already exists against natural decay and entropy. *Built* means creating new capacity, structures, tools, and people that were not there before.

Keeping applies at every level of wealth: sweeping a floor so the home is clean and habitable is the same fundamental act of keeping, whether the floor is dirt or marble. Building includes physical property, businesses, infrastructure, and raising children. Raising children is part of building, because people grow old and die, and new capable people must be formed to take their place. Separating "human life" from "mere property" is an illusory distinction. When a riot or a war burns down a home or a business, it is not "just property" that was lost. That home or business was a useful structure built by human labor and time to sustain human life; it is a piece of civilization. Destroying built property destroys part of what sustains human life, even though a building can be rebuilt and a dead man cannot.

Range of views: Different societies and households will prioritize different proportions of keeping versus building depending on their stage of development. A frontier settlement must focus heavily on building basic infrastructure; an established city must devote immense labor to keeping its waterworks, roads, and laws in repair.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept neglect: allowing homes, tools, laws, and personal health to deteriorate. It cannot accept building without keeping, or keeping without building. A new project left to decay is a case of the first. A shrinking inheritance hoarded while nothing new is made and no children are raised is a case of the second. It cannot accept dismissing the destruction of homes, shops, and tools as trivial.

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4. What you keep and build is self-anchored, tiered, and outward. Enemies are real.

What you keep and build

Why it is important: This identifies the subject of moral obligation: the actual work of maintaining and constructing life, addressed directly to the individual ("you"). Moral duty is measured by what a person actually maintains and constructs with his time, effort, and resources.

Range of views: The specific things a person keeps and builds will vary by his station, trade, and stage of life: whether he is maintaining a farm, running a machine shop, raising young children, or serving in public office.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept treating verbal signaling, political activism, or emotional sympathy as a substitute for the tangible work of keeping and building.

Self-anchored

Why it is important: The work of keeping and building must begin with the individual himself. Because humans are self-interested, limited, and particular, each person is the primary custodian of his own body, mind, solvency, and conduct. A man who does not keep himself in working order cannot support a family or defend a country. He is undisciplined, insolvent, or sick from a neglect of the care that was in his power, and he becomes a burden upon the people around him who are doing their work.

Range of views: People may draw the line of the "anchor" strictly at the individual, or include the immediate household (spouse and dependent children) as part of the foundational unit.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept collectivist doctrines that claim the individual belongs first to the state, the party, or humanity at large. You do not start from the globe and reason inward to find out what you are allowed to keep for yourself; you start from yourself and work outward.

Tiered

Why it is important: Because human time, money, and energy are limited, claims on those resources must be ranked by proximity and bond. Nearer tiers rightly command the larger share. Farther tiers command less. In a household budget, a man must first keep himself healthy and employed. Second, he must feed and house his wife and children, and educate his children. Third, he must meet his obligations to extended family, neighbors, and his local community. Fourth, he must perform the duties he owes his country, including taxes levied by law for the country's continuance. Fifth, he may give charity to distant strangers when a surplus remains. Honesty in speech and dealing is not one of these tiers. It binds inside every tier. An enemy stands outside them. Shortage of money does not license a lie, and owing a stranger the truth does not give him the child's claim on the household. A tax levied to confiscate the household, or to destroy a people, is not a duty of the fourth tier. It is an act of enmity, and it is answered under "Enemies are real."

Range of views: Cultures and households argue over the order of the intermediate tiers: whether a close friend outranks a distant cousin, and how an obligation to a church ranks beside an obligation to the town. The order above is one workable household budget. It does not close that argument. What stands is the shape of the ranking. The self and the household come before the stranger, and a claim on time and money thins as it moves outward, while goodwill reaches every peaceful person.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept universalism (such as extreme utilitarianism), which demands that a father treat a stranger in a foreign land as having the identical claim on his income and attention as his own child. A person who spends his family's grocery money on a distant cause has violated the tiers. It cannot accept treating truthfulness as an outer-tier surplus, owed only after the household and the state have been satisfied. Equally, it cannot accept nepotism or clan corruption inside a public office, which belongs under Point 5.

Outward

Why it is important: While the work begins at the self and household, it does not stop at the front door. The direction of responsibility moves outward from the individual to the neighborhood, the town, and the na-

tion. A household cannot survive in isolation if the town's water supply fails, the courts collapse, or the country is invaded. The inner rings are protected only when each man does his share in maintaining and defending the outer rings, including civic duty, lawful commerce, and military service when the nation's survival is threatened.

Range of views: How much of a person's time and money should go to the outer tiers changes depending on circumstances. In peaceful times, most effort stays near the household and local trade; during an invasion or natural disaster, a much larger share must be directed outward to the border or the common defense so the household is not destroyed.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept pure isolationism or egoism, where a person refuses to contribute anything to the community or nation whose laws and defenses keep his household safe. Conversely, it cannot accept state adventures that use the rhetoric of emergency to drain households for foreign projects that do not protect the nation's continuance.

Enemies are real

Why it is important: Some individuals, groups, and states actively seek to rob, subjugate, or destroy you, your family, or your people. You do not "keep and build" an enemy; you defend against him, deter him, or defeat him. Refusing to recognize that enemies exist leaves a family or a nation defenseless. Weakness is a condition to carry, not a virtue to admire.

At the household level, suppose a home invader breaks into a house where a man lives with his family. The invader has stepped outside peaceful law and is using force that threatens the life and safety of the family. To the homeowner, the invader is an immediate enemy who must be stopped by force.

At the national level, the Young Turk government massacred and deported Armenians and Greeks living under its rule. By that program it made itself their enemy.

An enemy is any person, or any body of persons, who acts to rob, subjugate, or destroy you, your household, or your people. The act may be one man forcing his way into a house. It may be a state carrying out a program against a people. A further fact belongs with the second kind

of case: the government under which you live can be that enemy when it turns its power to your destruction.

Range of views: Prudent people will debate when a competitor becomes an actual enemy, and what level of force or pre-emption is required to stop a threat. A business rival or a political opponent who abides by common laws and procedures is a competitor, not an enemy.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept a refusal to use violence to protect oneself and one's own. That refusal stands against these principles. It cannot accept the naive belief that enmity is merely a misunderstanding that vanishes if one refuses to name it. Equally, it cannot accept labeling everyone who is foreign, poor, or holds a different opinion within the law as an enemy.

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5. Justice is scoped procedural symmetry.

Justice is scoped procedural symmetry

Why it is important: These three words form a single concept that defines how rules must be applied among people. The phrase is one name for three requirements. "Symmetry" is the noun. "Scoped" and "procedural" name the kind of symmetry that counts as justice. They are not optional description. If any one of the three words is removed, justice fails. Without *scope*, a rule claims jurisdiction over the whole world where it cannot be enforced. Without *procedure*, decisions are arbitrary commands. Without *symmetry*, the powerful exempt their friends and punish their rivals.

Scoped

Why it is important: Every system of rules operates within a defined boundary of jurisdiction, membership, and role. A state's laws extend only to the borders of that state or country where they are established; a court in one country has no authority or mechanism to enforce its laws in another country. Within a country, smaller scopes also exist, such as a family, a business, a school, or a military unit.

Scope also defines distinct *positions* within a boundary based on distinct duties and status. A citizen and a non-citizen do not occupy the same position regarding voting, military conscription, or welfare, because they do not share the same bond and obligations to the polity. In a school, the teacher and the students are in different positions with different authority.

How a society defines its scope and positions determines its character. Men and women differ, the young and the old differ, and the teacher and the student differ. The question for justice is which differences are real and relevant to a position inside the scope, and which are not.

A Muslim who wants a country that distinguishes Muslim from non-Muslim in law, as written in the Quran, gives one answer to that question. A non-Muslim will not naturally want to live in that country. A person who truly holds that distinction to be morally right is not compatible with a country that refuses to draw it. Those two answers do not make one polity.

A secular state does not use religion to place citizens in different legal positions. Age, competence, office, and the difference between citizen and non-citizen remain positions where the difference is real and relevant. Symmetry runs between persons who occupy the same position.

Range of views: Societies debate where national borders should sit, how immigrants may be admitted to citizenship without overwhelming the existing population, and which differences (such as age, competence, or citizenship) justify separate legal positions.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept borderless universalism, which claims that every human in the world holds the identical legal claim on a nation's treasury, courts, and territory as the citizens who pay taxes and defend that nation. It also cannot accept arbitrary scopes invented to create corrupt exemptions for a ruling clique.

Procedural

Why it is important: Justice requires a known method (rules, laws, and standards of evidence) stated beforehand and followed consistently regardless of who is involved. Procedure ensures predictability so people

can plan their lives and build without fear of sudden, arbitrary confiscation or punishment.

Because humans are particular and unequal in talent and effort (Point 2), a fair procedure will naturally produce unequal outcomes. In a classroom, the teacher grades all students using the identical examination and grading scale. That is procedural justice. The students will receive different grades based on their mastery of the material; an unequal outcome does not mean the test was unjust. Furthermore, separating gifted students into higher-level classes is completely consistent with procedural justice, provided the qualification standard is stated beforehand and open to any student who meets it.

Range of views: Different legal and institutional traditions use different specific procedures (such as jury trials versus panels of judges, or different standards of testing and licensing) and allow varying degrees of mercy after a person has been found guilty under the rule.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept changing the rules after the fact to guarantee that a favored person or group wins. It cannot accept lawlessness disguised as compassion, where clear violations of the rule are ignored without consequence.

Symmetry

Why it is important: Symmetry means that every person who stands in the *same position* within a *scope* receives the *identical procedure*, and the penalty for a wrong falls on the person who did it. While a teacher and a student are in different positions, any two students taking the same class stand in the same position and must be graded by the same rule. Any two citizens accused of theft stand in the same position before the criminal court, regardless of their wealth, family connections, or political views. Symmetry is what prevents the tiered loyalties of Point 4 from corrupting public institutions: when a man serves as a judge, a police officer, or a teacher, he is bound by the scope of his office to apply the procedure symmetrically, rather than favoring his relatives or friends.

Range of views: People may debate proportionate punishments within the law, and debate what qualifications are necessary to enter a given position (such as an occupation or an advanced class).

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept two false definitions of symmetry:

1. *Equal outcomes (disparate impact):* The claim that if different individuals or groups achieve different results under the same rule, the rule itself is unjust and must be rigged until the results are equal.
2. *Value symmetry:* Holding the losses of two sides equal, so that a wrong is a debt between them, paid by an equal loss: a brother killed for a brother, a daughter for a daughter, or a price set by the victim's rank, tribe, or religion.

Explaining the Framing of Building and Virtue

Civilization and Technology

Civilization as the root technology

Why it is important: A technology is a repeatable method, together with the structure that method keeps in being, by which humans answer a problem in reality. A stable house is technology because a known method built it and keeps it standing. A stable life is technology in the same sense: it continues because conduct is repeated, not because it was wished for. We commonly think of technology as machines: steam engines, airplanes, or computers. However, none of those machines can be built or maintained unless people are fed, violent criminals and foreign invaders are kept away, contracts and laws are enforced, language and mathematics are taught, and children are raised to replace retiring workers. Civilization is that foundational technology. It consists of two parts. **Will** is the active decision by living individuals to keep the system running and to continue into the future. **Method** is the accumulated customs, laws, crafts, and knowledge passed down across generations. Civilization is not a living entity or a collective mind; if individual human beings lose the will or forget the method, the civilization stops working, even if its buildings are still standing.

Range of views: Civilizations vary in their specific customs, forms of government, and technical specializations, provided their methods successfully keep their people fed, defended, and reproducing.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept treating civilization as an automatic background condition that runs by itself without upkeep. It cannot accept valuing secondary technologies, such as financial instruments or entertainment, above the foundational practices that keep them in being, including family stability, law, agriculture, defense, and manufacturing.

Virtue

Why it is important: Because civilization is not an independent organism, it only exists when practiced by individual men and women. Virtue is the practice of civilization's will and method by an individual person. A society collapses when its people lie, shirk responsibility, produce shoddy work, despise order, refuse correction, have no children, and neither form the young nor listen to the old. A clever written constitution does not save it.

The 7 Virtues of Civilization

1. Align with truth

Why it is important: This is the personal practice of Point 1. To build anything that lasts, a person must conform his mind and his speech to reality as it actually is, rather than to what is flattering, comfortable, or socially convenient. A falsehood introduces a flaw into the method, and reality eventually answers the flaw with failure. The engineer who falsifies a stress test, the business owner who falsifies his ledgers, and the citizen who lies about a threat to his city each introduce one.

Range of views: Aligning with truth includes rigorous scientific measurement, accurate bookkeeping, plain truthfulness in daily speech, and admitting when a plan has failed.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept lying, fraud, self-deception, or prioritizing ideological loyalty and group consensus over observable facts.

2. Take ownership, which is responsibility

Why it is important: Ownership is answering personally for the condition and outcome of what is yours, even when someone else did the dam-

age. It is more than holding legal title. Because humans are limited (Point 2) and their obligations are tiered (Point 4), a person must claim a definite charge and maintain it himself: his body, his craft, his household, his debts, and his assigned post. Property and tasks assigned to everyone in general are assigned to no one in particular. Unless a named person, or a named office, answers for them, they fall into disrepair. A shared work lasts only when someone in particular is charged with the upkeep.

Range of views: The scale of what a person owns and answers for ranges from a young apprentice responsible only for his own tools and punctuality, to a father responsible for a household, to an executive or general responsible for a large enterprise.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept blaming others for one's own failures, demanding rights and privileges without carrying the corresponding upkeep, or expressing loud concern for distant global problems while leaving one's own home, finances, and job in disorder.

3. Seek excellence

Why it is important: Excellence is holding one's work to a high, objective standard of performance and durability. Doing the bare minimum lets tools, institutions, and skills degrade over time. Reality is consequential and never at rest, so things decay (Point 1), and what is built must be kept (Point 3). Excellence is required in routine maintenance, such as sweeping a floor thoroughly or machining a part to exact tolerances, and in building new improvements. When workers and leaders seek excellence, the civilization's margin of safety grows; when they accept slackness, systems fail under stress.

Range of views: The specific standard of excellence depends on the task. A temporary field shelter and a permanent stone bridge have different engineering requirements, but both can be executed well or poorly within their class.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept mediocrity, omitting required steps when unsupervised, or substituting credentials, titles, and certificates for actual competence.

4. Admire beauty

Why it is important: Beauty is vitality, order, and truth showing together in a particular thing. Vitality means that the thing has living form: a healthy body, a building with a coherent structure, an engine running as designed, a sentence that moves. It does not mean that the subject must be cheerful or intact. A tragedy is beautiful when its form is alive and its account of grief is true. A fictional tale that truly describes a moral reality, or an aspect of human nature, can be beautiful. A tale that depicts reality falsely, such as one that portrays cowardice and decay as noble and free of consequence, cannot. Inside a tale the author decides the consequences; in reality they come whether anyone decides them or not. Admiring beauty is practical: it trains a person to recognize when something is thriving, ordered, and true, and makes him unwilling to tolerate squalor, disorder, and falsehood in his surroundings. People will work and sacrifice to maintain a civilization that is orderly and beautiful; they become demoralized in one that is ugly and degraded.

Range of views: Different cultures have distinct architectural, musical, and artistic styles. So long as those styles reflect vitality, order, and truth, they fall within this virtue.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept the cult of ugliness: art, architecture, or narratives that celebrate chaos, filth, or falsehood. Depicting a wound, a ruin, or a deformed body truthfully is a different act from celebrating it. It also cannot accept treating beauty as mere idle luxury detached from function and truth.

5. Be humble

Why it is important: Humility is the practical application of knowing that humans are limited (Point 2) and that we did not invent the civilization we inherited. Because our knowledge and time are finite, our current models of the world may be incomplete or wrong. A humble person tests his ideas against reality, listens to correction, learns from skilled predecessors before trying to change the method, and recognizes that his individual work is only one part of a larger whole.

Range of views: Humility applies equally to the student learning a trade from a master and to the master engineer who double-checks his calculations because he knows he is capable of error.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept arrogance: refusing to check one's beliefs against conflicting evidence, or tearing down inherited institutions and customs without understanding why they were built. Conversely, it cannot accept false humility, which is weak self-deprecation used as an excuse to avoid taking ownership and acting.

6. Have children

Why it is important: This is the direct personal application of *human life continuing* (Point 3). Human life is the floor of goodness, and having children continues it. A person's care for children follows the tiers of Point 4: his immediate family first, then his kin.

Range of views: Family size will vary according to health, biological fertility, and the particular hardships of a household. Not every individual is biologically able to have children, or able to marry. For those who are able, having their own children is the normal course of an adult life.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept treating children as an undesirable burden, or as a luxury to be added once comfort is secured. It cannot accept a cultural ideal that celebrates deliberate childlessness among healthy adults while expecting someone else's children to maintain the economy and the country in their old age.

7. Form and listen

Why it is important: Elders form those younger than themselves. The duty is broad. It includes kin. It also includes politicians and other leaders, who train the people younger than themselves. Those who are younger seek the experience of the people around them. They listen. They test what they are told. They do not have to agree with all of it. Each person also receives an inheritance he did not earn: a language, laws, infrastructure, technical knowledge, and a defended territory. He hands that inheritance on in working order. For those who cannot have biological children, the duty remains open through adoption, teaching, apprenticeship, and leaving durable work behind. Raising a child with affection while failing to teach him discipline, truth, and a useful skill leaves him unprepared for reality.

Range of views: Parents do this in the home, teachers in schools, master craftsmen in workshops, and leaders in public office. The younger may test an elder's word and refuse what fails the test. Listening remains.

What it cannot accept: It cannot accept elders who will not form those younger than themselves, or the young who will not listen to the experience around them. It cannot accept generational theft: consuming inherited wealth, running up unpayable public debts, allowing infrastructure to decay, or failing to pass on the culture and technical skills required to keep the civilization alive after the current generation is gone.