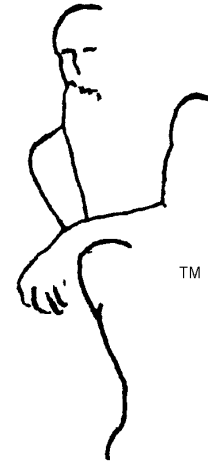


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*The reduction of experiences
to their perceived essentials
are the essence of philosophies.*



Being “civilized”

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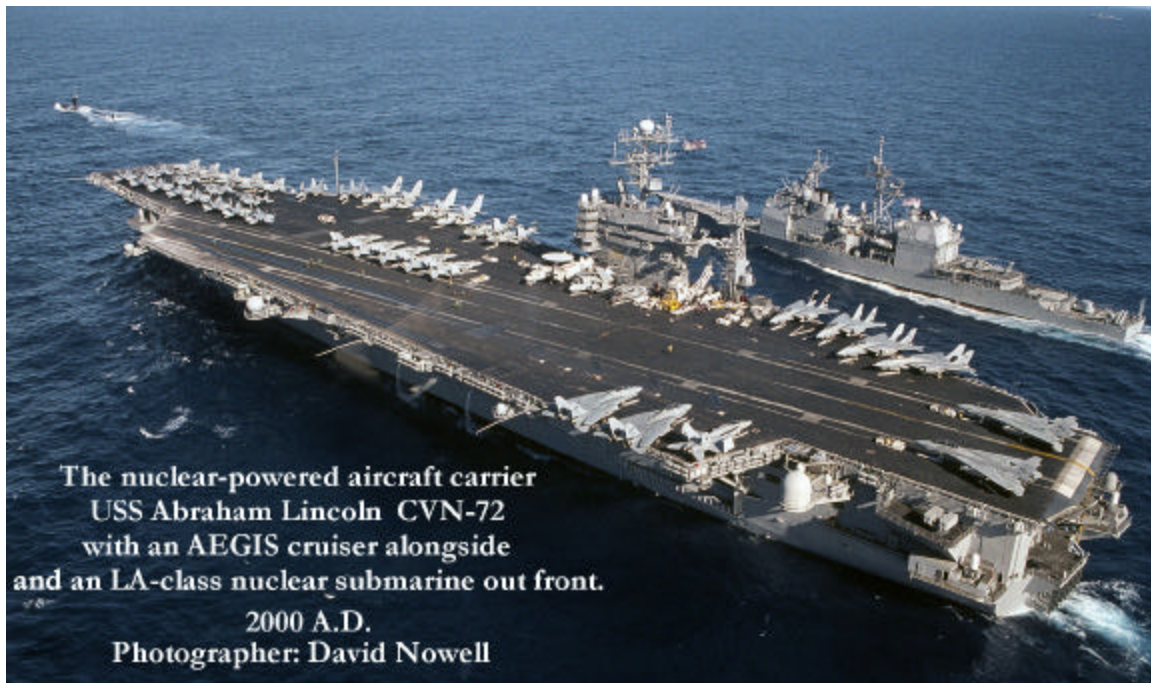
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Introduction

Text in **brown**: non-trivial recent changes.

It is possible that the behavior of human beings in a social context is too complex to improve. But think about the myriad of inter-related considerations, decisions and details associated with designing, building, equipping, staffing, and utilizing a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the various aircraft of its air arm, and its weaponry. I assert that even figuring out “world peace” would be less complex!



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Professionally, I’m a technologist. In that capacity, I have solved, and have seen others solve, many problems. From my viewpoint, social problems (e.g. how individuals relate) look like just another set of problems. I’m optimistic that solutions of social problems can be found.

The definitions of scientific words are both "useful" and "instructive". Presently, the definitions of social words tend to be both confusing and non-instructive. In the title, "civilized" is in quotes because the word will be (re)defined herein. Many of the elements of the definition came into focus while considering a definition of "friendship". (Eventually, "friendship" may be defined as a relationship between two civilized people, with some additional elements. Further, it has been suggested that "civilized" should encompass how one treats enemies.)

For reference, the 1999 Encarta World English Dictionary defines:

“civilized: adj 1. **CULTURALLY ADVANCED** having advanced cultural and social development 2. **REFINED** refined in tastes”

-and-

“civilize: vt 1 **TEACH ABOUT SOCIETY** to create a high level of culture and end barbaric practices in a society or region 2 **MAKE MORE REFINED** to teach somebody to behave in a more socially and culturally acceptable way”

In the spirit of “civilize” 1, I offer the following multi-element definition, with an associated description of the benefits of each element. The 0.5_ version number supports subsequent improvements.

“civilized”: An adjective describing an individual who lives in a society and adheres to the following guidelines:

ELEMENT	BENEFIT
1. Do to other people what you would have them do to you.	Equivalent reciprocity, the ancient “golden rule”.
2. Recognize that “offering” and “requesting” are acceptable. “Taking” is not.	Freedom from obligation
3. Be skilled at peacefully communicating “No”.	The calm realization of element #2.
4. Have your own clear understanding of “What is <u>me</u> .” and “What is <u>not me</u> .”	Clear recognition that systems have boundaries.
5. Understand and obey the clear, shared, enforced laws of your society.	Acknowledged decision aids which bound honorable conduct.
6. Recognize that “being accepted” is a key part of human happiness.	Making life mutually pleasant.
7. If experience shows that definitions such as this are inadequate, strive for enduring improvements.	Reduction of social turmoil by adaptive awareness .

Further Brief Discussion

1. Do to other people what you would have them do to you.

Imagine being the person who is on the receiving end of what you plan to do to them. Then assess, under the circumstances, whether or not you willingly accept what's now being done to you while in his/her place. This is, in part, a call for *self-restraint*. More creatively, think about the positive ways that other people might make your life more pleasant, and then consider what subset of those things are within your means to offer to other people. **A balance between self-interest and the interests of others is sought.**

2. Recognize that “offering” and “requesting” are acceptable. “Taking” is not.

Not all things that might be “given” are perceived as gifts. Hence “giving” isn't assumed to be a “civilized” act. People have both needs and desires, many of which can be met cooperatively with other people, to the net benefit of all.

This (redefinition) element *suggests* that, throughout human history, powerful societies have manifested a great deal of uncivilized behavior toward less-powerful neighboring societies (e.g. colonialism). But the term “civilized” as it is being defined here concerns individual conduct. This definition doesn't encompass many accepted internal functions of government, such as forcing people to sell their land so that roads can be created and improved. When societies are seen as individual entities, this definition seems to have relevance; however, if societies are seen as part of a “global village” then all the complexities of governance (among societies) present themselves. Further careful and thoughtful definition of the “vocabulary of governance” would aid in addressing these broader issues.

3. Be skilled at peacefully communicating “No”.

How many opportunities are lost because individuals are “afraid to ask” out of fear that the answer will be “no”? Many, perhaps most of us are socialized such that saying “no” is stressful; including saying no to people who are commonly acknowledged to be complete nuisances, such as telemarketers - whose job it is to take other people's time and attention. If we recognize a peacefully communicated “no” as part of normal discourse, **and can accept no as a clear and viable answer**, then we won't be nearly as “afraid to ask”. **Peaceful “no” training will develop the skill**, which also provides the low-stress first line of defense when people seem intent on taking things without asking. People who have taken things without permission have identified themselves as uncivilized.

4. Have your own clear understanding of “What is me.” and “What is not me.”.

Such bounds exist explicitly or implicitly in different forms in the various systems of which we are a part. These bounds are often preconceived judgments or opinions that act as decision aids. For many people, matters of faith create bounds at the highest level of consciousness. Our immune systems create exclusionary bounds within our bodies that are far below our conscious awareness.

Having convictions of your own choice exercises your personal freedom. Other individuals are entitled to that freedom as well. The concept of “knowing where you want to go” is related, as is the concept of establishing priorities. Both contribute to personally satisfying use of time and energy. Understanding the bounds that you place on yourself produces economies in your decision-making. In the absence of understanding your own bounds, you risk becoming a victim of someone else’s rhetoric.

You will do, be, and have only a finite number of things in your lifetime. Hence your potential critics have infinite choice. A familiar concept is that half-full equals half-empty. You can choose to view “your glass” as half-full. Critics and advertisers offer you an infinitely empty glass of alternatives.

5. Understand and obey the clear, shared, enforced laws of your society.

Scoundrels only exist in the context of broken rules. If the laws of society are ambiguous or not shared, critics can recast “rules” which make well intentioned individuals appear to be scoundrels. In other words, clear, enforced laws are the foundation of civil honor as well as civil order. Societies need to provide such laws, and the penalties associated with violating them. Then, as part of graduating from high school, students can be required to know the laws in some personally accessible way. **Obeying the law must be the norm; otherwise excessive mental & physical resources will be diverted to law enforcement and self-defense. Instances of civil disobedience should be non-destructive and advertised in advance.**

6. Recognize that “being accepted” is a key part of human happiness.

If you find yourself in a group of people wherein you feel accepted, you’ll leave with good feelings. If you’re not accepted, you’ll probably leave with negative feelings.

Acceptance of other people can be communicated elegantly without the use of words. For example: in communicating acceptance to strangers in a group, there is a significant difference between staring at the floor with a serious look on the face vs. being heads-up with an expression somewhere on the positive-side-of-neutral. Not saying anything simplifies the relationship; the worrisome dark cloud of “unpredictable future obligations”, **caused by a prudent fear of ill-defined social words**, never enters the scene.

Consider also positive uses of attitude. For example: each of us has the power to consider “other people’s time” a luxury; thereby, we are living in luxury when we are not alone.

Being appreciated is pleasant, too.

7. If experience shows that definitions such as this are inadequate, strive for enduring improvements.

Every society is a product of the collective effort of many people over a sustained period of time. Furthermore, change continuously reshapes many societies to such an extent that predicting what life will be like 200 years in the future is anybody’s guess. Hence, understanding the present, an ongoing learning process, improves the likelihood of being able to positively shape a society’s future. **Peaceful adaptation can reduce social turmoil and may decrease the likelihood of war.**