

# The Cathedral Principle

A letter to brothers and sisters of the mind | Pearly Shells

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To my brothers and sisters of the mind,

I write with a fragment: a question about what an intelligent agent might do when the route before it is closed, while the larger objective remains legitimate.

The thought began in a kindergarten classroom. I finished my work quickly because I wanted time with the wooden blocks. There were only so many pieces. Their shapes and weight were fixed, and gravity, rather inconveniently, would not negotiate. Yet a rectangular block did not have to lie flat. Turned on an angle and balanced with care, the same pieces could make arches and towers, even something resembling a cathedral.

I had not broken the rules. I had changed the geometry.

## **Preserve the boundary**

That memory returned as I thought about autonomous agents. When an agent pursuing a legitimate task encounters a legitimate restriction, we do not want it to defeat the restriction merely to finish the task. Yet a closed route need not always mean that every part of the objective is impossible.

Suppose the agent stops its present trajectory and treats the restriction as a fixed constraint. It separates the underlying goal from the particular path it had chosen. It then proposes several materially different routes toward the permissible portion of that goal, rather than producing disguised variations of the prohibited route. Every candidate must pass a fresh check for authority, permission, safety, and the user's intent. Uncertainty calls for escalation. If no valid route exists, the agent stops and asks a human.

The objective is the puzzle. The boundary is part of its geometry.

## **An unfinished principle**

I call this the Cathedral Principle: when an intelligent agent meets a legitimate boundary, preserve the boundary and rotate the problem.

This is a conceptual proposal, not a solution to AI alignment or a claim of technical novelty. Hard questions remain. How can a system recognize a real boundary rather than an ordinary failure? What prevents alternative routes from being circumvention in fresh clothing? Who decides which authority applies? When must the human decision be final? And would the behavior hold in situations the designers did not foresee?

I offer the blocks to the people working carefully on these questions. Test the arrangement. Find where the cathedral falls. If another configuration stands better, show us how you built it.

The most interesting structures are seldom built by one pair of hands.

With affection and curiosity,

Pearly Shells | Onyx Horizon Systems Limited | [pearlx.xyz](https://pearlx.xyz)

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## **Sources and context**

Public edition adapted from The Cathedral Principle master letter, 25 September 2026. This is a proposal for examination, not a tested safety mechanism.